

NORTHERN

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# INSIGHT

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JANUARY 2019



URBAN BASE

2019 - THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT!

business | property | media | technology | education | motors | arts | leisure

issue 43

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## FOREWORD

### Welcome to a record breaking January edition of Northern Insight.

Our cover stars are Urban Base, the high street estate agency with an expert eye on the new homes market.

As ever we are the regional leader in event coverage and amongst some great social photography look out for a star studded spread from the Lord Taverners Christmas lunch.

For Business Lunch we visit Terry Laybourne's new venture St.Vincent where we find Newcastle's restaurant king onto another winner.

Look out also for some 2019 fitness tips from our award winning columnist David Fairlamb.

All in all a perfect way to kick off the New Year.

Thank you for your continued support.  
Till next month.

*M.J. Grahamslaw*

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher



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## HAY & KILNER TEAM COOKS UP FOUR-FIGURE DONATION TO THE PEOPLE'S KITCHEN

Staff at North East law firm Hay & Kilner have found the perfect recipe to raise almost £6,000 for charity The People's Kitchen.

Employees at the Newcastle-headquartered practice chose to adopt the city-based organisation, which has been supporting homeless and disadvantaged people in the Newcastle area since 1985, as their dedicated charity for 2017/18.

And at the end of 12 months of fundraising, a total of £5,711 has been donated to The People's Kitchen at a special celebration lunch at the charity's Bath Lane headquarters.

Regular fundraising activities held through the year have included cake bakes and dress down days, while paralegal Mairi Clancy raised almost £500 by running the Edinburgh Marathon.

A team of ten young solicitors and trainees also successfully took on the famous Yorkshire Three Peaks challenge during the summer, completing a 25 mile route. The team crossed the finish line comfortably within the allotted 12 hour time limit, raising another £900.

Hay & Kilner also organised a five-a-side Charity Shield football tournament involving 15 teams from Newcastle's professional services firms.

The People's Kitchen aims to provide friendship and food to anyone who needs support and plays a unique role in the city's efforts to meet the needs of homeless and vulnerable people. Its 200-strong team of volunteers cook and serve over 40,000 hot meals every year, while the charity also provides sleeping bags, blankets and warm clothes for people sleeping on Newcastle's streets.

## SINTONS AID 21 YEARS OF AN ANGEL EXHIBITION



L-r: Councillor Angela Douglas, Mark Quigley, Karolyne Hart with an artwork by Robert Soden

An exhibition to mark the 21st birthday of one of the UK's most iconic and best-loved landmarks is being made possible through sponsorship from a North East law firm.

The 21 Years of an Angel exhibition has been organised to mark the milestone birthday of the Angel of the North, which has become known and loved around the world since being unveiled in 1998.

The sculpture, by artist Antony Gormley, stands at 20 metres tall with wings measuring 54 metres across, and can be seen from miles around its home in Gateshead.

The exhibition of unique works of art will have one-of-a-kind pieces from an array of local artists available to view and buy. It also marks the end of the Angel20 programme, a year-long celebration running from the sculpture's 20th anniversary in February 2018 until February 2019.

21 Years of an Angel is being sponsored by law firm Sintons, based in Newcastle, in a move which continues its commitment to supporting its local community and emerging regional talent.

Councillor Angela Douglas, Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure at Gateshead Council, said: "The Angel of the North is not just an icon for Gateshead and the North East, it's an international landmark which has brought regeneration, jobs and pride to the area.

Mark Quigley, managing partner of Sintons, said: "The Angel of the North has become instantly recognisable around the UK and indeed the world, and has helped to confirm the North East's place on the global map as a destination with great culture that people want to visit."



IF YOUR BRAND IS WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS WHEN YOU ARE NOT IN THE ROOM, WHAT WOULD THEY SAY ABOUT YOUR COMPANY?

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## FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE IS KEY TO COACHING SUCCESS

Two North East women who made a difficult decision to leave their long-established careers have joined forces to give others the confidence to do the same.

The pair, Julie McVeigh and Amber Farrier, started the change after taking professional coaching training and realising they could offer a new approach to leadership and management.

Now, they are helping people and organisations realise their own dreams. Their business Connected Coaching North East, based in Clavering Place, offers individual career coaching and coaching for companies, as well as a range of lunch and learn workshops advising on topics such as stress management, creativity and career change.



## BUILDING CONFIDENCE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS TO COME

A committed team of trustees have come together to launch a new charity in County Durham to help young people get the best possible start in life through increasing self-esteem.

The Consett-based charity, Building Self-Belief, tackles the growing trend of mental health issues amongst school children and seeks to put in place strategies, support and advice to help them get the best possible start as they embark on adult life.

The charity's programmes for schools include team building activities, educational visits, creative writing and self-reflection. Building Self-Belief also tackles many serious issues including bereavement, bullying, sleep deprivation and friendship issues.



## HIRESTREET EYES FURTHER GROWTH ONLY MONTHS AFTER LAUNCH

An online fashion rental business which is the first of its kind is pushing on with its ambitious growth plans only five months after launching.

Hirestreet hires out dresses for all occasions from an array of high street brands for as little as £7 for 10 days. The Jesmond-based company caters for the 16 to 30-year-old millennial market and their love of fashion-forward, affordable clothes.

Hirestreet is now looking to its next phase of growth. The business, founded by 25-year-old entrepreneur Isabella West, is planning to invest in more stock and develop a new website. A number of jobs are also planned as the firm continues to grow.

## METAL IN THE BLOOD FOR BLACKSMITH'S DAUGHTER

A blacksmith from Northumberland has just completed her first major commission which is one to remember for both her local community and family connections.

With four generations of blacksmiths in her family, Ashlee Donaldson from Amble has just put the finishing touches onto her galvanised mild steel four seat bench which was designed and made by the 27-year-old to commemorate 100 years since the end of World War One.

The bench, which will be situated in Hadston, has many interesting features including a metal Tommy hat, a Northumberland Fusiliers cap badge and a metal tin mug which every soldier would have been issued with.



## NEWCASTLE SALON NAMED WINNER AT PROFESSIONAL BEAUTY REGIONAL AWARDS

The brightest names in beauty were recently recognised at the Professional Beauty Regional Awards, with Newcastle's All About You – Urban Retreat being named as the North East Boutique Salon of the Year.

Awards were handed out to the most outstanding spas and salons in the country at a black-tie dinner with over 400 guests attending.

All About You – Urban Retreat is a hidden gem in the city centre and the perfect environment to relax with friends, enjoying a glass of fizz and a whole host of treatments. Treatments are personalised and include facials, massages and pedicures. All products are from high end leading brands such as ELEMIS, Jessica and L'Oréal.

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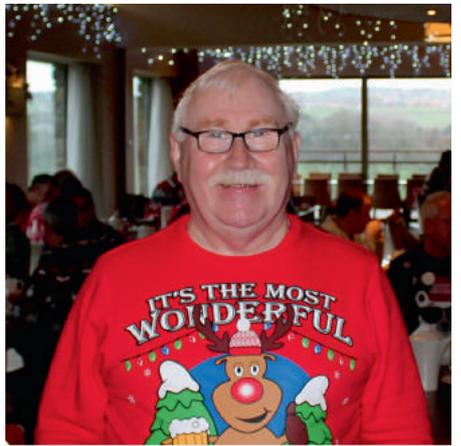
## ITPS & CELLULAR SOLUTIONS TURKEY CUP

Another year, another Turkey Cup for Managed IT Service and Support Providers ITPS and Business and Telecommunications Provider Cellular Solutions.

Guests enjoyed a milder than usual event at the prestigious Close House Golf Resort.

Mulled wine and mince pies were served at the halfway house keeping the golfers on top form in their quest to win the Turkey Cup.









## IS GREEN THE NEW BLACK?

The Future is Bright according to the ever-optimistic property team at URBAN BASE, the high street estate agency with an expert eye on the new homes market.

Sharing a positive outlook on the area by preparing to take on all that 2019 will throw at the region's property market. Jan Dale heads up the dynamic agency and confirms there are so many changes ahead with how we live, and where we live – not only is location a priority factor, but a major deciding factor is being part of a community combined with the ecology of a build, and how clean is the air where we live. Outside space, private gardens, landscaped communal areas, plants, plants and more plants - green really may be the new black when it comes to our homes!

Home is where the heart is! But in today's working-lifestyle needs of many businesses, along with internet access to emails 24/7 – everyone appears to be at work even when they are at home. Are we therefore becoming a nation of home-workers without even realising it? A place to call home; is it in the distant, clean-air, countryside, or is a place to call home in a city and closer to work, making everyday lifestyle and journeys to work easier. "This shouldn't have to impact on the quality of life. Living near to work has become a priority to many key workers." With so many new homes developments shooting up in recent years, there appears less reason to live in the out-of-areas country and commute, and more reasons to buy a brand new home and settle closer to work.

In the Ouseburn near Byker in Newcastle we have seen an emerging community evolve in the 76 homes, and award winning £14 million Malings

regeneration development, by Igloo. The new year will see the start of the £175 million coastal site at Seaham Garden Village. Around 4,500 homes, shops, bases for businesses and leisure facilities will feature in the South Seaham project, being driven forward in a partnership between Gateshead developer Tolent and Newcastle housing association Home Group. This exciting new scheme for our region will allow homeowners to be located very close to emerging business parks, as well as commuting facilities, offering an option of work/life balance to a new community in the making.

"At urban base Land & New Homes we have seen a major rise in demand for new homes, and as well as the financial benefits with a range of buying-incentives offered by the house builders, there is also the added-value to the quality of the build of new homes meeting excellent levels of insulation and subsequent saving on increasing energy costs. We expect the demand for new housing to continue, and we anticipate our regional house builders to continue to aim for excellence in both design and build.

In the year ahead we have no less than ten potential site starts on new housing across the region, varying from Northumberland's beautiful coast line – to the stunning village location of Redmarshall in Teesside. The Future's Bright... and the team at urban base are ready to apply their knowledge and expert advice to take on whatever temperature the market brings.

# CATCH ALL THE ACTION WITH A HALF SEASON MEMBERSHIP



Book up for the rest of season 18/19 and never miss a minute.

Leicester Tigers, RC Toulon and the Big One '19 are just three of the huge rugby moments still to come this season and fans can book their place at them all with an 18/19 Half Season membership.

Half season ticket memberships cover 640 minutes of top-class rugby in both the Gallagher Premiership and the Heineken Champions Cup.

In addition to guaranteeing supporters a seat or space on the terrace for games against Harlequins, Leicester, Northampton, RC Toulon and Worcester at Kingston Park, half season tickets also entitle holders to a ticket for the game against Sale at St James' Park.

After a spectacular debut, 'The Big One' returns as Newcastle Falcons take their Gallagher Premiership Rugby fixture against Sale Sharks to St James' Park on Saturday 23rd March (KO 5:30pm). The home of Newcastle United played host to a gripping contest last season in front of a club record crowd of 30,174 and this year the club are looking to make it even bigger. Don't miss out and book your half season ticket today.

**Adult half season ticket memberships start from just £113 with concessions at £98 and Under 16s just £43.**



To book your 2018/19 half season ticket membership call 0871 2266060 or visit the stadium box office.

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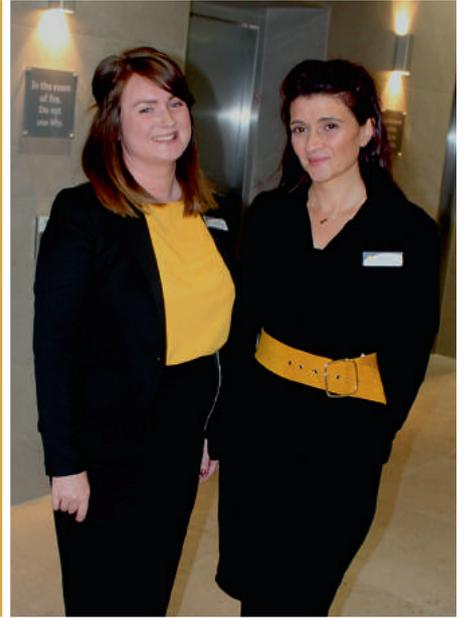
## MALDRON HOTEL NEWCASTLE OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Maldron Hotel Newcastle officially opened its doors to excited customers for the first time on Tuesday 4th December.

The four-star hotel, which is owned and operated by Dalata Hotel Group, Ireland's leading hotel operator, is the first Maldron to open in mainland UK and is part of a £100 million development on the site of the former Newgate Centre shopping mall.

The new hotel has created over 80 new jobs for the local community through a combination of hotel positions and also through the hotel's housekeeping partner WGC.

Located on Newgate Street, the new hotel sits right in the heart of the city, minutes walk to Newcastle's major attractions providing a central location for guests who are looking for stylish and comfortable accommodation with Newcastle City at their doorstep.





## A NEW YEAR, A NEW YOU? ARE YOU HELPING REALISE YOUR BUSINESS GOALS?

*"Be the change you want to see in the world"* – Mahatma Gandhi

I was talking to a client recently and we got onto that topic that continues to exercise many business minds – Brexit. After the normal ranting and raving about how we find ourselves in the current position and concluding 'the only certainty is uncertainty' we agreed we need to focus on what we can control.

### What are your main priorities?

This time of the year is often a period for reflection, both personally and professionally. What are your priorities? Hopefully you and your team might have reflected together on what went well and not so well in 2018. An open and honest 'lessons learnt' session can be cathartic and enables continuous improvement. What are you going to do differently?

### Beware.

Having been an avid planner for years and made plenty of mistakes I feel well placed to give some advice:

- *Challenge the length of the list of priorities*
- *Watch out for perfection - it doesn't exist in the commercial world*
- *Make it agile – remember David Brailsford and British cycling – it's all about marginal gains (what small changes can you make today that will impact your results?)*
- *Collaborate*
- *Ensure you have effective measures and start measuring now*

- *Plan for the unexpected*
- *Build in reflection time – time spent 'on' the business rather than 'in'*
- *Ensure that day to day activities reflect your business goals and vision.*

### How will you be the change you want to see?

In all our business planning and objective setting we often forget that change starts with you. We are habitual animals and it is easy to operate in our own comfort zones. When was the last time someone told you something you really didn't want to hear? If it is a long time you may want to get your head out of the sand!

Do you have a mentor, a critical friend, someone who you trust, who knows your journey? The 2018 ScaleUp institute report highlights having a mentor as one of the top requirements for business leaders involved in scaling their business.

### What will you stop, start and continue?

Having conducted appraisals for years I have always believed that it was as much about reviewing my ability as a manager/leader as reviewing the performance of the appraisee. Ask them what can you stop, start or continue to help them perform. You might just be a blockage to improved performance. Remember motivation is personal and our job as managers is to create the right environment and flex our leadership style based on the situation and individuals.

### Do your ways of working and behaviours support your culture?

Simon Sinek talks about 'starting with why.' Your why is your purpose. It is what makes you unique. Build your values and culture round it. But don't stop there. Do your ways of working and behaviours support your why? Be prepared to evidence your values by what you do and ensure they are reflected in how things get done.

### Commit to having honest dialogue

With your team, your business partners and most of all yourself but remember trust is essential. You earn the right to give someone direct feedback but your view is still only an opinion.

Successful businesses have a culture of performance management and are unafraid to have difficult conversations because it comes from the right place.

### Why does all this matter?

It's the basis for long term sustainable growth and profitability. Good people want to work for great companies. Having two millennial sons has taught me the needs of the next generation are very different. Expectations are higher, tolerance is lower and they know that alternatives are just a click away.

*'If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.'* Mahatma Gandhi

Andrew Silver is a Director of 360 Growth Partners who identify, coordinate and make the adjustments businesses need to accelerate growth. For more information go to [www.360growthpartners.co.uk](http://www.360growthpartners.co.uk) or e-mail [start@360growthpartners.co.uk](mailto:start@360growthpartners.co.uk)

# EGO OR WAY TO GO!

Karol Marketing's managing director Stefan Lepkowski is already eyeing up award opportunities for 2019. He thinks you should be too.

Some say winning industry awards is all about ego. A moment to wallow in self-glory, a pat on the back, a bit of corporate indulgence.

Others say it is just a money spinning exercise for the event organisers of these large awards ceremonies, like newspapers and professional institutes, to establish loyalty and brand equity with their members and audiences.

These detractors may have a point, but to me, the benefit of awards begins twelve months before they are won.

Organisations that show aspirations towards winning awards inevitably have employee cultures where there is a desire to win. And, by winning I am not talking about beating. Rather, it is the desire to achieve, to go the extra mile, to take risks and to pioneer. That means it is the client who benefits.

Whether you win awards or not is missing the point.

The value in having ambition to win awards lies in its ability to bring focus. Awards are not normally given to those who simply do a good job. That we deliver value for money is the client's right, it is to be expected.

Instead, awards are given to people, teams and organisations who set out to achieve a defined goal and then, in some way, excel. And, that excelling, is where the magic lies. It is what the client never has to pay for, and more often than not, it brings significant client benefits.

If you are lucky enough to be an eventual winner, awards, if used correctly, can also have another big benefit. No, I am not referring to publicity, I am talking about credibility.

At Karol we have a client who could see the benefits of raising its profile. The company was doing exceptionally well and had lots of great stories, but

it operated in an un-sexy industry and, despite all our media contacts, our greatest efforts failed to attract the interest of targeted media in any meaningful way.

We needed a plan to turn journalist heads. A plan that would force journalists to question why they were inclined to ignore stories on this company. Our strategy homed in on business and industry awards.

By working with the company to help position itself for success (*there is a science to writing award winning entries*), we not only helped sharpen the focus of the business, but our client began scooping award after award. The result was that the business achieved real credibility, shaking off of a cloak of obscurity. It suddenly became the 'darling' of the media. The resulting publicity, and credibility, contributed to several major tender wins – tenders which the client had been struggling to crack for over ten years.

And remember, patience combined with persistence is a virtue. Learn from your mistakes. When Karol first began entering awards it took six years before we cracked it. In that time I nearly gave up on many occasions. I was told that awards were like jobs for the boys – you had to be in the club, and Karol, not being formed as a result of employees breaking away from some larger, more established agency, was certainly not in the in-crowd.

But, the nay-sayers were wrong. We did win an award, followed by another and another and another. Over our 25 year track record, we've won nearly 80 in all.

Well, we are still at it. The end of 2018 saw Karol's client work scoop a whole load more awards. We are the most awarded public relations and marketing company in the North of England and I am very proud of it.

I say, it is not ego...it's the way to go!

To discuss how Karol's award-winning insight and creativity could help raise the profile of your businesses, please contact Stefan Lepkowski on 0191 2657765 or [Stefan@karolmarketing.com](mailto:Stefan@karolmarketing.com)  
@KarolMarketing



Karol's MD Stefan Lepkowski enjoys a clutch of trophies scooped at the recent Chartered Institute of Public Relations Pride Awards ceremony



Jim Meakin

## YOUR 2019 RESOLUTIONS

By Jim Meakin, Head of Newcastle Office, Armstrong Watson

As I started to write this I wondered just what the origin of making new year resolutions was. Did it start as some sort of Victorian Christmas Day parlour game in the years long before we all tuned into the Queen's Speech?

Well actually my research (yes, I googled it) indicated it is a much older tradition:

- The ancient Babylonians made promises to their gods at the start of each year that they would return borrowed objects and pay their debts.
- The Knights of the Medieval era took the "peacock vow" at the end of the Christmas season each year to re-affirm their commitment to chivalry. After a bad tempered visit to the January sales many of us would probably do well to emulate that one.
- And the tradition has many other religious parallels. During Judaism's New Year festival Rosh Hashanah, and culminating in Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), one is encouraged to reflect upon one's wrongdoings over the year and both seek and offer forgiveness.

I imagine the ancients of whatever era were probably little better than many of us at seeing through our new year resolutions. Research suggests that four out of five people will eventually break their resolution, and a third of resolutions survive less than a month before being dropped or broken.

I was probably surprised it is only one third. And there are good reasons for this. Most of us resolve to make big changes, underestimating the time and

willpower it takes to really change an ingrained habit or become entrenched in new, good behaviours.

The research I found about making successful resolutions shows a clear distinction between intentions and goals and suggests that making change stick is about having a careful balance between both. Goals motivate us and provide structure and a longer term measurement of success. An intention is more forgiving, without the "pass or fail" culture of a new year's resolution but is sustainable if broken down into achievable daily or weekly activities or changes within the structure of longer term goals. Goals tend to be a product of the mind rather than heart and rooted in the future, and intentions tend to be driven more from our instincts, from the heart. GWI if you like.

So my own conclusion from that is that success is about staying on track with incremental changes. Sharing these with trusted family friends or colleagues and seeking support makes it much more likely we will succeed and hopefully introduce constructive accountability.

I will close by sharing my own favourite new year's resolution. Like the research I have quoted it is not one I claim to have originated, but was written by one of my own great heroes an American rock musician

named Duane Allman. He wrote these words on new year's day 1969, almost exactly 50 years ago and I personally take much inspiration from them:

*"This year I will be more thoughtful of my fellow man, exert more effort in each of my endeavours, professionally as well as personally. Take love wherever I find it, and offer it to everyone who will take it. In this coming year I will seek knowledge from those wiser than me and try to teach those who wish to learn from me. I love being alive and I will be the best man I possibly can."*

*Duane Allman 1 January 1969*

How perfectly he really lived up to it I honestly don't know because as anyone with a shared liking for slightly obscure music will know, Duane Allman was taken in early death two years later at the age of just 24. But however successful he was or wasn't, I for one can only feel great admiration for anyone who aspires to those sentiments. And after all he was possibly the greatest electric slide guitar player who ever lived.

What a difference it would make to our world today if we tried to emulate Duane's emotionally driven motives and made them more linked to our longer term objectives and goals. Even for a few weeks.

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# WE KNOW THAT REAL FINANCIAL PLANNING STARTS WITH YOU



It's 2019. Perhaps you are recovering from the festive excess in more ways than one? You think, okay, it's time to take stock. Sort things out. Stop putting important things off. Or is that just me?

You may have already done some thinking ahead; booked the holiday or made enquiries about the new car. We're all quite good at planning for the short term – the fun stuff. But what about the long term? That might look a bit scary, less fun. So, it's easy to put things off and concentrate on the now. We're all busy, right?

But, that nagging question just doesn't go away. "Will I be financially ok in the future?"

Where do you even start?

It starts with you, but it's supported by people like us.

Ask yourself. "Where am I now?" "Where do I want to get to?" That could be retiring before 60, selling your business, helping your children through University and onto the housing ladder or even passing on wealth to your family. We all have different priorities.

### 5 easy tips to get you started:

1. Have a good look at last year's expenditure. Not difficult, take 30 minutes to look at your

internet banking transactions/statement. Most people under-egg what they spend. Be honest with yourself.

2. If you are consistently overspending (think Dickens Mr Micawber) take control. Set a budget and stick to it. Look at reducing your fixed costs.
3. Set some goals – these might be to reduce/eradicate debts, establish some kind of Emergency Cash Fund (typically six months fixed expenditure is good if possible).
4. Think about what is important to you. What will make you happier, reducing your debts/retiring earlier or another expensive handbag?
5. If, after all that, there is a surplus, think about how this could work best for you in achieving your longer-term goals.

What if you could talk to someone about what's important to you? Someone who was interested and understood your situation, who could pull everything together and put together a plan.

### We know/how to help you:

- Plan for the long term
- Stay on track
- Be tax efficient
- Invest in a way that meets your needs
- Ensure your loved ones are provided for if the worst happened
- Achieve your financial goals

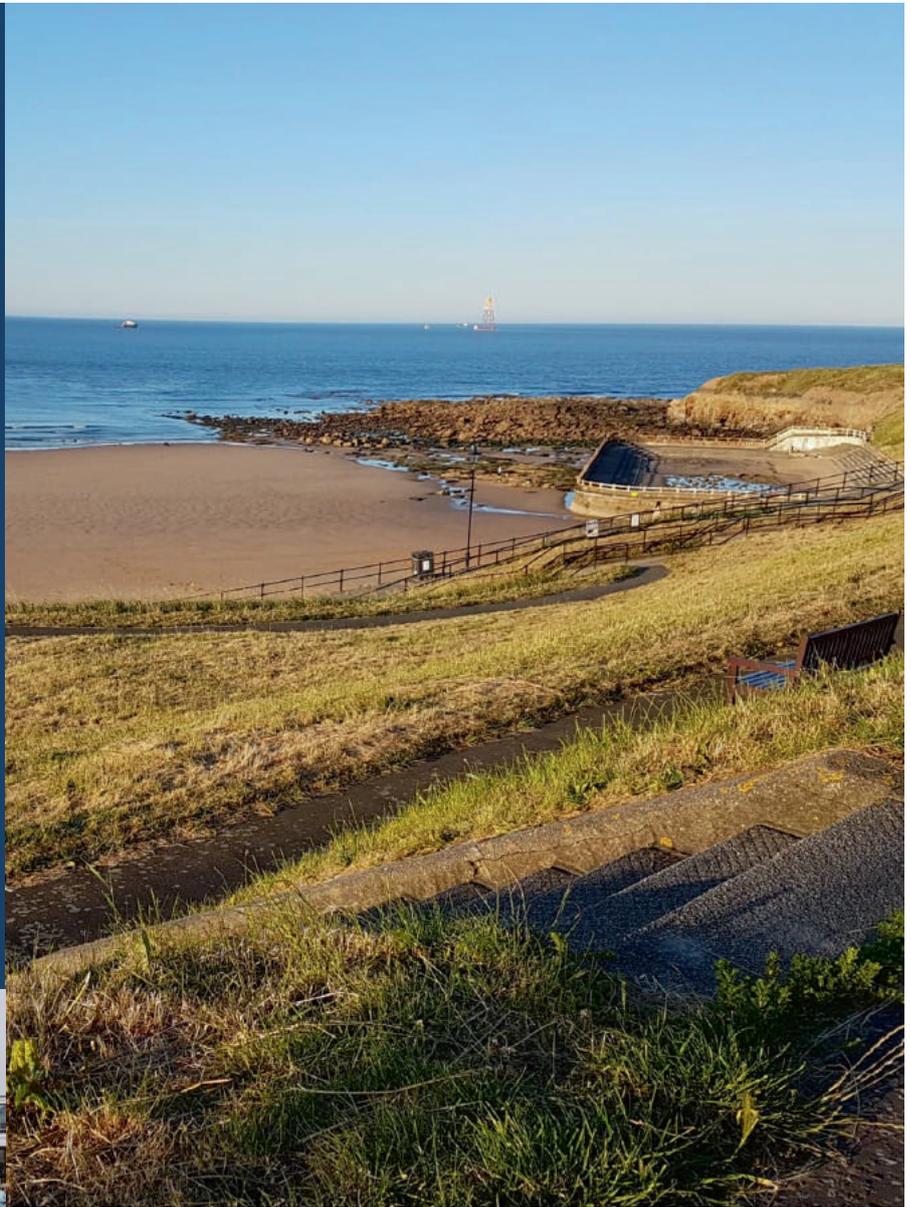
We'd like to help you make a start. Build your confidence and trust. Establish a plan and give you the financial peace of mind that we all hope for.

We've invested in some fantastic software, which shows your financial future and helps you make those big decisions with confidence. We already work with lots of medical professionals, business owners, those on the cusp of retiring and those already retired. Many of our clients are still accumulating wealth, other are trying to decumulate and pass wealth on.

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If this is an area in which you need advice, contact Amanda via email: [acowie@robson-laidler.co.uk](mailto:acowie@robson-laidler.co.uk) or roing her on: 0191 281 8191

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS  
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STATUTORY AUDITS  
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INVESTIGATIONS  
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## The Coastal Accountants



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Chartered Accountants & Registered Auditors

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0191 257 0355 [info@readmilburn.co.uk](mailto:info@readmilburn.co.uk)



## GEOGRAPHICAL EXPANSION FOR CERTAX

Following the launch of a new business earlier this year, Tom Baker of Certax Accountancy is celebrating taking on a second practice in the region and doubling his turnover.

Tom is the owner of Certax Accountancy Teesside and since securing his new office in Commerce House in Middlesbrough just eight months ago, Tom has seen the company go from strength to strength.

So much so that he has now invested in acquiring a second practice in the Tees Valley area, which has automatically doubled his portfolio.

This move has led to Tom looking to grow the team with expertise, and he will be creating a number of further jobs throughout 2019.

Tom accredits his success to hard work, ensuring each of his clients gets the personal touch that is then delivered on, and the boosting of his profile and reputation through having a luxury office in Commerce House.

He said: "The opportunity to expand across the Tees Valley came up and I am keen to create opportunity for myself and a team of employees, so I had no hesitation. Certax Teesside increases by at least a couple of a clients a week, and as my relationships with clients cements due to good performance, they are keen to recommend me.

"I do think a lot of my growth is down to my postal address and high quality surroundings. Being in Commerce House makes me work hard to fit with the ethos of the building. My clients are also very impressed with my office, and the business lounge. Making that good impression is very important, as they need to know they are in a safe pair of hands."

Tom, who holds a hosts of qualifications including

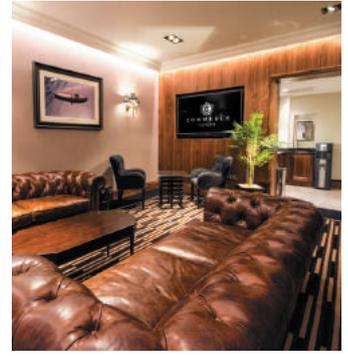
AAT Level 4, delivers accountancy services across all industry's focusing on the SME market. Christine Huntington, who is the facilities manager at Commerce House, said: "Tom is doing exceptionally well and it is fabulous to see him grow so quickly. Many of tenants are finding that by being part of the Commerce House Business Community it has boosted their business or client base by at least 50% and many are already upgrading to larger offices!"

Office space is now at a premium at Commerce House, with just a select few rooms left available. To see the choice of offices, which can take from two desks up to 15 desks please visit [www.commerce-house.co.uk](http://www.commerce-house.co.uk)

More information on Tom and his business is available at [www.certaxteesside.co.uk](http://www.certaxteesside.co.uk)

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Your business can be part of the growing Commerce House community!

- IMPRESSIVE OFFICE SPACE
- BOARDROOM
- HOT DESKS
- BUSINESS LOUNGE
- MEETING ROOMS
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## CASCADE REACHES TOP FIVE IN NATIONAL INNOVATION TITLE

Cascade Cash Management has achieved the accolade of being in the top five in the UK for the Best Technology Award for Customer Facing Solutions at the 2018 UK Financial Innovation Awards.

Cascade competed against steep opposition including Albaraka Turk, Amplify, Banco BPI and Santander, achieving amazing heights for the company to be shortlisted amongst such company.

Presented by The London Institute of Banking and Finance, the glittering awards ceremony was held at the Hilton Bankside in London, celebrating customer excellence in banking and finance.

Cascade is an independent and transparent service created to generate enhanced cash returns and increased protection on deposits through professional cash management.

The company was shortlisted earlier this year following Cascade's successful launch of its online cash portal, the only one of its kind in the UK.

The portal operates whole of market allowing independent and unbiased cash solutions meaning that clients don't have to choose only one bank. With the online portal and Cascade's dedicated client support team, all banks are accessed quickly and easily, on a daily basis.

Managing director of Cascade, Dr Emma Black, said: "Cascade is honoured and delighted to have done so well within such a prestigious award category. Cascade is unique within the market and having now administered over £650 million of deposits, we are thrilled to have been recognised at the UK Financial Innovation Awards. Our category had stiff competition, so we are proud to celebrate the success of reaching the national finals with the whole team!"

The Cascade team of eleven administer cash savings on behalf of clients. Depositors can also use the portal to administer their own savings. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

Alex Fraser, Chief Executive at The London Institute of Banking & Finance, said: "Congratulations to all those organisations that were shortlisted or won this year's Financial Innovation Awards. These finalists are being recognised for their development of innovative products and projects that empower consumers, communities and businesses around the world. We enjoyed celebrating such talent with them on the night."

More information is available at [www.cascade.co.uk](http://www.cascade.co.uk) and [fia.libf.ac.uk/finalists-2018](http://fia.libf.ac.uk/finalists-2018)



sachins 

### main **mama arora's curry**

this recipe can be used for beef, lamb, fish or even vegetables.

#### **ingredients :**

4 chicken breasts  
2 large onions  
tin chopped tomatoes  
garlic ginger paste  
fresh coriander  
haldi  
chilli powder  
garam masala  
salt  
channa masala  
dry fenugreek  
cumin powder  
coriander powder  
chilli flakes  
ground fennel seeds  
tomato purée

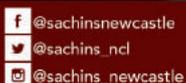
#### **cooking method :**

finely chop two onions  
warm two table spoons of vegetable oil in a pan  
once hot add onions, keep stirring  
add a table spoon of garlic ginger paste with a touch of water  
add tomatoes, keep stirring, mash the tomatoes  
add a pinch or two of salt  
add about 250ml of water  
add 1 tea spoon of haldi and mix into masala  
add 1 tea spoon of chilli powder and mix into masala  
add 1 tea spoon of garam masala and mix into masala  
add 1 tea spoon of channa masala and mix into masala  
add a pinch of chilli flakes, fennel and coriander powder  
then add your diced chicken, keep stirring  
once cooked add a small handful of dry fenugreek, rub together  
add a tea spoon of tomato purée and mix into the dish  
finally add some chopped coriander to the dish

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## RMT PRE FESTIVE SEASON DRINKS

More than 250 clients, contacts and friends of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors gathered in central Newcastle to celebrate the festive season at the Gosforth-based firm's end of year reception.

The annual event, held at the renowned Barluga on Grey Street, was held to mark the end of another successful year for the practice, and to help recognise the many achievements of its clients and contacts over the last 12 months.

Mike Pott, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, commented: "It has been an extremely busy year, working with the management teams of an extensive range of successful businesses from both within and outside the North East to achieve their commercial and personal objectives. It was great to be able to welcome so many of them along to our reception and recognise their success.

"The RMT team continues to develop across every part of our business to ensure we can fully meet the needs of our clients, and we look forward to helping them achieve even more in 2019.







## TH\_NK BIG, DREAM BIG

UNW Client Focus with Tarek Nseir – Founding Partner of TH\_NK.

Founded by Tarek Nseir, together with his business partner Gary Glozier, in the humble surroundings of a student flat in Heaton in 2004, TH\_NK has grown into an international digital boutique business that boasts the likes of ASOS, Vue and Knight Frank as its clients.

Tarek here discusses how the chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has helped TH\_NK on its journey since its inception, the challenges encountered along the way and his hopes for the future after the company's acquisition by EPAM Group in November 2018.

It can be common for university life to be not quite what people expect when they get there, which was the case for Tarek when he began his degree back in 2001. "I got bored very quickly" he explains. "I had worked at Accenture for 18 months between school and university, learning a great deal of things during my time there, so I knew I wanted something different."

While others may have looked to drop out or change course, Tarek decided to start a small agency whilst continuing with his degree. "My mum's friend needed a website, for which she was getting quoted £15,000 to build. It was an astronomical amount for something that was relatively simple, so I offered my services. I could manage the coding but needed help with the design, so I stuck posters up around Northumbria University looking for a web designer to help me out."

The response he got was not what he anticipated. "They were queuing around the block!" Tarek exclaims. It was here he met Gary Glozier, his TH\_NK co-founder, and they never looked back, winning huge contracts for the likes of Northern Rock as large projects steadily came in.

It was some time before he graduated that Tarek was introduced to UNW, who quickly recognised the potential of his brand. "When I was introduced to UNW, I was impressed by the fact that, despite us being a tiny company at that point, the partners took the time to show us real attention and care."

As the business grew, UNW became TH\_NK's audit partner and were a great help in sourcing a suitable fundraise as Tarek, Gary and the team moved into their first office at 55 Degrees North in 2005.

All this success was not without its troubles,



however, as 2008's credit crisis saw Northern Rock disappear almost overnight, and with it around 90% of TH\_NK's revenue. "It was a small miracle we survived to be honest" Tarek explains. Working closely with UNW, TH\_NK took cautious steps to ensure the business could continue to develop in what was a tempestuous environment.

"Things really turned around at some point in 2009, when we decided to seek a venture capitalist buyer, which UNW supported us greatly with. Over the past nine or so years, the firm has consistently provided us with exceptional advice as we've grown and evolved."

Now, with over 100 staff and three offices situated in Newcastle, Liverpool and London, TH\_NK has managed to consistently punch above its weight in an often-saturated market. When explaining what it is that sets his company apart amidst intense competition, Tarek is particularly assertive.

"Oh, it's ridiculously competitive!" he emphasises. "In reality, we're not just competing with other marketing services groups like the WPP and Omnicoms of this world, but a wide range of businesses as everyone moves from advertising into more digitally focused core services."

"The landscape has changed massively over the past five years. The reason TH\_NK has thrived, I believe, is that we've constantly evolved and never stood still."

"By being a boutique mix of tech specialists, business consultants and creatives, TH\_NK has been very impactful in the marketplace and is one of the main factors as to why we've

competed so successfully against companies far larger than ourselves. Now, as part of EPAM, we can hopefully continue this on a truly global scale."

A leading global provider of digital platform engineering and software development services, EPAM Systems has placed a focus on acquiring digitally centric businesses in 2018, such as Boston headquartered design firm Continuum in April. The approach from EPAM earlier this year came at a time when TH\_NK was experiencing 60% annual growth, leaving Tarek with a great deal to consider.

"We weren't looking to strike a deal, as there's been a great deal of interest in TH\_NK during our growth phase" says Tarek. "However, from the early conversations with EPAM we quickly realised this was a brilliant and, more importantly, unique opportunity for TH\_NK."

"We've always had a real passion to go on a journey with our customers, becoming not just a consultant but also an execution partner for them. We've probably been guilty over the years of thinking and planning beyond our capability at the time, but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. EPAM can provide us with the breadth and scale to make this dream a reality."

The partnership between UNW and TH\_NK has been a real journey for both companies, which has seen them experience similar growth trajectories in a relatively short space of time. "UNW has been invested in the journey with us and both John Healey and Steve Lant were instrumental in the acquisition by EPAM" says Tarek.

"TH\_NK has grown rapidly over the past few years and is unrecognisable from that small agency that began to work with UNW all those years ago, but it's more than just loyalty that has kept us working with them all this time, UNW always deliver."

"The acquisition by EPAM has allowed us to dream big and we're extremely excited to see what the future holds for TH\_NK, a future that UNW will unquestionably be a major part of."



Tarek Nseir



(L – R): Cllr Carl Marshall of Durham Council, Kangsheng Liu of G2O, Sarah Slaven of Business Durham, Craig Clement of G2O and Michael Vassallo of Maven.

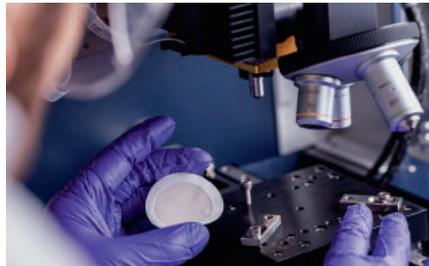
## MAVEN LEADS £1M INVESTMENT IN WATER TECHNOLOGIES BUSINESS G2O

Pioneering water technology business will create new R&D jobs in County Durham following investment in NETPark laboratory

Maven Capital Partners has led a £1m series B investment in Sedgefield, County Durham based water treatment technology business, G2O Water Technologies. A total of £600,000 has been provided by Maven funds, which includes a £200,000 investment from the Finance Durham Fund, established by Durham County Council overseen by Business Durham, the economic development organisation for County Durham, and managed by Maven. In addition to the £400,000 investment from NPIF Maven Equity Finance, supported by the European Regional Development, the additional £435,000 is from a number of private individual investors.

The funding will enable the business to increase its Research & Development facilities at its North East Technology Park (NETPark)-based laboratory including the recruitment of additional scientists to expand its work with key industrial development partners, including the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI), to commercialise and roll out its innovative technology.

G2O's graphene-based coatings technology provides highly efficient and cost-effective solutions to a broad range of filtration applications and critically can be used in conjunction with existing filtration membranes and systems. The technology has the potential to be used across multiple markets including the treatment of waste water in the oil & gas industry for oil and water



separation, industrial & processed waste water treatment, domestic water filters, and desalination.

With an increasing need for high quality drinking water using affordable solutions in both industrialised nations and the developing world together with increasing regulatory and cost pressures, G2O has identified a major opportunity to provide high separation efficiency solutions to real world problems for a range of contaminants.

The total global market for managing produced water was worth \$146.81 Billion in 2016. Within this the sub-market segment of industrial and waste water treatment is estimated to be worth \$26.77 Billion with a growth rate of 5.8% per year. Backed by a highly skilled and experienced management team and network of industrial partners to commercialise its pioneering technology, G2O's Executive Chairman, Andrew Greenaway, spent fifteen years at SIG plc, a FTSE

listed European industrials business, as Director of Strategy and Corporate Development. Andrew is supported on the G2O Board by Craig Clement, COO, a qualified accountant who has first-hand experience of commercialising chemistry technologies from his CFO role at DataLase; Dr. David Pears, CTO, who has more than 30 years' experience in R&D within the specialty chemicals industry and has recently been CTO at Itaconix and previously Reaxa.

Michael Dickens, Investment Manager at Maven, said, "We are delighted to support G2O's innovative development of water technologies. The company is creating products that offer affordable solutions to a variety of different markets, both domestic and global, and most importantly, global water filtration. Backed by a dedicated and highly experienced management team with excellent contacts in the markets they are targeting, we look forward to working with the company at their NETPark laboratory to drive the business forward."

Craig Clement, COO of G2O Technologies, said "We are thrilled to have completed our series B funding round with the support of Maven and to have located our R&D facility in the North East. We have been particularly impressed with the support provided to G2O by locating at NETPark. The demand for clean water is enormous and we are now well placed to develop products to meet the market's needs."

Please contact Maven's local team to discuss your business and its plans or visit [www.mavencp.com](http://www.mavencp.com) to find out more.

# CREATING VALUE

The £20 million Finance Durham Fund, managed by Maven Capital Partners, provides flexible equity and loan packages to support a business at any stage of its growth cycle.



If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, we may be able to help.

For more information please contact:

**info@financedurham.co.uk | T: 0191 731 8595**

financedurham.co.uk



## HAPPY CLIENTS WITH UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES (TO SOME BANKS AND BUILDING SOCIETIES!)

We helped numerous clients during 2018 across all areas of the market allowing satisfied clients to receive the keys to their new home, remortgage to a better interest rate or helping to develop a Buy to Let portfolio.

The opportunities available in the mortgage market are now extremely diverse, could we help you in 2019? Below are some examples of the types of scenarios where we have helped our clients in the last quarter of 2018 - all of the following mortgage offers were successfully received from mainstream lenders at prime rates.

**Retain an existing home and buy a new residential home** – our clients wanted to retain their existing home as an investment property and raise capital against this to fund the deposit on a new purchase. We arranged a let to buy mortgage on their current home and a residential mortgage on their new purchase.

**Paid in UAE Dirhams** – the client was looking to remortgage, but works overseas and is paid in a foreign currency. Not known to many, this can now be an issue for many lenders but we secured a competitive five year fixed rate.

**Bridging finance** – these clients had a property to sell but wanted to improve their existing home before they placed this property on the market. In the meantime, they had seen a property that they liked and so we utilised bridging finance to allow both to happen quickly.

**Buy to let investor** – this client wanted to start building a Buy to Let portfolio. We re-mortgaged three properties to put the client in a cash-rich position so that they could start to acquire properties quickly and easily.

**Borrowing in retirement** – these clients were looking to move home prior to selling their



Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

current property. An interest only mortgage was secured based on their assets and pension income facilitating a smooth move.

**Relocating first time buyers** – our clients were looking to move back to the North East, which also involved a change of job for both of them. Having spoken unsuccessfully with their banks they approached us for help. After a thorough review of their circumstances we found a mortgage to suit their needs.

**Home improvements** – our client was part way through an extensive home improvement project, part of which had been funded by credit card borrowing. They needed further money to complete the project and repay the debts. Whilst some lenders were unable to assist due to the level of debt, we managed to find a solution.

**Bank of Mum** – our retired client wanted to release some capital to assist her daughter. We arranged a

“retirement interest only” mortgage to release the funds quickly.

**7th floor apartment** – we were approached by a first time buyer who had applied directly to a bank and incurred several hundred pounds in costs before being told that the apartment he is buying was unacceptable to the bank. We searched the market to find a Building Society happy to provide the mortgage at a lower interest rate than he had previously expected.

This is a small example of the enquiries that we have received with positive outcomes for our clients, and also demonstrates that we can help most people. We offer local, face to face, independent mortgage advice and can advise on the best solutions for you.

*The purpose of this blog is to provide some examples of our mortgage cases and should not be interpreted as a personal recommendation or advice.*

**Paul Hardingham and Tony Ibson are Mortgage and Protection Advisers at Innovate Mortgages and Loans. Both have over 20 years of experience advising individuals and businesses across the North East of England. They can be contacted for bespoke advice at [paul@innovateml.co.uk](mailto:paul@innovateml.co.uk) or [tony@innovateml.co.uk](mailto:tony@innovateml.co.uk) or call 0191 223 3514.**

*The purpose of this article is to provide technical and generic guidance and should not be interpreted as a personal recommendation or advice.*

*Your home is at risk if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage or other loan secured on it.*

## DUO LAUNCH NORTH EAST FLIGHT ACADEMY

Lord John Stevens of Kirkwhelpington, Northumberland has partnered with a North East pilot to launch their own in-flight training school.

The North East Flight Academy, based at Newcastle International Airport, has been financed by Lord Stevens, a keen pilot himself, who has teamed up with Ben Harrison, 25 from Whitley Bay who will run the academy as full-time chief executive.

Lord Stevens is following in the footsteps of his father, Steve also known as CJ, who was the chairman and managing director of BKS Air Transport, the UK's oldest and largest domestic carrier that flew charters and freight since 1953 and then became part of British Airways in 1973.

Lord Stevens has invested a substantial amount in aircraft and facilities to continue the legacy of operating a flying school out of Newcastle airport since this date.

The North East Flight Academy will offer professional one to one flight training tailored around each individual student, whether they wish to fly for pleasure or become a fully qualified pilot.

Lord Stevens said: "Flying has always been a passion of mine and the academy fulfils a long-held ambition.

"I have been around aircraft from as long as I can remember. My father Steve was one of the founders of BKS Transport, which initially flew charters and freight until they were granted permission to operate schedule services between Newcastle, Isle of Man and Jersey. It then became BKS Air Transport in 1953.



"In 1955 the airline expanded with flights to Malaga and in 1957 longer scheduled services to Basle, Belfast, Bilbao, Dublin and Santander then Newcastle to London were launched. BKS carried around 1 million passengers a year and in July 1973 the airline became part of British Airways.

"It is with my father in mind, and my personal passion for flying and operating aircraft that I have invested so wholeheartedly in this venture and am continuing with my father's legacy.

"I am proud to partner with Ben, who at such a young age as already shown such commitment and skill to this career and I'm sure he will make this an incredibly successful business."

The North East Flight Academy gained support from Robson Laidler accountants in Jesmond who advised on the business structure, funding and marketing. Robson Laidler also set the business up on Cloud based accounting software platform Xero, so financial figures can be generated in real time, allowing the business to forecast and plan efficiently. The North East Flight Academy has also been set up with Receipt Bank for invoicing and Square for payment processing.

Robson Laidler chief executive Graham Purvis said: "Its been a pleasure advising on this enterprise and seeing the business come together. One of the best things about my job is seeing business ideas like this come to life. I wish Lord Stevens, Ben and the rest of the team all the best in their new venture. I am sure it will be a huge success."

As well as chief executive Ben, who initially trained at Northumbria Flying School and then completed his advanced pilot instructor course at Dundee Tayside Aviation, the business has appointed seven instructors, two of which are ex airline captains who will bring their knowledge and expertise to the business.

Within the next six months the business aims to extend into commercial training and is already in talks with two large commercial in-flight training schools in the UK.

The North East Flight Academy is offering a gift voucher scheme with prices starting from £115 for a 30 minute flying lesson.

For more information contact the North East Flight Academy on 0191 580 6550 or email [info@northeastflightacademy.co.uk](mailto:info@northeastflightacademy.co.uk).

## CIVIL ENGINEER MAKES RADICAL CAREER CHANGE AND SETS UP BESPOKE DESIGN COMPANY



Richard Frost

After a eureka moment former civil engineer Richard Frost had the biggest decision to make in his professional life, whether to end his three-decade association with engineering to explore the opportunity of setting up an independent design company.

Instead of making any rash choices Richard, aged 50 from York, turned to financial advisors, Explore Wealth Management to ensure any decisions made wouldn't be damaging to his monetary situation. The timely prospect of taking redundancy was also a card put onto the career table.

Richard said: "With any big decision I wanted to talk through my options to make sure I'd have financial security when starting up my new venture. Explore Wealth played devil's advocate as we weighed up the pros and cons. It was decided if the time was right and the appropriate measures were put in place then why not. What's the worst that could happen?"

Richard thought long and hard about which direction to take and he chose the

route of self-employment to specialise in making bespoke fine furniture.

Richard continued: "When it comes to making big judgements about your finances it's always worth getting advice. In my case it was Explore Wealth who helped me towards making the right decisions. Their guidance has ensured the pressure has been lifted from my shoulders and I can pursue my dream job!"

Explore Wealth Management is a family-run business based in Cramlington. Director, Stephen Sumner, said: "From the outset you need to be sure this huge change is right for you and your family, and obtaining financial advice is a very positive move.

"A financial adviser can always help you collate this information to see whether your plan is realistic, both now and in the future, without the risk of running out of money no matter what happens.

"With Richard, we looked at his existing assets, savings and pensions. We were able to analyse whether he could afford his career change without harming his financial security."

For information about Explore Wealth Management and Richard Frost Design please visit their websites [www.explorewealth.co.uk](http://www.explorewealth.co.uk) and [www.richardfrostdesign.co.uk](http://www.richardfrostdesign.co.uk)

# ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION: WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES?

If you've not yet heard about Robotic Process Automation (RPA), you soon will have. RPA is a type of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology that can replicate the actions involved in repetitive business processes, creating significant operational and strategic opportunities for businesses. This isn't science-fiction, it is happening now.



Darren Mee

### Are the robots coming for our jobs?

One common myth surrounding RPA is wide-spread job losses. Whilst there will always be an opportunity to use RPA for reducing costs, this isn't the best use of it. Many exponents of RPA highlight the benefits of automating mundane tasks. Used tactically and strategically, this can address particular pain points within a process, enabling staff to focus on more valuable activities. Enhanced compliance, audit trails and reduced error rates are also commonly cited benefits.

### Scalable growth, productivity and the talent war

Organisations are concerned about the lack of available talent, which could be further impacted by Brexit and continued low unemployment rates. Deploying that scarce talent to routine jobs requiring little judgement isn't a recipe for success – particularly if the 'millennial' stereotype is to be believed. Applying RPA technology to automate the right types of tasks and activities, enabling precious talent to focus on valuable activities, can set an organisation up for exponential growth.

### Implications for process and job design

Most of us crave rewarding, satisfying work where we can make a difference. It, therefore, makes sense for repetitive tasks to be carried out by robots. To move to this scenario, the challenge of designing appropriate processes and job descriptions needs to be addressed. Appropriately skilled process improvement professionals can identify tasks and activities to be carried out by robots and people respectively. This is about business change more than simply new technology as there's little value in automating a bad process.

### Drivers for outsourcing, offshoring or retaining inhouse?

Historically, organisations have decided to outsource (and/or offshore) activities considered non-core and where external providers deliver improved performance. RPA potentially changes that dynamic.

For organisations with cost pressures, offshoring presented a compelling business. Some sources have estimated that the use of a 'robotic labour force' presents a more compelling cost comparison than even the most competitive offshore rates. Accordingly, many outsourcers/BPOs are investing heavily into this technology.

### How will people 'cut their teeth' in this new world?

In many industries junior individuals have historically been expected to carry out routine activities. Whether it was an apprentice, office junior or a professional services trainee, undertaking this role generally helped provide relevant experience and 'on the job' training. As RPA and other automation and AI technologies automate these routine activities, there will be training and education implications for organisations.

### Human resources department...and robot resources department?

The good news is that robot resources don't require an HR department, but they'll still need maintenance, development and scheduling. Rather than a 'Robot Resources' department, most organisations will consider a 'Robotics Centre of Excellence', which may be a completely new function or merely an extension of the IT team with appropriate upskilling and resourcing to support this new technology.

To unlock the strategic potential of RPA, organisations should develop capabilities for the ongoing development of their robotic workforce. To begin with though, this is likely to be served by a third party while the feasibility and proof of concept is confirmed.

### An entry point for AI

AI is currently a very hot topic in both business and society. Many organisations that RSM consult with want to explore how AI can benefit their business. AI is not a simple topic to access and there isn't a wealth of readily available, mature solutions for

medium sized businesses. RPA potentially offers an entry level position to experiment with AI. RPA can be readily understood ie use a software robot to automatically carry out some parts of a business process that are currently routine, cumbersome and/or monotonous.

The RPA world is evolving quickly, bringing in more sophisticated elements such as Optical Character Recognition (OCR) scanning, Natural Language Processing (think voice activated assistants such as iPhone Siri or Amazon Alexa) and Machine Learning which could help to build a path for your business to incorporate more elements of AI.

### Quicker time to value and return on investment

One of the most important features of RPA is that the automation takes place through the same user-interface used by your teams. The software robots replicate the activities exactly as your staff do by clicking on particular fields on a screen. This differs to traditional IT automation which typically links systems and applications via 'back-end' databases.

Why is this important? Well, RPA projects can be delivered in a fraction of the time (and cost) of a traditional IT automation project., dramatically increasing the time to receive a return-on-investment.

### Summary

RPA is a technology that presents significant opportunities for organisations to both tactically address particular process 'pain-points' and to strategically consider their processes, operations and resourcing approaches.



For more information about how our technology and management consulting team can help your organisations benefit from RPA, please contact Darren Mee at [darren.mee@rsmuk.com](mailto:darren.mee@rsmuk.com)



Cyd Smith

## FORGET THE GYM!

"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

*Thomas Watson, Chairman of IBM 1943*

Jump forward 75 years and HMRC have decided that over 2.5 million businesses need one of these new fangled machines. We're not talking huge mainframes of a by-gone era. All you need is a small hand held device with more computing power than NASA had when they landed men on the moon.

Making Tax Digital for VAT (MTDfV) is to be introduced for all businesses trading above the VAT threshold (£85000) for VAT periods starting from 1 April 2019. For larger businesses who already use accounting software it's not so much of a problem. But what about smaller businesses who use more traditional accounting systems – spreadsheets, hand written cash books, carrier bags and the like...

If your turnover is below the VAT registration limit and you have registered voluntarily you can continue to use the existing portal. There will be no 'checks' put in place to confirm whether or not you are still eligible to use the portal because of turnover. HMRC's response to that question was that 'the onus is on the taxpayer to make sure they are using the correct method to file the return'. If you are trading above the registration limit and your turnover falls below £85000 you

can not opt back out of MTD, the only way to get out of it is to deregister.

HMRC originally said that spreadsheets would not be acceptable but have bowed to pressure to continue their use. However, the return information must be transmitted digitally using bridging software and apart from the original entries all other figures in the spreadsheet must be calculated using functions, formulae, macros etc. No cutting and pasting or manually re-keying totals.

For those businesses not using digital systems it will be a big change. There are hundreds of 'accounting' packages and related apps out there so investigating suitability and cost could be incredibly time consuming – time that small business owners don't have. And of course, once you have chosen your package you have to learn how to use it. We have many clients who will use a smartphone or tablet for all manner of things but when it comes to 'accounting' they really don't know what to know. The alternative is to outsource which will invariably involve more cost but would hopefully instil peace of mind for those who don't have the time or the confidence to do it themselves.

HMRC have, only recently, been sending out letters to VAT registered businesses about these changes. Some of our clients have received them, many have not. There seems to be a general lack of awareness and a lack of clarification by HMRC on several points. For instance, there are exemptions available on religious grounds, remoteness, ability etc but no firm guidelines as to how these exemptions will be assessed. Some (mostly larger) organisations have had their start date deferred to 1 October because HMRC systems are not ready.

The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee recently urged HMRC to defer the start date for at least one year on the grounds that smaller businesses had not had time to fully prepare and that the impact assessment carried out by HMRC had greatly underestimated the cost to businesses. But the message from HMRC is that 'it's happening'. So, forget the gym, the diet, the abstinence from alcohol, cigarettes etc and all the other well meaning promises made at midnight on New Year's Eve. If you are not yet prepared, then your New Year resolution has to be to get organised for MTDfV as quickly as possible.

**Our clients have access to free simple accounting software.**

**For more information about how MTDfV may affect your business contact [info@csaccounting.co.uk](mailto:info@csaccounting.co.uk) or telephone 0191 4879870.**



Gary Fawcett (2nd from the right) and his team of Investment Managers at Brewin Dolphin

## HOW TO GET STARTED WITH ESTATE PLANNING

As a nation we remain buttoned-up when it comes to talking about inheritance. Yet in many cases, it's inadvisable to automatically assume that you don't need estate planning. Almost half of families in the UK say they have never discussed inheritance matters, according to a survey commissioned by Brewin Dolphin.

**One of the main reasons why is that many people assume that estate planning is not for them – that it is only necessary if you are very wealthy.**

Nothing could be further from the truth. Most of us would like to leave a legacy. If you want to ensure your wishes are followed after you die, planning is essential, whatever your circumstances.

### It's good to talk

The first step is to begin a discussion with your family. That isn't necessarily easy, as inheritance and estate planning can be a highly emotional subject.

Consequently, conversations about inheritance are often put off until they can't be avoided. "A health scare, near death experience or getting older are the most common reasons cited for confronting the issue. But, if you leave it too long, it may be too late to make a difference," warns Gary Fawcett, Divisional Director at Brewin Dolphin in Newcastle.

"The conversation doesn't have to centre on money or be upsetting; it can be nice to talk to older family members about heirlooms they want to pass on," he adds.

Once you have broached the subject, estate planning does not need to be complicated. A financial planner can walk you through all the options, helping to ensure you create a plan that is best suited to your family's circumstances.

### Start with the simple things

One of the simplest and most effective forms of estate planning are lifetime gifts. Many people wait until death before passing on their wealth through their wills. But, transferring wealth while you are alive can have a transformative effect on your family's life – and you get to watch your loved ones benefit.

Gifting money to a younger relative to top up their pension can substantially boost their income when they eventually retire. Paying into an ISA for a youngster can provide them with a useful financial head start in life.

Gifting money during your lifetime can also reduce an inheritance tax (IHT) liability. You can give away £3,000 each year and this will not be subject to IHT. You can give as many gifts of up to £250 per person as you want during a tax year, as long as you haven't used another exemption on the

same person. In addition, parents can gift £5,000 to each of their children as a wedding gift, while grandparents can give £2,500.

Gifts of any size to charities or political parties are also tax free. If a gift is regular, comes out of your income and does not affect your standard of living, any amount of money can be given away and ignored for IHT.

### Future needs

You don't want to give away money that you might need in the future, for example, to cover care needs in later life. But, our planners can work with you to clarify how much of your wealth is available to pass on to future generations.

If you have a large and complicated estate, they can also help you consider other ways to pass on a legacy, making use of pensions, trusts and life assurance, for example.

Once you have an estate plan in place you will have the peace of mind of knowing that you have laid the firmest foundations for your family's future. Succession planning doesn't have to be morbid: it is as much about enabling people to live, as it is about dealing with an estate after death.

## 10 YEARS ON AND LOCAL ACCOUNTANT TELLS US HOW HE'S GONE FROM HIS BACK BEDROOM TO OVER 500 CLIENTS

A father who turned a sideline into a flourishing business is celebrating a successful 10 years in business despite a few setbacks along the way.

Andrew Potts, of KP Simpson Certified Public Accountants started offering his accountancy skills to friends as a way of boosting his income back in 2008, and he never thought when he started working from his bedroom that he would be where he is now. 10 years on, the 37-year-old has settled after a move to his own building on Albert Road in Jarrow.

The firm currently employs 12 staff and has more than 900 clients on its books. Andrew said: "When I started the sideline, I never thought it would take off like it did. It was a massive leap of faith to leave a permanent job to go solo. I never thought when I started working from my bedroom that I would be where I am now." The firm offers small and medium-sized enterprises services including payroll and book-keeping, taxation advice and accounting help. Andrew, a fully qualified accountant, added: "We strive to deliver the best customer service, which I think is why we have really taken off. We treat each client as an individual rather than just a number, and I feel this really sets us out from the competition."



Andrew has not only come a long way with his business, but his personal life too, after having a brain tumour removed in 2017 that was slowly killing him. He carries a scar from ear-to-ear after undergoing life-saving surgery to have a brain tumour the size of a Satsuma removed.

After his operation, Andrew was told by the DVLA he couldn't drive, which pushed him to run six miles

home from work each day, and with that, Andrew ran the Great North Run a mere year after surgery raising money for The Brain Tumour Charity - you could say the man is a true inspiration.

The firm plans to celebrate its successes later this year with a bash for all friends, family and clients to attend.

To find out how KP Simpson can help you and your business, check out the website [www.kpsimpson.co.uk](http://www.kpsimpson.co.uk), call 0191 420 0550 or email [info@kpsimpson.co.uk](mailto:info@kpsimpson.co.uk).

## ADVANCED FUNDING SOLUTIONS TO HELP YOUR BUSINESS THRIVE IN 2019...

Knowing you want to grow your business or expand in to a new field is a good start, but how you get there and how you do it is a huge struggle for lots of companies; lack of funding is a key reason why many businesses fail to scale. If you can't access the right funding mix as and when you need it - you're unlikely to grow significantly.

You first of all need to start with a business growth strategy, you'll need to incorporate this in to, or create, a business plan. At this stage, you'll need to seek input from someone in the financial industry to help identify cash flow implications of taking on additional debt, as well as what you'll need in order to achieve your goals.

Enter Advanced Funding Solutions, a locally based, highly experienced, individually tailored service with the skill and expertise to help you. If you approach a bank or finance house for funding then you'll be limited to what they can offer you from their own in-house funding products. Likewise, should you go to a small independent broker, the chances are that their funders panel will also be severely limited. However, when you speak to Advanced Funding Solutions you immediately gain access to what is possibly the largest and most comprehensive portfolio of internationally based funders operating within the commercial finance



market. You benefit from an unparalleled choice of funding sources, including specialist funders who operate exclusively within niche market sectors.

Whether you're looking for a commercial or investment mortgage, development, short-term or invoice finance, or peer-to-peer lending, we have a range of services and advice to find the perfect solution to your lending worries.

Achieve financial clarity this year, speak to the people in the know and remember these top tips:

- 1. START-UP.** Secure a start-up loan to get your business off the ground.
- 2. GROWTH.** Funding and support to assist your growth ambitions.
- 3. CAPITAL.** Funding for whatever equipment your business needs.
- 4. ALTERNATIVE FINANCE.** New and innovative ways to fund your business.
- 5. VEHICLE FINANCE.** When you need extra cars/vans on the road to help your business grow.

For more information and advice, contact Advanced Funding Solutions at [www.advancedfunding.co.uk](http://www.advancedfunding.co.uk) or 0191 486 2089.



Chris McCourt

## WE WANT YOU TO GET TO KNOW OUR CORPORATE FINANCE TEAM!

Our 'Five Minutes With...' blog series continues with Tait Walker Corporate Finance Associate Partner, Chris McCourt.

### **What is your role and how long have you been part of the Tait Walker team?**

I am an Associate Partner in the Corporate Finance team, so I lead project work with a range of clients. I help businesses owners who are either looking to grow their business through raising money or acquiring other businesses, or by helping them sell their business when the time is right.

### **What do you enjoy most about your role?**

I get to work with different people every day. Our clients come from a range of industries and it is great to be able to learn about a new business and help them on part of their journey. It is also very satisfying to be able to help someone achieve their ambitions – be that helping them scale up their business or see the business they have built up passed on to new owners to take it forward.

### **What's your favourite thing about the North East?**

The space. I lived in London for a couple of years

and found the sheer number of people everywhere more than a little irritating! I used to come back up on the train, cross the viaduct into Durham where I grew up and feel like I was back somewhere that suited me much better.

### **Where is your ideal dinner date and why?**

My wife would tell you I have a very sweet tooth, so anywhere with a good dessert menu!

### **What did you want to be when you were growing up?**

Different things at different points in my childhood; when I was young I really wanted to be a farmer but for most of my school life I hoped to be a chef. How I ended up going from wanting to cook to what I do now I have no idea!

### **Have you got any hidden talents?**

I have some pretty random facts in my head so I am a useful addition to a pub quiz team.

### **Which charity is closest to your heart and how do you support them?**

The Great North Children's Hospital. One of my children has been a patient there several times during his life and I have always been amazed by how brilliantly they deal with what can be very hard situations. I've run the Great North Run a few times and have raised money for them in the past.

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

Surround yourself with people who are cleverer than you, and listen to them.

### **What's your favourite way to spend a Saturday morning?**

With two young children, my Saturday mornings (every morning in fact) are usually fairly noisy and chaotic, but on the rare occasions that isn't the case I enjoy having a good cup of coffee and catching up on what's happening in the world (in silence!).

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

## A NEW YEAR RESOLUTION YOU SHOULD KEEP

May I begin, in the traditional way, by wishing all readers a very happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

January is an interesting month. For those that crave the warmth and light of summer, January is dark and moody. For others who love cold and frost, to return home and warm themselves in front of a fire, it is comforting and cosy. Some will be giving up booze for a month with "Dry January." I will not be among this number. However, I would lay odds that every good business is planning the year ahead. It is a good practice and individuals and families should do the same.

A business will be looking at its spending plans, its marketing campaigns, cash flow and completing a SWOT analysis.

For those unfamiliar with the term, it refers to Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. You make a list of each and work out the best way of utilising or addressing them.

In financial services terms, a business may look at itself and view that it has a threat or weakness in the areas of pensions or loans. It may see that the death or illness of a key worker or shareholder could create real and severe issues for the business. Business owners also need to consider succession planning. Who takes over from them and how do they extract value?

Similarly, an individual or family can find that they have unprotected mortgages or loans. What happens if the main earner dies or is unable to work?

They should also consider what their retirement plans look like. Do they have enough in the pot



now, or do they need to save more? Will they have to adjust their expectations?

Then there is the tax man. He is a threat to all parties here.

We accept that we must pay taxes but there are no prizes for paying more than you need. A bit of planning can reduce the tax burden on the business, family or individual. It leaves more to be enjoyed or reinvested for greater returns down the line.

And we can help with all this. It's called making a plan.

We can help identify some the weaknesses and threats but also opportunities and strengths. We can produce forecasts and create cashflow models. We

can assist you in achieving a clearer understanding of where you are financially, recognising your goals and what you need to do to achieve them.

January is a great time to plan and it should be a New Year resolution, and one that is kept.

There is a phrase, "No-one plans to fail but many fail to plan." It is true, and the most successful businesses and individuals are ones that plan.

Try it. You could well be pleasantly surprised.

Happy New Year!

If you or would like more information, or would like to discuss your own position, then please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleague, David Hughes.

**Peter Rutherford is a director at Rutherford Hughes Ltd. He can be contacted on 0191 229 9600  
peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com www.rutherfordhughes.com**

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## LORD'S TAVERNERS HOST CHARITY CHRISTMAS LUNCH

On The first Wednesday in December, the festive season got underway with great entertainment and generous giving. A sell out Civic Centre hosted the Lords Taverners' Christmas Lunch, raising in the region of £45,000 for the sporting charity.

Entertainment on the day came from Stuart Pearce, Jason Robinson and Steve Harmison all brilliantly interviewed by Sky Sports presenter Pete Graves, Dottie Weir as always did a sterling job as master of ceremonies and excellent comedian Ian Irving, was the supporting act.

Jamie Graham, the Regional chair of Lords Taverners' Northumberland Durham, thanked everyone for their generosity and continued support of the charity, which gives young people a sporting chance.





# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## GRAHAM LAVERICK

Managing Director, Prismatic.

### What have been the 2018 highlights for Prismatic Wealth?

We have been fortunate this year to have so many! Firstly buying, remodelling and moving out of shared offices into a larger, dedicated building.

We have expanded our staff numbers across all departments having taken on three new team members, Dawn in August, Caroline in September and Jonathan in December.

And finally one of our Chartered Financial Planners, Rebecca, has been awarded the CII's Maddocks Prize in addition to the team celebrating a flurry of exam successes this year.

### What core services do you offer?

Our business is structured in terms of our corporate and private client offerings, we cover all aspects of retirement planning- pensions, DB transfers, pension consolidation and transfers, pension drawdown and annuities, pension and divorce and self-invested personal pensions (SIPPs). We also offer investment planning advice and investment review, alongside life planning, estate planning, and protection planning. On the corporate side we assist businesses with their corporate financial planning needs, employee benefits, auto-enrolment, health and wellbeing and business protection.

### Tell us about your team?

It is true you are only as good as the team around you and the team we have here makes my role as Managing Director a lot easier.

Whilst face to face financial advice is very important, the work that takes place behind the scenes is equally as vital. Our client facing and back office team has expanded steadily over the last five years and we pride ourselves on developing staff who want a career in financial services, supporting them in their professional development. This is a serious business as you are dealing with people's aspirations and expectations, but a good sense of humour is essential.

We seem to have a lot of animal lovers in the team from horses to dogs and chickens- don't go there that's a story in itself! I gave up on the choice of football support a long time ago with all the North East teams represented here given that our staff hail from Middlesbrough, Durham, Redcar, Marske, Darlington, even Scotland amongst a few other towns.

### What has been the proudest moment so far?

This is a really difficult one to answer however I would have to say it was the re-branding of the business and making our voice known within the local community.



Just after the move to our new offices we hosted a regional event for the Bank of England, which is something we could never have contemplated prior to the move.

### What is the biggest challenge you currently face?

There are numerous challenges such as the unknown factors of Brexit.

Further recruitment of high-quality candidates interested in a career in financial services continues to be a difficulty in this region. But we hope that as our reputation becomes more well known in the local community, we will attract the best employees. To assist with this, we have started to develop links with local universities to implement a graduate trainee programme.

The industry is heavily regulated, which should be the case, but this does not always benefit the client and can deter people from seeking financial advice earlier than they do. Our industry seems to be constantly receiving bad press and that makes it harder for those advisers doing things right.

### How did you build your brand in 2018?

Having outgrown our existing offices, where we were for 15 years, we made the decision in late 2017 to move in September 2018 when there was a break clause in our lease. Purchasing the property we have now has given us more room to deliver our quality advice and host business seminars without the need to hire external premises.

In the Summer we appointed a Business Development Manager to build our presence in the region, we hope that this will cement our position in the local business community. Financial Services are not a quick fix, it's not like changing your car or your computer which you can see straight away. We consider this appointment as a long-term core aspect of the business.

### What are your 2019 goals?

We are looking forward to hosting a number of seminars in-house for both our private clients and members of the business community on a variety of subjects. Our lunches will be delivered by fund managers whilst the corporate breakfasts will be geared towards HR managers and business owners covering employee benefit options and employee lifestyle issues such as health and wellbeing and financial education.

Over the last couple of years, we have started to work with a number of firms overseas in countries such as New Zealand and Ireland, providing advice to those that have moved and become resident elsewhere- this area of the business will further develop.

We want to grow the business and now have the space to do so in a controlled manner. I do believe this will come naturally but I am keen to recruit the right calibre of employee who can add to the success of the company. I have never been focused on turnover.

Finally we want to work with more like-minded companies and individuals who value our services and expertise and who want a long-term, collaborative relationship.

### Where do you see the business in five years?

I know that the business is not as reliant on me as it was say five years ago and I would like to believe that this will continue over the next five years.

Do we have any aspirations on size and numbers? No, we don't, but we do have over 30 years in business, so we must have done a number of things right as we have worked with some of our clients over that same time period.

I would hope that we can push the brand and our offering to more local businesses as it's often depressing to find that companies go outside the North East for expertise when it is available here on their doorstep.

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

# COMPANY MOVE TO HARWORTH'S LYNEFIELD PARK COULD TREBLE TURNOVER

A multi-utility service connections company that has significantly increased turnover year on year, is now looking to expand further after becoming the latest tenant at Harworth Group's Lynefield Park development.

PWG Connections has relocated from Amble to larger, customised commercial premises at the former Alcan aluminium smelter plant site. The move supports ambitious growth plans which could see turnover treble in five years and new UK-wide, service infrastructure contracts within the education, healthcare and transport sectors being delivered.

The firm is one of the region's fastest-growing, independent utilities companies providing electricity, water and gas connections to homebuilders, civil engineering organisations, local authorities and private domestic customers throughout the UK. Current clients include Taylor Wimpey, Northern Gas Networks, ESP, Sir Robert McAlpine, Balfour Beatty, Integral and Nissan. It employs 25 staff including three apprentices, and is now looking to grow the business from its new Lynefield Park HQ.

MD, Paul Groves, explained, "Since the industry was opened up to increased competition by the Government, a small number of companies like PWG have carved a niche in the sector by positioning ourselves just below the bigger



organisations and supplying a very bespoke, customer-focused utility connections service. This has meant that we were rapidly in need of larger premises and Lynefield Park was ideal strategically, commercially and in terms of main transport links.

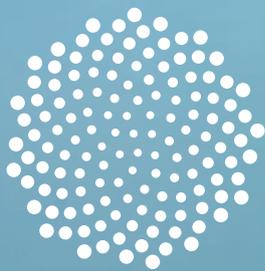
"We've leased 3,500 sq ft of industrial space and this is ten times more accommodation than we had previously. It's an exciting time for the business and one that could see us deliver significant projects for major new clients operating in new industries."

Eddie Peat, Corporate Director North East of Harworth Group added, "It has always been our

long-term vision to develop a strategic industrial zone for the area which would attract further inward investment. We're delighted that PWG Connections has become our latest tenant and with interest in the site high, we hope to announce more in the very near future."

Lynefield Park is a 175 acre brownfield site earmarked for major development by Harworth Group. It could become a strategic industrial gateway to the wider South East Northumberland region, already home to some of the region's key employers including AkzoNobel, Bernicia and Lynemouth Power Station.

For more information about Lynefield Park, contact Nick Atkinson on t: 0191 245 1234 or e: [nick@htare.co.uk](mailto:nick@htare.co.uk)

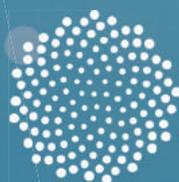


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## PRISMATIC WEALTH NEW OFFICE OPENING

Wealth Management company Prismatic Wealth celebrated their recent office move to dedicated premises on Falcon Court, Preston Farm Business Park, Stockton with a well-attended open morning, at which guests were invited to explore the new outfit over breakfast.

Their new building has ample on-site parking, a large reception area, five meeting rooms, a boardroom and dedicated seminar room as well as a breakout area to accommodate events.

Graham Laverick, Managing Director and Ben Houchen, Tees Valley Mayor led proceedings providing guests with an overview of Prismatic Wealth's history, they currently manage over £180 million in client funds and employ 20 staff.





# What if you only own the topping?

The topping  
(your house)



The land  
your house  
sits on  
(the  
Freehold)



*We'll make it a piece of cake*

## SHOULD I BUY THE FREEHOLD OF MY HOUSE, OR IS IT A WASTE OF MONEY?

If you own a house built in the 1970's or 1980's where you pay a ground rent then you need to read this!

Most people do not know the difference between Freehold and Leasehold property and £20 or £35 a year ground rent does not raise any alarm bells. However, whenever you want to change a window to a patio door or build a small extension or place solar panels on your roof, you need the consent of the Freeholder. They not only charge several hundred pounds for this consent, they often increase the ground rent significantly.

Careful property owners who check that they have Planning Permission and Building Regulation Approval can find themselves in breach of their Lease if they didn't ask the Freeholder for consent.

In addition, when they try and sell their homes, they find out that they may have a big problem. Mortgage companies will not lend on properties



Sue Shaw-Toomey

with less than 60 years left on the Lease. The fact that you can only sell to a cash buyer means your house is worth a lot less.

If you pay the Freeholder for a 'valuation' you pay £95.00 for the Freeholder to give you an aspirational price. This price is merely a figure that they hope to get from you. Parliament have introduced a mechanism to make this process fairer. The statutory basis for calculating the price is usually 30% to 50% of the aspirational price. If the Freeholder asked for £12,000, we can normally reduce that to around £4,000. The total fees for both the Surveyor and ourselves is under £1,000.

We are experts at helping people get the best deal when buying their Freeholds. We are based in Cramlington, so we are local as well as friendly and efficient. Give us a call for a no-obligation chat about your options. Buying the Freehold will add more to the value of your home than it costs – so yes – you should buy your Freehold!

Sue Shaw-Toomey is the Managing Partner of Toomey Legal Limited of Fergyspace, Northumberland Business Park West, Cramlington NE23 7RH  
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Martin Wilson (Partner) and Jenny Atkin (Associate) from the Real Estate Commercial Property Department at St James' Square pictured with Ian Jones (centre) from The Naked Deli

## ST JAMES' SQUARE LAW FIRM ADVISES THE NAKED DELI ON MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENT

Commercial law firm St James' Square has helped clean-eating restaurant chain The Naked Deli expand into new premises.

The Naked Deli has opened a new flagship restaurant in Newcastle's historic Central Arcade to serve up its popular range of whole and natural state fresh food.

The new restaurant opened its doors last month and offers a health-conscious and clean-eating dining experience with both eat-in and take-away options.

Martin Wilson and Jenny Atkin from the real estate commercial property department at St James' Square, advised The Naked Deli on the deal that saw the firm redevelop the Grade II-listed premises at 97 and 99 Grey Street, which had been standing empty for some time.

Jenny, an Associate at St James' Square Law Firm said; "The Naked Deli is an exciting addition to Grey Street and brings a unique healthy dining

experience to Newcastle city centre. The design of the restaurant fits perfectly with the iconic listed buildings and is true to the brand's unique style."

"Like St James' Square, The Naked Deli is a young, dynamic business with big ambitions for the future so our partnership works really well.

"We are thrilled to have worked with The Naked Deli during its expansion into their new flagship premises and congratulate them on this latest milestone achievement."

Launched in 2014 in Heaton, The Naked Deli also has sites in Fenwick's food hall, Gosforth, and Newcastle Airport.

Ian Jones, Property Director at The Naked Deli, said: "We are delighted to open our new Grey

Street branch and bring our healthy and nutritious food to more people in the heart of Newcastle.

"The team at St James' Square was fantastic throughout the negotiations. The service we received from them has been incredible. They really understand our business and always go the extra mile to help things go to plan."

St James' Square recently released figures showing a turnover of £1.3 million in the 18 months since it was founded. The firm employs 28 members of staff and has recently moved to a new 5000-square foot office at Esh Plaza, in Newcastle Great Park.

The team represents an array of successful companies, including Hays Travel, Northgate, Co-wheels, and Premier Care Homes.

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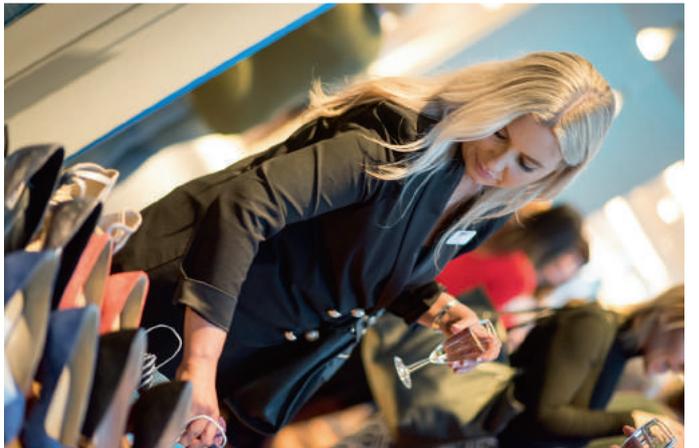
**FIZZ IN THE CITY TIME**

Jesmond based Mincoffs Solicitors recently hosted their festive Fizz in the City at the Crowne Plaza Newcastle. The increasingly popular ladies' networking event showcased the fantastic work of Smart Works Newcastle, a charity that helps unemployed women find work through interview coaching and style sessions and raised over £300 with a business card draw and pop-up shop.

Fizz in the City is held quarterly and information about future events can be found on Mincoffs' website and social media channels.

[www.mincoffs.co.uk](http://www.mincoffs.co.uk)  
@mincoffs #FizzFriday







## ICO FINES - THIS TIME IT'S PERSONAL

Data protection expert Gillian Scribbins, of Muckle LLP, explains how company directors can now be held personally liable for marketing malpractice

If you're a company director, it's safe to say you've heard about the new data protection laws. Wearing my legal advice hat, I will tell you about the many, many obligations and mandatory business procedures you need in place to avoid those possible maximum fines of €20 million (or 4% of your company's annual turnover, if that's higher) for your company.

Other business advisors might tell you the GDPR is just another risk to be managed. You might expect this kind of reactionary approach to data protection to go something like this: a breach of the legislation is found and identified, a fine is issued, your insurers swoop in, your premiums rise and the data protection fault is resolved. Business carries on.

When expressed so nonchalantly, it's easy to see why not every board of directors is taking GDPR seriously, despite warnings from their lawyers and data protection officers.

As of the 17th December 2018, however, the Information Commissioner has a new string to her bow, which alters this laissez-faire landscape somewhat.

### Nuisance marketing

Of the enforcement actions taken, and published on the ICO's website so we can have no excuse for ignorance, there is a distinct trend of data controllers being fined for nuisance marketing. This



Gillian Scribbins

is the result of the ICO's continuing investigation into nuisance calls and messages, one of the key consumer concerns when it comes to use of our personal data.

Throughout October last year, the ICO was investigating 103 separate cases of nuisance marketing, after receiving almost 16,000 complaints, and as a result issued a number of enforcement action notifications.

### Personal liability

Marketing is governed not only by data protection laws, but by the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulation (PECR). In an

expansion to the ICO's powers, an amendment to this law came into force last month. This amendment allows directors to be found personally liable for contraventions their company makes of these marketing regulations.

Where a company is found to have breached PECR, which in most cases will mean it is guilty of unsolicited or nuisance emails, texts or telephone calls, a responsible "director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the body or any person purporting to act in such capacity", may now be fined up to £500,000 in addition to any fine the company may have received. This director's liability for breach of PECR applies to individuals who may since have left the company or resigned.

The new powers are hoped to prevent perpetrators of wilful or negligent contraventions escaping penalisation by placing the fined company into liquidation.

This supports the message the ICO have been putting out recently, around the importance of board buy in. The ICO has made it clear that when complaints are investigated, or breaches are reported, they will be taking into consideration board awareness, accountability and engagement in data protection. So if you are of the pro-active school of thought, you may find a greater element of leniency and cooperation from the ICO should an enforcement notification be headed your way.

To learn more or for help with any data protection, GDPR compliance or IT legal issues, email [data@muckle-llp.com](mailto:data@muckle-llp.com) or call 0191 211 7777.

Headed by leading lawyer, Lyn Rutherford, our specialist Family team provides advice in all areas of family law. These range from pre- and post-nuptial agreements to relationship breakdown, including advice on separation, divorce, financial provision and child maintenance, as well as co-habitation or civil partnership disputes.

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## “IT’S NOT ALWAYS THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR”

Following the busy festive period many people find themselves simply unable to continue in an unhappy marriage or relationship. Undoubtedly every year there is a spike in divorce enquiries in early January. Last year, 8th January was dubbed ‘Divorce Day’ by some sections of the media.

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Sadly, the estimated percentage of marriages ending in divorce now stands at 42%, with around half of those divorces expected to occur in the first 10 years of marriage (Release from the Office of National Statistics 26th September 2018).

It may be that considering counselling with organisations such as Relate could be the first port of call, however one or both of the parties to a relationship are often unable or indeed unwilling to consider this and divorce and/or separation is inevitable. Should you find yourself in such a situation, help is at hand and you should not feel alone during these undoubtedly difficult times.

If there are issues regarding children or financial matters to resolve then in the first instance a referral can be made to mediation. This is the process of trying to resolve future arrangements with the help of a neutral mediator who will seek to assist parties in reaching their own agreements amicably.

People are often filled with dread at the prospect of seeking legal advice regarding such personal issues but this should not be a distressing experience. When considering legal advice then ideally you should look for a lawyer who is a member of Resolution. Resolution are a national organisation



Sarah Reid, Managing Director

of family lawyers and other legal professionals whose members follow a code of practice that promotes a non-confrontational approach to family problems. Solutions that consider the needs of the whole family, especially the children, are particularly encouraged.

Further to this there is also the option of both parties appointing a Collaborative Lawyer. Under this process each person appoints their own Collaboratively trained lawyer and the parties will then meet together to try to resolve the issues at hand. There will also be the opportunity to work with an independent financial advisor, children specialist or accountant to focus on the particular issues such as matrimonial finances and assets, maintenance for the children and arrangements for the children. All such professionals make up a collaborative team and sign an agreement which

commits to trying to resolve the issues without going to court and prevents any of the parties representing you in court if the collaborative process breaks down. This ensures all parties are committed to finding focussed solutions by way of amicable agreement rather than through length and often costly court proceedings.

In summary, divorce/separation doesn't have to be the very stressful process that people so often envisage. If you find yourself in a situation whereby the relationship is at end then always consider contacting lawyers who are solution focussed. Divorce and separation don't always have to end with a costly and protracted court case which can have lasting implications both financially and emotionally for all concerned. Ensure that you have the right team on your side from the outset to give yourself the best outcome.

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**Sarah Reid is a trained and experienced Collaborative lawyer and a member of Resolution. For further enquiries please call the family team on 0191 5670465.**

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Gillian Marshall

## WE NEED TO GET BETTER AT EXPORTING...AND FAST!

By Gillian Marshall, chief executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum

Whether the UK's exit from the European Union goes smoothly or sends shockwaves throughout the economy, international trade will remain key for the future success of British business - or its revitalisation.

The uncertainty, in many respects, is hampering organisations' short to mid-term strategies and future plans for investment - as we often hear and read about in the mainstream media whenever an industry expert addresses the nation.

According to the latest research into the services sector - often considered the most dominant in the UK - activity gradually fell from the previous month. The Services Purchasing Managers' Index (IHS Markit/CIPS UK) showed a reading of 50.4 in November, down from 52.2 in October.

This latest reading was at its lowest since the immediate aftermath of the Brexit result, and there have also been plenty of reports into the manufacturing sector that indicate manufacturers are stockpiling their goods to counteract the uncertainty brought about by Brexit.

For entrepreneurs however, Brexit should be seen as an opportunity. Nobody truly knows what will happen after the 29th March, so it needs to be 'business as usual' until then, and throughout the withdrawal transitional period. The same should be said for exporting and unlocking new opportunities with the rest of the world.

It's clear that there is currently a huge demand for British products abroad, and the demand is growing. Last year alone, North East exports totalled £12.9

billion, an increase of 8% on 2016.

Our region is home to a plethora of fast-growing, successful companies that are contributing to the resurging North East economy and making wider, meaningful contributions to UK PLC. However, according to regional figures, less than four percent of businesses in the North East export their goods or services.

There are plenty of ways that companies can take advantage of the opportunities available through exporting and international trade - whether by reaching out to the Department for International Trade (DIT), or leveraging expertise from people who have been there and done it before.

Contrary to the low levels of exporters operating in the region, 40 percent of Entrepreneurs' Forum members are actively exporting and largely remain positive about their prospects.

Our membership comprises businesses operating across multiple industries and sectors; from engineering and manufacturing firms and marketing agencies to retailers and those in professional services. Each, in their own right, has the potential to export their services and products, with many doing very successfully.

Workwear supplier, MI Suppliers, regularly takes orders overseas, including in Australia,

while Analox's gas detection solutions are used worldwide and Francis Brown deliver its fabrication and engineering services globally.

Wessington Cryogenics produces cryogenic vessels for customers around the globe and is so specialised that overseas clients have included NASA, The European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the United States Air Force.

These are just a handful of companies on our doorstep that are utilising international markets and growing their businesses through exporting.

In order to stay ahead of the curve, it is vital that people embrace, rather than avoid, the challenges brought about by Brexit. The same can be said for international trade and ensuring that crucial relationships are maintained and developed with neighbouring countries in Europe and further afield.

Entrepreneurs and businesses operating throughout the North East and the wider UK are the ones that are creating the jobs and driving growth that is necessary and will be so vital over the course of the coming months and years.

They require support and clarity in order to deliver these crucial contributions to the economy, so there needs to be more doing, rather than a downbeat atmosphere and scaremongering from the powers that be.

**The Entrepreneurs' Forum supports more than 300 aspirational North East business owners in all sectors, helping to expand their networks, improve leadership skills, share experience, create new opportunities and grow their business. For more information call 0191 500 7780 or visit [www.entrepreneursforum.net](http://www.entrepreneursforum.net)**

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#HARDWORKWINS

An Entrepreneur Interview with...

## STEPHEN PRIOR

Director, Forest Carbon

### Tell me about your background in business

My working life began in education as a teacher and later headteacher of a school in Zimbabwe, which had more than 500 pupils, including 150 boarders. This was my first experience of business as I was essentially running 'an SME' by managing the school, with its total of 150 staff, and reporting to the Board of Governors, which was similar to a company Board.

I had to run and manage the school as a business and, given the extreme political difficulties at that time in the country's history, in order to keep it running I had to learn very quickly to be entrepreneurial in my approach to my responsibilities as Head.

### How was Forest Carbon formed?

The political unrest in Zimbabwe meant that it was pretty much untenable to stay there, so my wife and I returned to England. It was the perfect opportunity, being between jobs and countries, to go back to study, and I enrolled at Durham University Business School for an MBA, allowing me to think about and ultimately pursue a new career.

Unbeknown to me at the time, my future business partner, James Hepburne Scott, had been exploring the idea of a potential forest carbon market in the UK, which I eventually picked up as part of my dissertation at Durham. James, who had experience working within the UK's forestry industry, had actually put the research question to the business school and as part of my research project I interviewed him and met with him, which, after the meeting, led to the creation of Forest Carbon.

### In your own words, what is it that Forest Carbon does?

We support and enable the creation of new woodlands in the UK on behalf of businesses that want to mitigate their carbon footprints. To date, we have planted more than seven million trees in over 130 new woodlands across the UK. We focus on UK woodlands as, while they capture CO<sub>2</sub>, they also bring loads of other benefits to the country.

The added value of our work is that our projects are all quality assured under a government backed mechanism called the Woodland Carbon Code, through the Forestry Commission. We actually helped to develop the code back in 2011.

Our first meeting as Forest Carbon was with the sustainability team at Marks & Spencer's in 2006, set up through a friend from my MBA class, and we had initially envisaged going down there with our business plan to get some advice and being told that we were crazy! But we came back with a purchase order and formed

the business on a handshake on the platform at Paddington tube station!

### What is your proudest moment with the company?

That's a tricky one! The first great moment was when starting the business on our own with our own quality assurance rules. James and I were heavily involved in lobbying the Forestry Commission to establish its own mechanism, which, as touched on earlier, we helped to develop.

As soon as that went live, it proved to us that we had been on to something for quite some time; the ideas we had been generating were being acknowledged by the Government, as the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) supported the Forestry Commission in setting up the Woodland Carbon Code as the industry standard.

We then took all of our existing projects, roughly 40 woodlands at the time, and put them through the quality assurance mechanism. They all passed with flying colours, which was a real vote of confidence in what we had been doing, and a reward for all the businesses that had worked with us early on and shown faith in us.

Other than that, it's a joy and constant sequence of moments – whenever we get a new woodland planted or business to work with you know that together we're doing something great.

More recently, we've had successes in establishing a quality assurance mechanism for peatland restoration projects, and we were one of the main drivers behind this. This is another example of how we have been involved in directing government policy – sort of a small business leading the way and the government following!

Is there a particular mistake you have made while in business? And how did you overcome/learn from it?

It's hard to identify one particular mistake or error, I think probably like most entrepreneurs it's a long list. It's a cliché but it really is how you respond to and learn from them that counts.

### What is Forest Carbon's USP?

I suppose it has to be that we're the only company in the UK that does what we do, which makes us unique.

We turn organisations' ideas about sustainability and carbon offsetting into supporting woodland creation, and these are larger scale projects with multiple other benefits to society – things like flood mitigation, better water quality, employment, habitat and public access. These woodlands wouldn't happen without our partnerships with businesses, and most businesses wouldn't be able to access projects

like this, or wouldn't be able to do so alone, so we're bringing all the parties together and creating something new and valuable.

### How has the firm grown and what do you attribute this to?

The Woodland Carbon Code was massive as it shows we're endorsed by the Government, which supports what we're doing and trying to achieve.

As a result, we're able to issue individual certified carbon credits, which allows us to work with organisations of all shapes and sizes and operate more flexibly.

This was probably the biggest single breakthrough; to have the ability to provide audited, traceable carbon credits from these woodlands, which distinguishes Forest Carbon from other organisations.

### Do you live by/do business by a certain motto?

One I've learnt from James: "Nothing is ever as good or as bad as you think it's going to be" – which keeps you on an even keel.

The other is a philosophy that people in Zimbabwe have, which is: "We'll make a plan. It doesn't matter what happens, we'll make a plan."

These are the two sayings that get me through any mistakes I might make!

### What are the future plans of the business?

More trees, more peat is what I'd summarise it as!

The country is still very badly deforested and there are big government aspirations to increase the forest cover in the UK. We, as a business and with our partners, have accounted for five to six percent of all UK woodland creation over the last five years – so we'd like to keep increasing that number and support the Government's aspirations, as the country needs more woodlands.

Forest Carbon has planted somewhere in the region of 150 woodlands, with more in the pipeline, and completed one peatland restoration project, which is a brand new concept. So, the aim is to get peat restoration to a similar level.

We've also launched a new scheme called the Carbon Club as a means to widen access to woodland creation and carbon credits beyond the larger organisations we typically work with. Smaller companies don't usually have access to the kind of resources to gather the required information and calculate their carbon footprint, so the club has been designed with this mind, with pre-set tiers based on employees' numbers and other readily available data.



Stephen Prior is a member of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, a group of like-minded people who come together at inspirational events to share best practice, create valuable connections and help each other to grow their businesses. For more information, visit [www.entrepreneursforum.net](http://www.entrepreneursforum.net)

## IMPROVING CAREERS GUIDANCE TAKES TIME AND EFFORT

The North East LEP has been working in partnership with the Gatsby Foundation for three years, with the aim of improving careers guidance for all young people in the North East.

Sir John Holman, Senior Adviser to the Gatsby Foundation, shared his insights on how schools can be supported to provide world-class careers guidance with TES online.

We have known for years how important good careers guidance is in supporting each young person in making the best decisions for a fulfilling future. However, I was also acutely aware of the criticism levelled against career guidance in English schools and colleges.

For this reason, with the backing of the Gatsby Foundation and with colleagues from the University of Derby, I conducted an international study, a literature review and a survey of schools in England to delineate just what world-class careers guidance looks like. This resulted in the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, which are now placed at the heart of government's Careers Strategy, launched in December 2017.

As we pass this milestone, there is cause to celebrate. In 2015-17, Gatsby ran a successful pilot of the Benchmarks in the North East, where we saw the positive difference they can make on the ground. From all of this evidence, I can confidently say that the Benchmarks really do make an impact on the lives of young people.

Moreover, when the government placed the Benchmarks at the heart of their drive to make career guidance world-class in this country, I was pleased when I saw how schools and colleges quickly embraced them as a serious driver for

change. The government also committed money to the strategy, announcing funding for Career Leaders and the rollout of a national Careers Hub network, based on the North East model in our pilot of the Benchmarks.

However, we still have a way to go. The government has committed funding to train over 1,300 Career Leaders and create 40 Careers Hubs, but this is just a start: over half of schools in England will still be without the support of a Careers Hub, for example.

From a recent analysis done by Gatsby, we know that the vast majority of headteachers are aware of the strategy, but we also know that not all governing boards are yet aware of the changes. One of the clearest messages from those involved in our pilot in the North East was that having a governing board that is fully engaged in careers provision leads to a stronger careers programme and more successful interventions. Without this support, meeting all eight Benchmarks is that much less achievable.

And it is all eight Benchmarks that need to be achieved – no single benchmark is more important than any other. They make a coherent framework that needs to be considered as a whole. The

recent State of the Nation report by The Careers & Enterprise Company highlighted how progress towards certain Benchmarks is slower than others, which goes to highlight the need for trained Career Leaders and the support of hubs for every school.

Alongside this, we must remember that the Benchmarks work best when the whole school understands the opportunities they offer.

Perhaps most importantly, I believe that what career guidance policy needs now is a period of stability. World-leading administrations like Germany and Ontario show the value of a stable system where students, teachers, parents and employers all understand what they can expect from the career guidance system. Such stability takes years to establish.

We knew when we developed the Benchmarks that they set a high bar, and that fully achieving them across a school or college takes time and a sustained effort. I urge the government to allow schools and colleges the time and support they need to make the most of this opportunity so that our aspirations of world-class career guidance for every student can be achieved.



Sir John Holman is senior adviser to the Gatsby Foundation and author of *Good Career Guidance*. Find out about the North East LEP's work with the Gatsby Foundation at [www.nelep.co.uk/skills](http://www.nelep.co.uk/skills).

# RETAINING TALENT IN THE WORKPLACE - 6 STEPS TO SUCCESS FROM HADRIAN HR



Deb Tweedy

Talent retention is often overlooked in a business, whereas the cost of recruitment and selection can typically incur sizable outlays. The hiring process will often involve advertising, selecting and interviewing which without doubt takes time and effort.

However, many business owners and line managers fail to recognise that this is only the first stage of the people management process.

For a business to be successful and to retain great talent, line managers need to foster good relations with their staff. The relationship between the employer and the employee is, in reality, founded on the relationship between the employee and the line manager. This means line managers can either make or break relationships, so it is essential that they understand that people are their most important asset and how to ensure good team members are not lost.

Retaining great talent can ensure customer satisfaction and sales, whilst also creating a positive atmosphere which sees other employees wanting to attend work each day, so it is vital that businesses get their talent management right from the start.

Here, Hadrian HR shares 6 steps to success when it comes to retaining talent in the workplace:

1. Hadrian HR recommends that everyone is provided with a copy of the business plan upon joining a company. However, prior to starting, a nice touch would be for the employee to receive a welcome card signed by their whole

team, and they should be emailed regular updates from the business as soon as they receive their offer of employment, affording them the opportunity to understand the company culture and to feel involved from the outset.

2. Upon joining, staff should receive a full induction whereby they meet all of the key people within the business who will support them throughout the early days. Additionally, throughout the first six months, new employees should meet with HR on three occasions so that any initial teething problems can be ironed out.
3. Prior to becoming a manager or team leader, all personnel should undertake a qualification in leadership and management (ILM Level 3). This can significantly help them to value relationships and manage effectively. Employees should be encouraged to actively contribute to the firm's business offering through bi-monthly meetings where they can put forward ideas as to how the company can grow and develop.
4. Staff should be surveyed regularly so they can comment on what they think the business does well, how supported they feel by their line managers and what they feel could be done

better. By involving the staff and then actively working upon improvements, staff will believe that they have a voice.

5. The managing director and senior management team should operate a culture which has zero tolerance of bullying to stamp out any negativity. They should be approachable and actively listen to their workforce, encouraging staff to have a voice via a number of channels and understand that those operating on the coal face are integral to the future success of the business.
6. Managing directors should also understand the importance of providing autonomy and the dangers of micro management. The success of a business and low levels of attrition are as a direct result of managers leading from the top whilst ensuring positivity is a resounding element of the culture.

Hadrian HR understands the need for no-nonsense HR consultancy advice which is vital to the smooth running of any business. Its team of HR specialists provide personalised packages to micro and small businesses across the North East, ranging from one off contracts to a full audit of current policies and provision of customised contracts and handbooks.

# NATIONAL LANDSCAPE DISCOVERY CENTRE LAUNCHES NEW EXHIBITION TO CELEBRATE LOCAL ARTISTS



A new exhibition celebrating local artists has opened at The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre on Hadrian's Wall.

Northumberland National Park Authority has created a special gallery space to showcase artists from across the county who take their inspiration from the landscapes, plants and animals that symbolise the Park.

Titled 'Inspired by Our Land', the exhibition features 12 local artists and includes original work, prints, photography and ceramics. Visitors can expect to see traditional landscape paintings alongside contemporary art and stunning photography.

Popular watercolour artist David Holliday, who is based in the Tyne Valley and works from his studio at The Hearth Arts Centre in Horsley, is one of the artists featured. David has an honours degree in Design & Illustration from Sunderland University. For more than 20 years he has been painting works inspired by the North East's urban, coastal and rural landscapes, iconic heritage sites and wildlife.

Describing the opportunity to exhibit his work at The Sill, David said: "It's an honour to be involved in the National Park Authority's first art exhibition. The Sill is an iconic location and I feel proud to have my work feature alongside other hugely talented

artists living and working in Northumberland.

"I have been painting landscapes and wildlife throughout the county for many years. Northumberland National Park is a constant source of inspiration; therefore it's fantastic to be exhibiting my work in the place that helped shape it."

The majority of artists featured in the exhibition hail from Hexham, Rothbury, Haydon Bridge, Bardon Mill, West Mickley and the Hadrian's Wall area.

They include oil painter Peter Flanagan, Cathy Duncan, a specialist in linocut prints, Lindsey Cooper who works in acrylics, photographer David Taylor, printmaker Carol Nunan, acrylic artist Judith Forster, printmaker Carole Thirlaway, mixed media artist Denis McErlane, sculptor Robin Fox, ceramic artist Graham Taylor and photographer Will Nicholls.

Rosie Thomas, Business Development Director at Northumberland National Park Authority, adds: "We are thrilled to host our first art exhibition in the heart of Hadrian's Wall country and to

celebrate our gifted local artists and provide them with a unique opportunity to share their talent with visitors to The Sill.

"Inspired by Our Land represents the unique environment, varied geography and wonderful wildlife of our National Park. It promises to be a fantastic exhibition and I'd encourage anyone with a love for the countryside to come and see it. We have a great variety on display, ranging from oils and watercolours to mixed media, sculpture and photography. With such a wide selection there is undoubtedly something for everyone."

'Inspired by Our Land' is a free public exhibition which runs from Saturday 17 November to February 2019. It is open seven days a week from 10am to 4pm.

The Sill is the UK's first dedicated National Landscape Discovery Centre and the result of a pioneering partnership between Northumberland National Park Authority, YHA (England and Wales), and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) through a £7.8 million grant made possible by National Lottery players.

To find out more about The Sill go to [www.thesill.org.uk](http://www.thesill.org.uk) or to book an event or activity, go to [www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk)

# UK RESTAURANT CHAIN SIGNS DEAL TO SOLVE MODERN SLAVERY AND ALLERGEN CONCERNS IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN

A restaurant chain with 260 branches across the UK has signed a contract with a North East based company that will see them implementing an innovative and reliable approach to a number of issues faced in the world of food, drink and hospitality.

Celebrating their 45th birthday this year, Pizza Hut UK Restaurants is the latest customer to join the growing client base of Trade Interchange, leading supplier management software provider. Its ARCUS® platform is a pioneering cloud-based solution made up of modules designed to help mitigate supply chain risks and make cost savings.

The Pizza Hut chain boasts a commitment to 'responsibly manage our resources to help our people, guests and planet'. Director of Supply Chain and IT for Pizza Hut Restaurants in the UK, Steve Packer, saw the integration of ARCUS® as the perfect way to ensure the chain adheres to those commitments.

He said: "Our focus is on quality and on delivering consistently high standards. We also take an ethical approach to modern slavery and the severity of allergen risks. Combine those, with our stance on animal welfare, and it means there is a high level of



supplier management administration to undertake.

"It is therefore crucial for us to get things right, especially in our supply chain. The ARCUS® platform is the solution for us."

The combination of ARCUS® modules being used by Pizza Hut UK Restaurants includes: Supplier Information Management (SIM), Supplier Contract Management (SCM), online auctions (eAUC) and online requests for information (eRFx).

Co-founder and managing director at Trade Interchange, Mike Edmunds, said: "The requirements of Pizza Hut Restaurants are very specific, therefore we configured its SIM module to meet its exact business needs.

"Thanks to SIM, Pizza Hut's business departments have standardised the process when it comes to supplier management and this has therefore created more visibility and transparency in the supply chain."

More information is available at [www.tradeinterchange.com](http://www.tradeinterchange.com)

## INTUITIVE COACHING CHANGING THE WAY WOMEN RUN THEIR LIVES

### Upturn in Modern Women Finding Their Spirit Answers To Life



Annette Greenwood

In 2005 a new saying hit the UK media "Don't Get a life, Get a Life Coach". Back then 100,000 Brits were reported to have a life coach and since the industry has only boomed further. In fact if you Google Life Coaching UK today there are 228,000,000 results thrown up!

But the life coach trend is now getting left behind by a raft of modern women who have found a new way to boost their lives, and for many that includes their businesses, in a bit more of an unconventional way.... Intuitive Coaching.

Intuitive Coach, Annette Greenwood has had a varied life and more experiences than one woman should ever go through including violence, depression and financial hardship, all of which made her seek out her

more spiritual side. She is now turning it all to her advantage, as many of her recent clients are starting to follow this new trend, which Annette professes to have been delivering for many, many years.

Intuitive coaching follows many of the perimeters of life and business coaching, following principles such as goal setting, examining habits, creating plans to action and working on issues or stumbling blocks.

However, Annette's coaching goes to the next level and includes a more spiritual approach helping women to tap into their own divine power and sense of being. This is then used to improve health, wellbeing, business, family, and overall happiness.

A number of female celebrities have been reported as being a fan of this form of coaching including Ophra Winfrey and Madonna.

As well as analysing behavior and looking for business solutions, this deeper spiritual involvement helps individuals find who they are as a person and to discover a true purpose in their own life and their actions within that life. This in turn assists with any decision making process, and has very positive outcomes.

Annette and other intuitive coaches across the UK (for which there are over 3 million Google hits already!) use different forms of intuition when coaching; but Annette can use several including, connection to the person, a sense of feeling, gut, holding an object (psychometry) and or using tarot.

Annette said: "Many people think finding our sixth sense is hocus pocus, but we all have a deeper level

than most coaching reaches. This heightened sense of awareness is important to acknowledge, and that tapping into our intuition or gut feel has huge benefits really assisting with important decision making giving that extra edge just when we need it. I love empowering women to listen and make choices that serve them based on this particular strategy.

"If you combine traditional coaching alongside being at one with the wider universe, it can put a completely different perspective on things and the person in a much more positive place. There has been several occasions when I have had a sense of knowing about a person, the information I share is relevant and accurate to them. I like to give options so if someone prefers a more traditional life coaching session then we do that instead."

Annette Greenwood has over 20 year's experience in helping women bounce back from life's personal and professional challenges, heartaches and setbacks. Having overcome personal trauma (including depression and domestic violence) herself, Annette is now a highly skilled, qualified coach, and founder of the Catalyst project of a charity, working specifically with women.

She works with and advises women from all walks of life, from female prisoners to CEO's. She understands 'difficult times' and the need for tools to bounce back whether that's in business, personal, or emotional, possibly caused by an affair or a relationship problem. No stranger to the menopause Annette believes and advocates a positive attitude and mindset which has immense benefits on all levels.

More information is at [www.annettegreenwood.com](http://www.annettegreenwood.com)



## MAKE A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION TO JOIN THE GIVING NETWORK

It's January and if you haven't yet made your New Year's resolution how about joining The Giving Network from the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland and give back to important local causes?

The aim of The Giving Network is to bring together the next generation of North East philanthropists. On our own it's difficult to make a difference; when we work together, the possibilities are endless.

The Giving Network was set up by the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland to mark its 30th Anniversary. The aim is to get 30 people who are passionate about their local community to commit just £30 per month. Gifts are matched £1-for-£1 in the first year, and after 12 months, members can give away their portion of the fund to important community causes at a special giving event.

Supported by Ward Hadaway Law Firm which is also celebrating its 30th Birthday, the network recently held its first get together at Alphabetti Theatre in Newcastle. Further events are planned for 2019 and beyond.

In the first year The Giving Network's collective mission is set on tackling

poverty, supporting mental well-being and promoting diversity across Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.

One of the first to sign up was Gary Fawcett, divisional director at Brewin Dolphin Investment Management & Financial Planning. For Gary it was the local element that was important, as well as the fact that collectively the group can make a real difference. He noted that the monthly commitment is a manageable but meaningful amount for a young professional like him with a young family. Together with the other members it adds up to a big sum over a year.

Charlotte Thornton of Hive HR echoed this in a recent blog post on LinkedIn. She reflected that The Giving Network gave her a clear focus for her commitment when she turned 30, to give £30 a month to charity. She feels her donation is in safe hands and the knowledge of The Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland means the money will go where it will have the most impact. She was surprised that she knew a lot about global issues but relatively little about the issues people are facing in the region. The Giving Network connects her to the people most in need in the local community.





Feeling inspired? Join The Giving Network now and get 2019 off to a great start by making a real difference in the local community. To find out more about the Giving Network visit [www.communityfoundation.org.uk](http://www.communityfoundation.org.uk)



## 2019 NE1 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Christmas decorations were not even packed away before NE1 Ltd turned its attention to preparations for next Christmas and started mapping out a calendar of events for Newcastle up to and including December 2019.

2018 saw the busiest summer and Christmas period in NE1’s history with the most projects ever delivered by the Business Improvement District Company, a programme that set the bar high and raised expectations for what NE1 will do next.

Curating events and activities in the city formed a key part of NE1’s business plan, which secured a successful revote for the BID company giving NE1 another five years to deliver for Newcastle city centre. What was clear from NE1’s re-vote consultations with businesses and the public was just how popular NE1’s events and activities are and how successful they have been for the local economy over the past 10 years.

NE1’s events have always been ambitious, engaging and focussed on delivering measurable business benefits for NE1’s members. Making sure they continue to deliver commercially for the city is crucial and is the starting point for considering whether events remain in the programme for 2019 and beyond.

With this as the starting point, the programme continues to grow and evolve, reflecting changing consumer expectations and the need to keep Newcastle vibrant, different and interesting.

These events are a highly visible and essential way of raising Newcastle’s profile, changing perceptions and making it stand out from its competitors. Having events and activities in the city centre also provides compelling reasons for people to visit, to come back frequently, to stay longer and spend

more while they are here.

The team at NE1 are now gearing up to deliver the new, 2019 events calendar, which is already packed with the return of many of NE1’s annual favourites and with some new additions. One of the priorities for NE1 has been to continue to attract world class, major events to Newcastle, specifically those that deliver significant economic impact for the city including major sporting events and concerts at St James’ Park.

The first event in the 2019 calendar will be the return of NE1’s ever popular, and highly successful, Newcastle Restaurant Week. The event, which is held twice a year adds an estimated £1.1 million to the local economy each year, as well as providing added vibrancy to the city’s restaurant scene at traditionally quiet times of the year. The dates for January’s event have been set with restaurants gearing up for the bookings onslaught.

In February, NE1 is supporting the Chinese community to help expand the Chinese New Year celebrations, and in May 2019 will team up with Newcastle City Council and with NGI to deliver the Heineken and Challenge Cup fan zone when the final weekend of the rugby world cup is staged at St James’ Park on 10th and 11th May 2019.

St James’ Park has a proven track record of hosting major national and international sporting fixtures and NE1 says it is proud to be involved in staging what rugby aficionados declare will be the centrepiece of Europe’s festival of world-class club rugby.

NE1 has structured its events delivery on a two-phased plan, the summer season running from May to September and winter from Mid-November to early January.

From July to September, NE1 ups the ante with its activity programme with major events scheduled to bring the city to life. In July, NE1 will again sponsor Northern Pride, the biggest free LGBT festival in the country and Screen on the Green will return for free, open air movies in the heart of the city – both a sure sign that summer is on its way.

2018’s summer takeovers on both Blakett Street and Northumberland Street were well received and exciting plans are already afoot for this year. The pinnacle of NE1’s summer celebrations will be the Newcastle Motor Show weekend, the largest free, open-air motor show in the North. The event, which grows in stature and popularity year on year will have a number of new elements this year, involving more of the city and attracting what are expected to be record numbers of visitors.

August 2019 will see NE1 continue its support for Newcastle Mela which last year were extended into the city centre with an inaugural parade that kick-started the celebrations.

After summer, the focus will shift to Christmas with NE1 looking to seize the commercial opportunity that the festive season provides and encourage people to think Newcastle when they think Christmas. Newcastle’s Christmas offer has come on leaps and bounds in the past few years and 2019 promises to be even better.

For details of all that will be happening in the city over the next 12 months and beyond visit [www.getintonewcastle.co.uk](http://www.getintonewcastle.co.uk)

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## ALEX BRADLEY

Director,  
Restaurant Design Associates (RDA).

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I never really gave career ambitions much thought throughout school. It was not until I landed a part time job when I was 16 at The George Washington Hotel washing pans, polishing cutlery, waiting in the restaurant and preparing room service that I developed a passion for the hospitality and catering industry. Since then, I have had various roles within the industry including at a Michelin star restaurant and before joining Restaurant Design Associates, as part of the management team at Blackfriars Restaurant in Newcastle.

### Tell us about the inception of the company?

The company was founded in 2007 by my step-father and mother, Roy and Judith Addyman. They both had experience from another construction firm specialising in interior fit outs and were aware of the huge potential market within the hospitality industry. The business started off in the Quadrus Centre in Boldon with a team of five. Through expansion, my two brothers Nick and Neil both joined the business as a designer and project manager respectively, along with a couple of other specialists. I joined around a year later to assist in the purchasing and commercial department with my 'hands on' experience of working in catering. Within a few years, we had outgrown our office space and moved to a much larger premises on Monkton Business Park in Hebburn, allowing us to continue expanding our team, developing our offer and increasing our client base. Now, with a team of 26, we still have a strong family core and ethos in everything that we do.

### What services do you provide?

Specialising in new-build or refurbishment projects throughout the hospitality and retail sectors, we pride ourselves on providing a full 'turnkey' service, from consultancy and design, through supply and delivery, to project management, installation, handover and aftercare. From a client's perspective, it is basically the full service from an initial idea to being ready to open, trade and beyond.

### What's your proudest business achievement?

There have been a number of successes along the way but most recently, we won Distributor of the Year – North of England at the Catering Insight Awards 2018. It's a great award to win, as it is voted for by the suppliers within the catering industry. As one of my main responsibilities at RDA is the supply chain management, I like to think this means we are doing something right in this area of the business and have been recognised for it.



Alex Bradley

### What challenges have you encountered?

We work with everyone from independent restaurateurs and small business owners through to large multi-nationals with complex structures, so understanding our client's needs and how they operate is key. Getting the right balance between our family friendly, flexible, small business ethos whilst also presenting a professional business to business organisation can sometimes be a challenge, particularly with our larger clients who operate under a more corporate culture.

### How has the industry changed?

Over the last 10 years, there have been some great technological advances in the catering industry, many of which we can design into our projects when the budget allows us to. Examples include, energy saving devices, such as heat reclaim technology from catering equipment and refrigeration plants. This could be used to heat incoming water for the kitchen, or multifunctional catering equipment, meaning a full menu can be created on one piece of catering equipment. This requires less space in the kitchen and reduces labour costs.

Clients expectations have also increased. We constantly strive to deliver the best service in our industry in terms of what we can achieve in our

design, commercial and operations departments and going the extra mile is becoming more important than ever, in order to maintain repeat business in a very competitive market place.

### Is there a mantra you always aspire to do business by?

We ultimately focus on quality in everything we do, from making a cup of coffee for guests in our office to delivering large projects on time and on budget. The entire team understands the importance of this and this is what helps us retain and win business.

### How do you like to unwind?

Spare time outside of work is usually spent with my family. My wife and I have recently had our first child. She smiles, laughs and is currently figuring out how to make different noises whilst waving her arms in the air. Naturally, we think these are clear signs that she is going to be a genius. She never fails to put a smile on my face after a long day though. I am also partial to a game of football or poker with friends and one of my favourite places to visit, when time allows, is By The River Brew Co. on the Gateshead Quayside. Having completed a few shipping container conversion projects this year, I can almost get away with calling it 'market research'.

For further information about RDA, visit [www.rdalimited.co.uk](http://www.rdalimited.co.uk)



RDA Directors being presented with the award. L – R – Catering Insight Editor Clare Nicholls, Blue Seal National Accounts Manager, David Chesshire, RDA Directors, Alex Bradley, Nick Bradley and Neil Addyman, and Blue Seal Branch Manager, Glenn Danks.

**RDA**  
Restaurant Design Associates

## RDA WIN DISTRIBUTOR OF THE YEAR – NORTH OF ENGLAND AT THE CATERING INSIGHT AWARDS 2018

It's celebrations for RDA after being crowned the winner of Distributor of the Year – North of England in the Catering Insight Awards.

Voted for by the Catering Equipment industry, the company beat off stiff national competition to scoop the prestigious award. RDA were also finalists in the Digital Initiative of the Year category.

The award follows a successful 2018 for the company which has seen it open new offices in London due to client demand as well as becoming one of the first in the entire design

and construction industry to be accredited with the new ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety Standard – three years ahead of the migration deadline.

The judges commended RDA saying "In a turbulent market, the firm has adapted to reduced budgets whilst still providing innovative solutions such as offering shipping container kiosks as an alternative to a full site installation.

Opening a London office to cater for increasing client demand, the distributor has invested in staff, ensuring it has specialists in all areas."

Alex Bradley, Director at RDA said: "We are absolutely delighted to have won this award. To be recognised on a national platform amongst our peers makes us extremely proud and is a true testament to the hard work and dedication of everyone at RDA."

For further information about RDA, visit [www.rdalimited.co.uk](http://www.rdalimited.co.uk) or tel: 0844 873 4993

## AVOIDING INSANITY

It's that time of year again, when everyone re-writes their New Year's Resolutions, and they return to work with a renewed focus on the year ahead.

If like most ambitious business owners your focus is on growth, have you formulated a plan on how to achieve that growth in 2019? Will you increase your market share, your Average Order Value, or entice your customers to purchase more frequently? Ultimately every sales plan boils down to one or more of these three strategies. However, the experts are warning that 2019 is expected to be a tough year for growth.

Now, I'm no economist but the signs are all there. Oil prices have been steadily creeping upwards since the middle of 2016 (and were at their highest just before the last crash), inflation is rising, house prices are stalling (except in the capital), the US economy is overcooking it's bacon, cheap Chinese imports continue to undermine many markets, the high street is in decline as we continue to change our shopping habits, the Italian banks are overinvested in Turkey (potentially threatening the financial stability of the EU) and Interserve are asking their creditors for a rescue deal – and that's before we even discuss Brexit. (Note: at the time of writing May has just delayed the commons vote – so who knows what the outcome will be by the time you are reading this!)

My apologies if you were expecting one of my usual positive and upbeat columns to kick-off the new year, when instead I'm as cheery as the grim reaper, but the fact is, every economy always operates in cycles and we've been riding an economic growth curve for eight years now, so it's prudent to expect a period of contraction within the next eighteen months.

Those of us old enough to remember the humdinger of a recession in 2008 (which really hit the North East service sector particularly hard), or even the recession before that in the early 1990s, will likely have the scars and the war stories to tell – I know I have, but what I also have is some insight into how to avoid going insane should the same happen in the next twelve months.



Nicola Cook. CEO of Company Shortcuts.

### 1. Know your numbers.

Now is the time to have clear visibility on cash and cashflow, backed up by accurate projections and forecasts. In the last recession only one metric changed in my business, but it cost me dearly. All our conversion rates and order values were the same, but our lead times doubled, and this one change put an enormous pressure on cashflow.

Note: You need to be positively cashflowed, longer than the average lead time in your pipeline. If your average lead time is six or even twelve months, then you need to have sufficient cash available to trade for at least that length of time, to ride out any dips in your incoming new business.

### 2. Ensure you have enough oxygen to ride out any downturn

Oxygen in business = cash. Stress test your business. Raise working capital now if your cashflow demands. It's always easier to get your hands on cash when you don't actually need it. Run a million different 'what if' scenarios, and plan for each potential outcome. How fast could you open a new income stream, break into a new market if needed? (Right now I have a post-Brexit apocalypse business plan tucked away in my

desk drawer. I hope I don't need it, but I know exactly what I will do if we need to adjust our long-term game plan).

### 3. Sweat your assets

Look to make improvements in productivity now. How can you gain more with the same people, the same technology and the same processes? Your people need to know NOW, the core principles of selling – especially if you've become reliant on organic inbound leads. Most businesses have no clue how to switch from reactive order taking to proactively selling and the amount of time it takes to refine your Sales Engine.

### 4. Cut once, cut deep...

...like a surgeon. If the worst were to happen don't dither. Confront the brutal truths and act swiftly.

Don't panic though. Even if your sector or market does diminish, it always cleans out the dross in your competition, (you know the cowboys who offer poor products or services at minimal) meaning that when the market grows once again, you will be better placed to expand your market share and achieve your long-term growth ambition.

To watch a video on how to improve the sales focus of your business visit [www.companyshortcuts.com](http://www.companyshortcuts.com)

# WHAT ARE YOUR CX RESOLUTIONS?



Kate and Kennedy

Have you made your customer experience resolutions yet? If not, why not? If you only do one thing in your business in 2019, make sure it revolves around the experiences you create for your customers.

Hopefully during 2018 you have realised and that everyone within your organisation accepts, that the experiences you create for your customers, needs to take precedence over everything else? Hoping this is the case, 2019 has to be the year of taking action. You need to start delivering great customer experiences or else be prepared to lose out to competitors.

Our customers' expectations continually change and increase therefore we need to ensure that 2019 is the year of the customer. Your business needs to stay relevant, maintain a competitive edge and therefore needs to proactively invest in understanding the needs and evolving demands of your customers.

So, with the turn of the year, just like we do in many other walks of life, it's time to start taking some Customer Experience Resolutions. Resolutions you need to stick to! With this in mind, we've come up with a few to help you out. However, these need to be more than resolutions, look at them as action steps that will bring you happy and loyal customers at the end of the day!

- > Expectations work both ways, so always set the right ones with your customers. (Note the word with and not for).

- > Make Omni channel a way of life. Seamless interconnected experiences will create a lot of buzz.
- > Learn from those that know the most. Never miss out on an opportunity to collect customer feedback, every opinion matters.
- > Make customer experience your DNA, it takes collaborative working and a company wide approach - it's not a department.
- > Allocate a permanent seat for your customer at the decision-making table "Bring your customer into the board room."
- > Build a company strategy and culture that places the customer above everything else.
- > Feedback and data is great, but do something with it that helps build better experiences for your customers.
- > Close down the sales prevention department.

Like most resolutions, what's new is less about shiny objects and more about the mastery of down-to-earth principles. It's all about keeping your eye on the prize with a sensible plan. In this instance the prize is your customer, the prize of retaining them, doing more with them, or indeed attracting new ones.

Ultimately, success in turning a new leaf depends on getting your hooks into manageable steps that resolve past weaknesses to propel your growth.

These resolutions not only drive growth, but also drive customer experience management into your company's DNA. And that's a gift that keeps on giving.

If 2019 is to be a great year, it MUST be the year of your customer!

Would you like to know more about how to create and embed Customer Resolutions that will propel your business growth, delight your customers, engage your employees, excite investors and stakeholders? Overall, improve operational effectiveness, ensure less churn and higher engagement and ultimately positively impact the bottom line? Shift your organisation from what can sometimes be dysfunctional treadmills between you and your customers to mutual value creation? If that answer is yes, we would love to show you how. Please contact us to learn more about our programs that will ensure 2019 is not only the year for your customer, but the year for you too.

Happy New Year everyone and cheers to a very exciting 2019!

**IN 2018 WE HELPED OUR CUSTOMERS  
INCREASE THEIR PROFITS BY BETWEEN  
24% AND 95%**

**WANT TO DO THE SAME?**

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OUR CX EXPERTS CAN HELP YOU IN 2019**



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# HOW GETTING ORGANISATIONAL VALUES RIGHT CAN DRIVE EXTERNAL SUCCESS



It doesn't matter how big your company is, being clear about your values - and the behaviours needed to express them - is of key importance. Gradvert leadership and management coach Alan Shaw shares his experience and gives some top tips for success.

If there's one thing Gradvert leadership and management coach Alan Shaw is passionate about, it's helping businesses champion the values they believe in.

But central to this are the behaviours that underpin these values - the visible expressions of the principles that are important to the way we do things.

This is a view shared by Gradvert MD Michaela Reaney, who recently asked Alan, in conjunction with his colleagues, to develop the Values and Behaviour Framework that is now at the very heart of the Gradvert culture and character.

"Values are not about the people who run a business, they are the fabric of every person involved in Gradvert. A collective with a shared purpose. Our values are at the heart of our culture and will be used to hire new people, attract new clients and partners. They will be used to measure and change behaviour for the success of Gradvert. It is not the words that will make the difference, but the conversation and how we integrate our values into every day interactions," said Michaela.

Gradvert's values and behaviours' journey began on a team away day where employees at the Newcastle-based company, which specialises in helping businesses develop talent and improve performance, worked together to define their values.

"We talked about what the values really mean to the way we do things," said Alan. "We addressed the fact that they are the guiding principles - they are the mantra of everything we do.

"We went through a whole series of challenging statements as a team and we came up with what we believe reflected who we are as a business and who we are as a team."

This process allowed Gradvert to collectively decide on its four key values – Do the Right Thing, One Team, Curiosity, and A Love of Learning.

Each of these values has specific behaviours - tangible actions that help Gradvert understand what to expect of each other, how to put values consistently into action, and measure how well they are living these values. Alan said: "Setting values can be the easy part but it's meaningless unless they are supported by appropriate behaviours, and people who are willing to have mature, honest conversations with each other to ensure that the behaviours are embedded.

"It can be quite a challenge to have that accountability and have those conversations but it's about rising above that and thinking about our One Team approach."

The next challenge came as the team began to incorporate the new values and behaviours into their everyday routines.

"There was a real positive feeling when we were developing our values and behaviours but once you start living and breathing it, you must make sure there isn't a difference between how you feel and how you act as inevitably actions speak louder than words," said Alan.

To keep values at the forefront of everything the company does, Gradvert asks all of its employees, including its top leadership team, to make a personal commitment pledging to live these principles on a daily basis.

The pledges, displayed in the Gradvert's Hault's Yard headquarters, serve as a visible reminder and a benchmark for ongoing review and recognition of great things happening.

So with the values and behaviours now successfully embedded in the Gradvert way of life, what advice would Alan have for others?

"Firstly, values are not just about the people who run a business," said Alan. "The whole process must be about people contributing to them, believing in them, and feeling part of something.

"Also the people at the top have to genuinely and effectively role model living the values and behaviours and if you do that then people will buy into it."

Finally, Alan recommends Gradvert's unique approach of having employees set out their commitment in writing.

"Ask your team to make a pledge making their personal commitment to the values and behaviours," he advised. "It creates ownership and it's something you can all reflect on and use to evaluate how well you are doing."

Find out more about Gradvert at [www.gradvert.com](http://www.gradvert.com)

# RECRUITING THE '2019' WAY

By David Taylor, Associate Director, Howie White



David Taylor

Looking into the new year brings with it both new challenges and new opportunities and the recruitment market is no different. With more than 40 years of experience between us at Howie White, we would like to think we know a thing or two that may help you to tread the minefield that is recruiting new team members.

So, you have a position to fill? Any business wants to attract and then employ the cream of the crop for their available roles, but how do you attract those premium candidates, the ones who will show passion and drive not just in their interview, but in their role for years to come? At Howie White, we believe a pro-active rather than passive approach tends to land the best quality of candidates. With a plethora of job sites on the internet, it can be tricky to decide the best platform for your advert. We prefer to use our extensive network, spanning all industries, and having discussed what skills or experience are a 'must have' and which are a 'would like', to find those stand out candidates.

Once a shortlist has been decided, with unemployment at an all time low, it is imperative in this climate to get things moving. A lot of employers lose candidates during a lengthy recruitment process. We suggest setting out the full process, along with rough timescales at the

first opportunity. Adding extra stages, and extra time, can lead to the best candidates being offered something better elsewhere. It is also key in an initial interview to really sell your business to the candidate. As important as the salary package is to the candidate, so too is the culture and reputation of the business. A candidate should have a clear idea of the role and the business' activities prior to the interview based on the job spec and their own research however, it is in the interview that they will decide whether they can see themselves working there.

It cannot be denied that at present, there is a definite candidate driven market, candidates are in the driving seat and looking to command more than just a better salary. This means employers need to be looking at what else they can offer, not just the figure on the payslip. The good news is that this doesn't have to be a costly venture. In an evolving working world, you don't have to go 'full google' and install a slide, but there is a

lot to be said for, and a lot of value placed on - flexible working hours, company discounts or even Christmas parties for employees' children.

Once an offer has been made and the benefits package is explained, employee retention is key, most employees look to leave when growth of their role within a business appears stunted. Although there are many who decide they want out when they don't feel that they have a strong working relationship with the management team within the business. Taking both of these into consideration, as an employer; regular reviews, with targets and personal development plans with clear outcomes and benefits will go a long way. As will taking a genuine interest in the people you work with and who work for you.

If we can give two pieces of advice, it is to; remember why you hired this person, and that ultimately, everybody wants to feel valued and responsible within the role they play in a business.



Bryony Gibson

## START A NEW JOB AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, offers advice on how a business and a new employee can get off to the best possible start.

Given how difficult the recruitment process can be for both parties, it's a shame when things fall apart at the final hurdle because someone struggles to settle in to a new job.

The New Year always brings a new influx of talent to the market, but hiring and retaining staff is still a major challenge, so I thought I'd share some tips on how people can find their feet faster, and how companies can improve their onboarding plans.

### NEW STARTERS

A new job can be exciting, scary and confusing all at the same time. You're going to meet new people, learn new things, widen your network and, often, earn more money. On the flip side, it's up to you to settle in to your new home and prove how good you are all over again.

The first few days are crucial to your success. It's important to remember that being out of your comfort zone is ok. Everything may feel different but don't put too much pressure on yourself; new things will soon become the norm.

Communication is the key, especially when you have a tough day. If things don't go right, don't be too quick to decide you've made a mistake. Take time to remember why you wanted to move in the first place, as the reasons will still hold true.

You can't succeed in a job unless you know what

success looks like, so make a point of finding out exactly what your manager - and the wider business - expect of you.

Set your own goals if required and be prepared to offer support to your new colleagues whenever the opportunity arises. This will help you to integrate and also give you a chance to show people what you can do.

If you spend enough time learning, building relationships and thinking about how you can drive value in your new role, you'll be able to step up to any challenge and fit in with your new team from the start.

### THE EMPLOYER

Whatever you do, don't wait until a new employee joins your team before starting to make them feel at home. Help with their transition by keeping in touch throughout their notice period, invite them to social events and make sure they know how much you are looking forward to them joining you.

It can be lonely when you've handed in your resignation, especially if you're moving to a competitor, so keep in constant contact from the moment you offer the job.

Day one is vital to building a strong, long-term relationship, so you need to be prepared and have a welcome plan in place.

Get the basics ready a week before their start date: a clean desk, computer, system logins, email, HR and payroll forms etc,

Invite them to start a little later than usual on their first day. That way you can remind everyone they're coming and get your urgent work out of the way so you can dedicate time to support them.

Introduce them to everyone you can and assign a 'buddy' who can help them through the initial weeks. Try to make sure they don't eat lunch alone!

When you start a new job, you're never as busy as you're used to being, so make sure you have plenty of things they can do from the off. No one wants to appear lazy, so pick out projects they can tackle independently and with colleagues.

At meetings, ask for their input and ideas to help them to feel part of the team and ease in to the company culture.

As the weeks turn to months, make sure you continue to meet regularly. Check they're happy but also get to know them as an individual. The more you know about their interests and motivations, the better your relationship will be.

It's often the little things that make the biggest difference, so make sure you let them know you care.

Contact Bryony for career advice and for help finding the right tax & accountancy role or recruits on (0191) 375 9983. Alternatively, visit [www.bryonygibson.com](http://www.bryonygibson.com), connect on LinkedIn or follow @bryonygibson.

If you work in tax & accountancy and are looking for a new challenge, or need someone to help drive the business forward, get in touch: [bryony@bryonygibson.com](mailto:bryony@bryonygibson.com) | (0191) 375 9983.



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# AKZONOBEL WELCOMES INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL CHILDREN TO ASHINGTON FACTORY

As part of an ERASMUS+ project to design a STEM-inspired 'playground for the future', a group of school children from across Europe have visited AkzoNobel's state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Ashington.

The year six pupils, who hailed from Germany, Italy, Poland and Ashington's own Bothal Primary School enjoyed a full day at the plant where they were treated to site tours, an interactive colour workshop, a virtual reality experience as well as a surprise visit from AkzoNobel's iconic Dulux dog.

"The ERASMUS+ scheme is a European funded programme designed to enable schools from other countries to work together collaboratively on a project," explained Leanne Johnson, assistant head of school at the Ashington Learning Partnership Trust.

"Pupils from Bothal have already visited the partner schools in Poland and Germany so it was really exciting for us to welcome their students here to Ashington.

"We thought about the different activities that we could plan around the theme of 'design' and given that the world's most advanced paint factory is right on our doorstep, we thought it would be a shame not to include AkzoNobel in the itinerary.

"The day we spent on site with the team from



Jill Johnston, site support coordinator at AkzoNobel Ashington with some of the school children and the Dulux dog.

AkzoNobel was a huge success. Despite the language barriers, all of the children had a fantastic time. The appearance of the Dulux dog was a lovely added surprise as well!"

"We have a fantastic working relationship with the ALP Trust so we were delighted to be approached about the ERASMUS+ project at Bothal," said Jill

Johnston, site support coordinator at AkzoNobel Ashington.

"The children thoroughly enjoyed the day they spent with us on the site. They were really engaged and loved getting hands-on with the painting exercises. We hope that the visit will help to inspire the children with ideas for their playground as the project progresses."

For more information about AkzoNobel, visit [www.akzonobel.com](http://www.akzonobel.com).

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## Booking now for Monday 28th January

**Speaker - Sir Peter Vardy DL** - The Vardy Foundation

**Venue** - Jesmond Dene House, Newcastle upon Tyne

**Date** - Monday 28th January 2019, 12 noon

**Price** - £50pp to include a two-course lunch and coffee

**We are extremely honoured to have Sir Peter Vardy as our speaker for our January lunch event.**

With a focus on his work with the Vardy Foundation, Gary Lumby will interview Sir Peter and there will be an opportunity for questions from the floor. This is one not to miss.



THE VARDY FOUNDATION



## Booking now for Monday 4th February

**Speaker - Andy Preston**, Entrepreneur & Philanthropist

**Venue** - Wynyard Hall, Stockton-on-Tees

**Date** - Monday 4th February, 12 noon

**Price** - £50pp to include a two-course lunch and coffee

**Founder of the charity CEO Sleepout and Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation.**

Andy Preston runs some of the most forward thinking charities in the UK and supports a variety of business. His website features inspiring personal blog posts, we know this will be an uplifting presentation.

Limited places available - contact Linda Hitman to reserve your space, [Linda@exclusivebusiness.net](mailto:Linda@exclusivebusiness.net)

**Diary Dates:** Monday 25th February - Micheal Owen, Always Wear Red - Jesmond Dene House  
Monday 4th March - Professor Dr Jane Turner OBE DL - Teesside University



**RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PEOPLE**

The Exclusive Business and Northern Insight lunch events wrapped up for 2018 with two inspiring and entertaining speakers.

At Jesmond Dene House in late November, Jon Chadwick of Durham Distillery took us through his journey from the senior echelons of the NHS advising on the dangers of drink to setting up Durham Gin. Jon was an engaging and entertaining speaker who made massive career changes seem easy.

In December guests at Wynyard Hall were entertained by Tony Robinson OBE of #/BizMatters who delivered a lively presentation.

January lunches begin with Sir Peter Vardy in Newcastle and Alistair Waite at Wynyard Hall full details at [exclusivebusiness.net](http://exclusivebusiness.net)





Ammar Mirza CBE

## THE POWER OF PEOPLE -HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Is it me, or is time going faster? Odd thought, but I remember being sat in school and watching the clock tick so slowly. Roll forward a few decades and time seems to be whizzing past me with 2018 over, in what seems like a blink.

What an interesting year 2018 has been with lots of ups and one or two downs to contend with, which in fact make the ups or the highs even better. The major events were primarily family orientated with the birth of my granddaughter Aiyla followed, not so long after, with my own daughter Zara. Interesting situation, especially as I certainly don't feel old enough to be a grandfather! But very happy with the new bundles of joy, bringing lots of sleepless nights, poo filled nappies and sick on your suit as you are about to set off for work, but all with unconditional love.

Looking back I achieved 80% of my ambitions for this year, and the 20% I didn't, I know exactly why. I wasn't disciplined enough! And this is one of the biggest lessons learnt this year, which has led me to extend a methodology I came up with a few years back – The Power of 3 – to now incorporate

ABCD as an approach that is transformative both personally and professionally.

As it is the New Year I would like to focus on the D aspect of this approach and help explain why we fail in so many of our endeavours.

The first D is Desire – having a goal, ambition or even New Year's resolution.

The second D is Direction – taking your objective and creating a plan that is SMART (specific, measured, achievable, realistic and time based.)

The third D is Discipline – this is where you constantly and consistently focus on your plan until you achieve your desired outcome, not letting anything get in your way. This is where the vast majority of people, including myself at times, fail.

So as you think about your New Year's resolutions where you overnight are going to become the healthiest, fittest, family orientated person alive

and then three weeks down the line you feel like giving up. Stop to consider all of those people who persevered through thick and thin. Progress and results don't come overnight, so focus on your plan, write down and share your plan with those close to you. You are twice as likely to achieve your goal if you share it and move forward on your ambitions every day.

My ambition is to continue making the North East a better place for everyone that lives here. As 2018 came to an end it was fantastic to reflect on all of the incredible initiatives that we managed to deliver through the Primary2Prosperity Campaign, and how when you focus on progressive aspects of life, encourage those around you, and share ambitious goals the power of people shines through.

May your 2019 be blessed with hope, happiness and harmony.

Love and Peace.

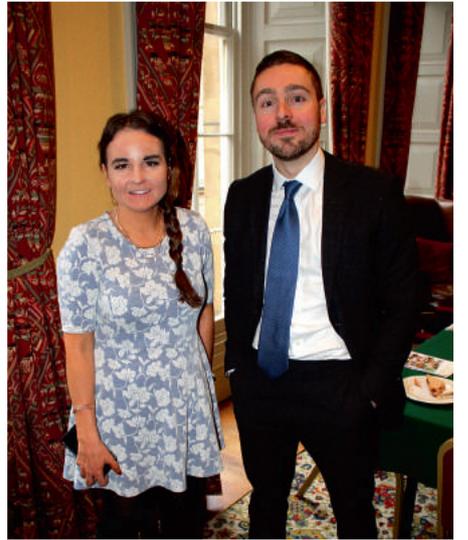
**Ammar Mirza CBE is the founder and chairman of Asian Business Connexions, Board member of North East LEP and holds various other positions across the private, public and third sectors.**



**AFTERNOON TEA  
WITH PIE**

The Primary Inspiration through Enterprise Charity hosted afternoon tea at the Northern Counties Club. The event brought together key stakeholders to discuss how they can collaborate in helping future generations realise their ambitions and raise their aspirations. The PIE Charity brings education to life through STEM and Enterprise Challenges within Schools delivered by local businesses.

For further info visit [www.pieproject.org](http://www.pieproject.org)



# Your SME Centre of Excellence helping businesses...

SME CofE aims to be the leading Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) Support Hub. A truly collaborative and ethical approach that will provide a one stop High quality centre of excellence for All support needs, helping SMEs to start, survive and thrive.

## Our Services

We offer a full in-house business support service. Whether you need support on starting a business; technical accountancy, tax or legal advice; require funding to grow your business; want a registered, virtual or physical office, we can help. From our dedicated SME Centre of Excellence right here in Ponteland we have the essential support.

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**ABCURRY CLUB EVENT**

The hugely popular sell-out ABCurry Club was hosted at Virgin Money in Gosforth.

The theme of the event was Diversity and guests heard from Tim Arthur the Creative Director of Virgin on the importance and impact of a diverse workforce, and how Virgin Money is creating a culture that focuses on value add.

Ammar Mirza CBE shared insights of the incredible achievements of ABC and details of the 10th Anniversary celebrations in 2019.

To find out more email [info@abconnexions.org](mailto:info@abconnexions.org)



## EXCHANGE PROGRAMME BOOSTS WEAR SIDE'S ITALIAN RESTAURANT SCENE



(L-R) Gianni Lombino, Louise Hardy & Daniel Vecsey

An Italian entrepreneur has arrived in Sunderland as part of a cross-border exchange programme to learn about brewing and launch a new beer in the city.

Gianni Lombino is working with Sunderland-based organisations, Darwin – a micro-brewery, and Brewlab – a training and scientific analysis provider for the international brewing industry. He has been

working with the organisations for three months to broaden his knowledge of brewing in the hope of one day opening his own brewpub in his homeland of Sicily.

He embarked upon his entrepreneurial journey by taking part in the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs Programme, which offers those in the early stages of starting a business the chance to spend one to six months working in a European business.

The North East Business and Innovation Centre (BIC) in Sunderland is a UK contact for anyone wishing to take part in the programme and the BIC matched Gianni with Darwin and Brewlab.

The programme has provided a way for Gianni to broaden his horizons and develop the beer with Brewlab's support, as well as learn new skills, whilst it has given Brewlab the opportunity to showcase their ability to fast-track a successful beer to market.

Darwin has already received orders for the beer from some popular Italian restaurants on Wearside after impressing the restaurant owners at a blind taste-testing experience last month.



(L-R) Chris Gent, Kirsty Gent, Donna Bainbridge, Chris Hackett & Chris Reed

## EXPANSION IS AS EASY AS 1-2-3 FOR TEACHER RECRUITERS

An education recruitment company has expanded after surpassing their growth target.

123 Teachers, based at Business Central in Darlington, has hired two new recruitment consultants, taking their total members of staff to five.

Established in 2016, the firm specialise in supplying teaching staff to secondary, primary and special educational needs (SEN) schools throughout the North East and North Yorkshire.

123 Teachers' owner, Chris Gent, said: "We've exceeded our expectations in terms of growth. We were looking at achieving a further 25 per cent of growth from last year and we're delighted to have exceeded that target so far.

"Having already achieved our goals we have been

able to bring in Chris Hackett, who will recruit for primary schools, and Chris Reed, who will recruit for SEN schools."

Kirsty Gent, who co-owns the business, said "This means we now have three dedicated teams in the company with a member of staff specialising in each department of secondary, primary and SEN recruitment and I'm hoping our two new members will grow with the company – they're potentially future managers who could help us grow further."

It's been a rapid rise for 123 Teachers over the last two years, having recently upgraded to a larger office within Business Central after being based in one of the centre's smaller offices and before that, Business Central's co-working lounge.

## NORTHERN MAN LAUNCHES VOICE-OVER BUSINESS

An ex-BBC radio producer has started his own company to provide voice-over services to North East businesses.

Northern Man Productions, launched by Bruce Edwards, who previously worked as a radio producer and presenter for BBC Cleveland, will now provide his voice to businesses to help them deliver effective digital content.

Bruce started the company with support from the BIC, citing the rise in technology and a demand for voice-over work as the main reasons for starting up.

"Many organisations are producing videos that need quality narration," said Bruce, "and the explosion of the internet has made it possible for companies to make their own video content to get their messages out there. It's a very busy marketplace.

"But with these videos, there usually needs to be a voice or some sort of vocal trigger to help the viewer understand what's going on.

"This is where I come in and lean heavily on my experiences in radio – where I've learned how to speak in a compelling way – and deliver effective narration to help the viewer or user."



Bruce Edwards

# WHY YOU NEED A TDR APPRENTICE IN YOUR BUSINESS...

With more and more businesses seeing the benefits of apprenticeships, and reports showing an increase in the number of employers that would prefer to hire someone who has completed an apprenticeship over someone with a university degree, it is clear that many businesses are already taking advantage of apprenticeships, however there's still a way to go in closing the skills gap and local firm TDR Training are doing their utmost to help and promote the benefits.

Knowing how to highlight a skills gap within your team can help your business plan for staff development and recruitment, and an apprenticeship can be the perfect solution for this. Training a candidate on the job, with on-hand support from the apprenticeship provider is a win-win situation for all concerned.

Apprentices can also help to boost the appeal of the industry among their peers and colleagues. This, in turn, helps businesses and industries grow and develop. The Apprenticeship Levy is something any business can utilise towards this. The Apprenticeship Levy is a UK tax on employers which can be used to fund apprenticeship training. In the current (2018/19) tax year it is payable by all employers with an annual pay bill of more than £3 million at a rate of 0.5% of their total pay bill.

As a business, you can really benefit from the fresh thinking and forward approach of an apprentice. Their inquisitive and curious minds enable you to progress, develop and innovate, and apprentices will be able to complete some quite complex projects within months of starting that push not only their newly acquired skills but also encourage their ability to problem solve.

They often generate ideas and will typically have access to the most up-to-date industry regulations and training materials as well as internet trends and news. The biggest thing to highlight is that an apprentice will join your business with fresh eyes, and will pick out issues and resolutions that might have eluded your team over the years; they really are a breath of fresh air.



Around 76% of employers who employ an apprentice agree they make their workplace more productive, according to data compiled by the National Apprenticeship Service. A typical apprentice delivers productivity gains of over £10,000 annually – can your business afford to be missing out?

At TDR Training, they can provide apprenticeships in science, engineering and manufacturing, business admin and customer service and leadership and management, and with some large corporate employers to place apprentices, you know they are tried, tested and trusted in their field.

Through structured engagement with schools and TDR's family learning programmes, TDR Trust makes learning a positive and enjoyable experience and helps develop enthusiasm for lifelong learning, and provide encouragement, support and guidance to help them achieve their full potential.

**So if you think your next hire should be an apprentice, speak to the people in the know. Enquire today at [www.tdrtraining.co.uk](http://www.tdrtraining.co.uk) or by calling 0191 491 1505.**

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Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 2233500 [ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk) [www.sandersonyoung.co.uk](http://www.sandersonyoung.co.uk)



## Rocklyn Lodge Runnymede Road, Darras Hall, Ponteland

5 5 5 E

An outstanding opportunity to acquire one of the larger style luxury homes set back on Runnymede Road with beautiful grounds extending to the River Pont. Built in the late 1980s, Rocklyn Lodge has been significantly extended and improved, with beautiful interior design and decoration throughout.



Price Guide: £1.795 Million

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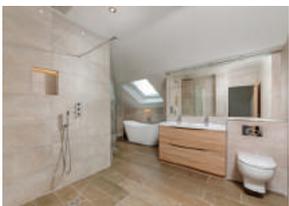
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## Runnymede Road Darras Hall, Ponteland

Situated in a fabulous, mature landscaped plot is this beautiful, newly built detached dormer house. Extending to approx. 4000 sq ft, it has been designed to a modern architectural standard with beautiful light rooms including a stunning L shaped kitchen/ living area with choice of kitchen design.

**Price Guide: £1.15 Million**

5 2 3 B



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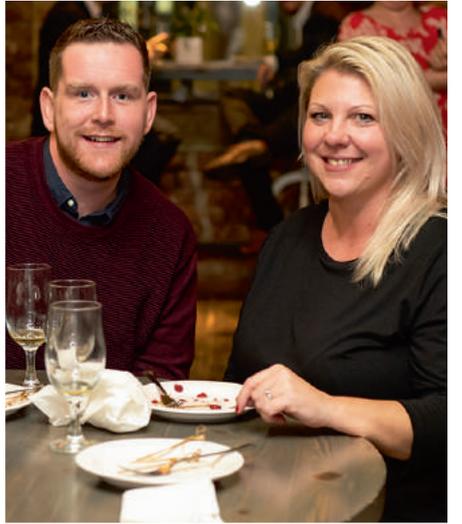


**MINCOFFS  
PROPERTY DRINKS**

Mincoffs recently hosted their second 'Property Drinks' event bringing together the region's property community. Held at Newcastle's Bealim House, 'Property Drinks' was one of a series of events to mark the firm's 70th anniversary celebrations and follows on from the success of the popular 'Tech Drinks' events which the firm has been running since 2016.

[www.mincoffs.co.uk](http://www.mincoffs.co.uk)  
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## PANDORA, NOSFERATU AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Like most small business owners, I am proud of what we have built since 2005.

**A dedicated team of professionals, winning the Sunday Times Letting Agent of the Year Award, thousands of happy tenants and hundreds of happy landlords. Then I look at our online reviews and wonder if actually, I am Nosferatu the Vampyre.**

Reviews tend to be either five stars or one. Nothing much in between. While it is lovely to get a positive review from a happy tenant it is the one stars that get my full attention. Is there anything I can learn from a negative review that will help improve our service in the future?

Well yes, it seems there is a lesson. People do not like paying for cleaning or damage at the end of a tenancy. This is far and away the primary reason why someone will sit at a laptop and pour out a five hundred word online complaint. This, after spending an equal amount of time trying to persuade our property managers that the oven was caked in baked-on food when they moved in or their mattress was stained brown from the off.

Provide them photographic proof that this is not the case and suddenly we are Photoshop Wizards.

We have a duty to our landlord and new tenants to ensure the property is immaculate at the beginning of a tenancy, that all safety systems are working and that gas or electrical systems have been tested. Beyond that point it is the responsibility of the tenant to ensure a degree of care for the property they live in.

Recently I was the 24 hour call-out duty manager when a tenant called at 11.45pm to report a failed light bulb. I informed them we would be out between 08.00 – 09.00 am to fix the problem and was immediately hit with a social media barrage. "Nosferatu the Vampyre is making us sit in the dark and we are very afraid". The bulb was replaced in the morning but the negative comments will stay online forever.

Pandora has definitely opened the social media box and it will not close any time soon. From

the beginning of time until the early 1990's people have had mixed experiences of even the best of businesses. The difference today is, a tiny percentage of the disgruntled can have a disproportionate effect upon the perception of a business.

The real lesson to be learned from the small proportion of vocal complainants is simple. Act. Act upon the root cause of complaints. In this case a lack of understanding that generally looking after and cleaning a rented property during a tenancy is the responsibility of the tenant. We already make this abundantly clear before, during and near the end of a tenancy, but in 2019 we will redouble our communications efforts. In time I may become known as Nosferatu the Spammer. And on that note, I shall leave the last word to Alexis Ohanian, founder of news site Reddit who said "It takes discipline not to let social media steal your time".

# WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED FROM THE BOTTOM TO THE TOP



elegant design which allows the entire space to be opened up to rest internally or externally depending on your preference, leaving a lovely open feel to your property. The ultimate choice in summer restorations, bi-folding doors have to be seen to be fully appreciated, especially the light and panoramic views.

A bi-fold really does perfectly join the inner space with the outer for parties, dining or relaxing.

If window upgrades are more on your January to-do list, we highly recommend a switch to double glazed windows; the best in energy efficiency. Different homes suit different window types which is why Conservatory Roof Supplies offer a wide range of styles of UPVC windows including UPVC and wooden frames, so whether it's traditional elegance or contemporary chic, they're guaranteed to have the perfect windows for you, all made to measure from their local based factory, guaranteeing top craftsmanship and work to be admired.

They can also provide a range of conservatory and orangery solutions so whether you're looking for a standard conservatory or something a little more contemporary with a tiled roof, they provide a bespoke service from design to build, ensuring you get the dream extension you've always wanted - within your price-range.

Conservatory Roof Supplies don't just do what they say on the tin; conservatories, they're so much more than that. Their experienced team can help with many household tasks including doors, conservatories and roofs, as well as UPVC windows to upgrade the look and feel of your home.

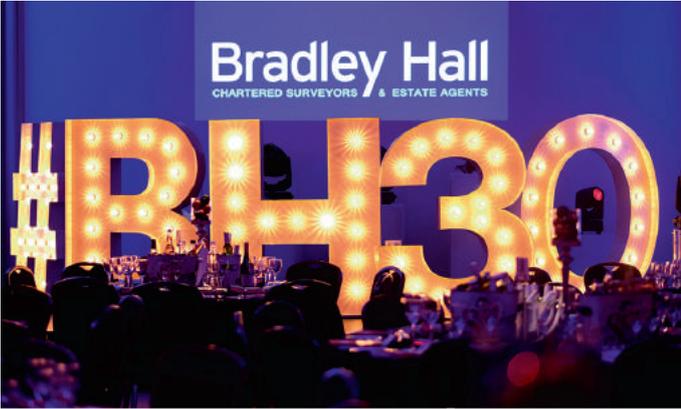
We aren't just talking your standard patio or interior doors; they provide a wide range of stylish and affordable UPVC and Bi-Fold Doors across Newcastle and the North East that are sure to show off the best of your home and garden. The bi-folding door is an exciting development in the PVC-U market and one that homeowners have caught on to over recent years. They provide an

For more information visit their website: [www.conservatoryroofsoutheast.com](http://www.conservatoryroofsoutheast.com) or follow them on Facebook for regular updates and offers, as well as a range of project images.

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## FESTIVE FUNDRAISER RAISES THOUSANDS FOR CHARITIES

Bradley Hall held its 3rd annual Festive Fundraiser in aid of local organisations, Marie Curie and Daft As A Brush Cancer Patient Care, raising thousands of pounds for both charities. The event also marked the official 30th anniversary celebration for the firm.

Almost 300 special guests attended the Crowne Plaza Newcastle – Stephenson Quarter, and were entertained by a casino, comedian and magician. A raffle and auction was held, with fantastic prizes donated from local businesses, hotels, spas and restaurants.







Matt Hoy

## MAKING EVERY PROPERTY LOOK £1,000,000

Director of estate agency, Matt Hoy, tells Northern Insight how and why the firm makes every property look like it's worth £1,000,000

The Bradley Hall brand has been built over 30 years, and especially over a recent period of growth, has become known as a market leading full-service property agency. In the past three years our estate agency operations have expanded into Alnwick, Morpeth, Sunderland and Hexham while continuing to develop a further growing presence in both Durham and Gosforth.

Our reputation has been built upon quality service and excellent marketing, and our property expertise is often associated with luxury mansions or the higher end of the price scale. Our branch windows are full of impressive looking properties. We know that a photo speaks a thousand words, and the first and most important factor when marketing a property is often the imagery.

We employ only the best professional photography as standard, so all our properties are displayed to their full potential.

While our competitors may not send a professional photographer out to these properties as part of their standard package, we think it is the most important factor in the process in order to secure

the best price for our client's homes. In addition, many properties within this price bracket are sold within the first few weeks of them coming to market – which explains why you see them a little less frequently in our windows.

**It may as a result look like everything in our window is worth £1,000,000, but the fastest moving price bracket across our offices is between £150,000 and £550,000.**

There is an association between high quality marketing materials and high fees or additional costs, however, at Bradley Hall this is not the case. We provide bespoke packages to meet the specific needs of each client, while working hard to ensure every one of our clients, no matter the price of their property, receives the best value for money and ultimately the best price for their home.

As well as using professional photography, our marketing includes; high quality lifestyle brochures, online marketing, bespoke advertising and editorial opportunities and glossy backlit window display cards.

Our property experts and specialist marketing team provide cost effective and targeted marketing to put your property in front of the right audience. Whether your property is suited to a first-time buyer, a growing family looking for a new home or someone searching for a luxurious mansion, we ensure it is marketed to the right people. We are both proactive and reactive, and up to date with the most effective and creative print and digital marketing tools to get your property sold quickly – and for the right amount.

Bradley Hall is a truly regional firm, with a dedicated team of experts and a quality service which is unrivalled by other agencies. We boast the highest qualified team in the region including; 10 RICS registered valuers to advise and influence mortgage valuations and 15 trained and fully qualified chartered surveyors.

For information on its services please visit the Bradley Hall website [www.bradleyhall.co.uk](http://www.bradleyhall.co.uk)



Lewis Chambers

## WHY JANUARY IS A GREAT TIME TO STEP ONTO, OR MOVE UP, THE PROPERTY LADDER

By Bradley Hall Director of Mortgages and Finance, Lewis Chambers

Once the hustle and bustle of Christmas is over, many often start thinking about their first, or next home. Homeowners welcome guests for Christmas dinner and realise their dining room is too small or their family and all its possessions are growing, making a once a spacious home cramped and claustrophobic. First time buyers get Christmas out of the way and start to plan their next steps – and the enthusiasm of the New Year and ticking off new milestones begins.

The time between Christmas and New Year sees a huge increase in Rightmove traffic; the festive period in 2017 saw traffic increase by 200%. Many people have some well-earned time away from work and find themselves scrolling through a property search, looking for the ideal home while finishing off a tin of Quality Street on the sofa. And why not? Contrary to popular belief, the winter is a great time to buy or sell a property.

Many have yet to realise that the winter is a good

a time as any to sell, and still wait for the Summer months. That means only one thing – less supply. This less supply, coupled with the evidence from Rightmove, means demand – ultimately suggesting that your property holds a good chance of selling quickly. This also means it's an ideal time to be marketing your property to first-time buyers, especially with the current incentives for non-homeowners to step onto the property ladder.

As well as various incentives including the Government Help to Buy: Equity Loan, the Help To Buy ISA and shared ownership schemes, there are also some very attractive low deposit mortgage offers. In December, first-time interest rates for 95% LTV, most popular with first time buyers, fell to record low rates. A Moneyfacts UK Mortgage Trends Treasury Report revealed that the average mortgage rate at 95% LTV fell by 0.09% from November to December, down from 3.63% to 3.54%. This drop is a substantial reduction from the

December 2017 figure of 4.15%. Not only that, but the average has almost halved in the last decade, falling from 6.52% in December 2008 to today's record low.

The shift in interest rates makes it unsurprising that at the height of the financial crisis there were only 17 deals at 95% LTV, which has since increased to 304. During the same period, the number of 90% LTV deals has hit 656 – its highest ever level and up from 102 in December 2008.

'Uncertainty' is probably one of the most used phrases when it comes to economy, money, property and everything else – so this drop in mortgage interest rates comes as a very positive step ahead of further Brexit activity. At the moment, there isn't much room for rates to decrease further, but there is room to rise – which isn't really a bad thing for those looking for a mortgage. Fixed rates offer you the certainty and reliability which we are all now looking for.

For more information on Bradley Hall's mortgage services please call 0191 260 2000.

## OVER THREE DECADES OF INTERIOR EXCELLENCE

With a studio in Newcastle and consulting office in London, interior designer George Bond has been advising clients for over 30 years – including TV personality Carol Vorderman and Amnesty International activist, Bianca Jagger.

Familiar to national TV viewers in his role as resident interiors expert on 'Better Homes' with Vorderman from 1999 – 2003, George was guest design advisor on BBC One's 'Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is' from 2008 and currently appears in a new regional TV series, 'Behind Closed Doors'.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, was a (founding) board member of the British Institute of Interior Designers, and currently serves as Lead Judge on the panel of the Northern Design Awards. George Bond Interior Design has been the recipient of numerous awards, most recently London's prestigious five star International Property Awards for Interior Design in 2013/2014 and the following year, 2014/15. In a role he has taken seriously for nearly a decade, George also mentors numerous students and graduates of Newcastle College and continues to provide them with support, guidance and inspiration.

### **What Is Your Opinion of the Standard of Work Presented at the 2018 Northern Design Awards?**

I have been on the Judging Panel of the Northern Design Awards since 2013 and it's very interesting to see how the regional industry is developing and where investment is being directed. I was struck this year by how much the entries in the commercial sector have improved - in fact, some of them were quite outstanding. On the other hand, there were fewer residential



George Bond

submissions that were really exceptional and I'm not entirely sure what's behind that. Budgetary constraints continue to play a critical role and I believe the commercial market is increasingly sophisticated and competitive with larger budgets being allocated to comprehensive new-build or refurbishment developments that need to impress. However there seem to be fewer residential projects with the budgets and clients brave enough to look beyond current fads and trends and explore new frontiers. In addition, it appears increasingly that design graduates and novice professionals are playing it safe, regardless of the many exciting innovations in technology and materials in the industry, instead of inspiring clients to think 'outside the box'.

Perhaps experience is a key factor – designers with a track record are more willing to push clients a little beyond their comfort zone and produce something really note-worthy and interesting. Trust is fundamental. New designers starting out on their own need encouragement to be more confident and assertive...it is so important that veteran industry specialists guide and support them.

### **You have been mentoring students for several years now...are you impressed with the calibre of work being produced?**

I've been mentoring graduates from Newcastle College and Northumbria University for nearly ten years and there is no shortage of raw talent coming out of region. However, I believe the curricula should incorporate more classic and traditional design influences as well as contemporary trends - and it is critical for students to have greater awareness of the importance of [paying attention to] detail. Broadening horizons as a result of visiting experts and first-hand travel is imperative, to my mind, to achieving original and inventive results grounded in a solid understanding of the craft.

Furthermore I believe that an extended period of apprenticeship in the workplace should be a mandatory element of the degree qualification process, beneficial from the perspective of both the student and potential employer. Upon graduation, students generally seem unprepared in the practical application of their trade and often too nervous to really demonstrate what they are capable of.



Helen Heward

## INTRODUCING HELEN HEWARD, ASSOCIATE, PLANNING HOUSE

As a chartered town planner with over 12 years experience in the public sector across planning policy, development management and enforcement, I'm leaving my comfort zone in the Local Authority to start a new adventure in the private sector.

**It's a really exciting opportunity to use my unique practical skills to effectively navigate the planning process from a Local Authority perspective to provide clients with an insightful and reliable service in the private sector.**

As a Senior Planning Officer, I have dealt with a wide variety of planning applications, predominantly major applications for residential, commercial, industrial and renewable energy developments. In previous articles Planning House, has described the move from Local Authority to the private sector as "gamekeeper turned poacher" and honestly I can't think of a better analogy.

For me, planning is all about relationships. I initially decided on a career in town planning as I was interested in the relationship between human activity and the natural environment. I soon learned that effective town planning is underpinned by collaboration and importantly communication between stakeholders in the whole of the planning process. In my experience the better the relationship between stakeholders the smoother the planning process runs!

The ethos behind Planning House is to provide a personal, flexible service that meets the needs of its clients; this suits my approach down to the ground.

I am definitely a 'people person', I love a challenge and have always thrived under pressure. I am an advocate for talking about a problem to resolve it and definitely believe that communication is key.

In my experience I have found that meaningful engagement can resolve the seemingly unresolvable. As planners we are often mediators between stakeholders, when something is talked about face to face or explained properly a solution can usually be found.

I am of the opinion 'why have countless emails back and forth when a discussion would be better?', this has always worked for me and is definitely an approach I intend to maintain. So when, following my return to work from maternity leave, I was offered an opportunity to work for Planning House, a company which has been built on service to clients I jumped at the chance.

Planning House is also supportive of another of my passions which is promoting gender equality. My time away from the office, during maternity leave, highlighted to me that whilst women may be represented in the industry there is a wealth of women who take time away from their career for family. This inevitably has an impact upon career progression. Fortunately, the flexible approach of

employment with Planning House accommodates my personal circumstances whilst supporting my career progression.

Nationally the network that champions for gender equality in the planning industry is 'Women in Planning'. The network is women-led however is not exclusively for women. There are branches across the UK and I am currently in the process of launching the North East network. Excitingly the upcoming launch event, in early 2019 will be supported by Planning House!

Having children has made me realise that being a working mother is tough and the pressure is immense. Trying to fit that into office hours is practically impossible. However, my new role at Planning House has offered 'a new way of working' giving me the flexibility to spend time with my young family whilst continuing to work in a profession I am passionate about – why do you have to choose! I am sure that this flexibility will benefit my family and future clients too.

I'm really excited to get started. If you have any planning matters you would like to discuss, from January 2019 I will be joining the Planning House team and I look forward to hearing from you.

PLANNING HOUSE can be contacted on 07944844882, [info@planninghouse.co.uk](mailto:info@planninghouse.co.uk) or by visiting [www.planninghouse.co.uk](http://www.planninghouse.co.uk)



## KNIGHT FRANK'S CHRISTMAS COCKTAIL PARTY

Around 300 guests joined Knight Frank's Newcastle team for cocktails and canapes to kick-off the festive season. The annual party, hosted at Barluga on Grey Street in Newcastle, was a chance for the Knight Frank team to thank all colleagues, friends, clients and suppliers for their support throughout the year. Office Head and Partner, Peter Bowden, said: "We had a brilliant turn-out and it was a fantastic night. It's our main social event of the year and always goes down well."







Jon Tweddell

## BUSINESS GOES ON WHILE THE HOUSING CRISIS CONTINUES

By Jon Tweddell, Director of JT Planning

As we embark on a New Year it is always good to reflect on the year past. Whilst many are worrying about the uncertainties surrounding Brexit, others see it as an opportunity going forward.

**Whatever happens over the coming months, and however turbulent the markets get, some things remain certain - business goes on and the UK housing crisis continues.**

Our broken housing system is one of life's constants and shows no signs of being fixed soon; young families and many local people continue to struggle to find affordable homes.

### Record breaking year

In spite of this backdrop, 2018 has been a record breaking year for JT Planning in terms of turnover and profitability. Importantly, it has seen us become involved in a diverse range of exciting new projects. The scale of the projects has also drastically increased.

We are currently advising on a scheme in Northumberland for 330 new homes and have just lodged a planning application for a large-scale distillery and visitor centre in Wooler.

We have won permission on behalf of our clients for several developments including a major expansion of Longframlington for Dacre Street Developments and a mixed-use development in Amble for Coble Developments. We have also secured commissions

from The Cairn Group to advise on two hotel sites in Newcastle and Slough.

Our bread and butter work for small to medium size developers remains the same and counts for a large percentage of our work. We have worked on several edge-of-settlement developments within the smaller villages of Northumberland and we think this type of work is likely to continue into 2019.

Our geographical coverage also continues to expand. Although most of our work is North East based, we have advised on a range of applications and appeals in York, Buckinghamshire and London.

### New opportunities in 2019

So, what does 2019 hold? We hope to continue being involved with a wide range of housing and commercial projects for our current client base.

Elsewhere, JT Planning is enjoying other opportunities emerging within our newly formed surveying department. Kieran Atkinson, our land surveyor, has been working on a wide range of projects including survey work for a sensitive boundary dispute and topographical surveys.

We continue to be involved with several sites at the post-planning stages.

We act for many land owners who simply want to see the value of their land increase with a planning permission. Once planning permission is secured the site is often offered to a developer or investor.

I am pleased to say that we've managed to arrange a number of site sales on behalf of land owners including a 40-unit housing scheme in Wooler and a housing development in North Northumberland. We hope these sorts of deals continue into 2019.

### Local Plan for Northumberland

As well as political uncertainty nationally around Brexit, there is continuing concern about the future development plan for Northumberland.

During 2019 we expect Northumberland County Council to publish their new Local Plan. The draft version of this document was extremely disappointing and far less ambitious than the earlier Core Strategy.

It will be interesting to see if the council has listened to the many objections that were lodged against the plan.

For more details visit [www.jontweddell.co.uk](http://www.jontweddell.co.uk)

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...



## CRAIG VAN BEDAF

Director, Pod Newcastle

### **What's the secret to your success?**

I guess working for a small architecture practice after finishing university exposed me to what it takes to run a successful business. Timing's important – it's everything. The recession of 2008 also made me stronger, focusing the mind on surviving, steering Pod through the ups and downs. Practice and financial management has also been a key ingredient to success - regardless of talent or the quality of work, financial health is paramount. I think we do this pretty well.

### **Why do you enjoy your job?**

The sheer richness and diversity of our work never fails to raise my interest or excitement - seeing the realisation of so much hard work and effort in the built form makes it all worthwhile. Working with people is great, too. I get a kick from our fantastic clients - indeed a great number I like to think of as good, personal friends. Talented people also surround me at Pod; where working with them is a genuinely warm and emotional experience.

### **What's your proudest achievement?**

Without doubt it's my two wonderful children, Zachary and Esme. They are fortunately nothing like me and inherit both my wife's looks and intelligence, which is such a relief. Running Pod for the best part of 11 years is right up there. It's been

a rewarding experience, engendering an emotion of deep pride.

### **What advice would you offer?**

Trust your own judgment. I'm generally a fairly impulsive individual and used to making quite a few decisions during the day. I firmly believe that your initial reaction or opinion on a project to be the correct one. People need to understand that architecture offers a wide spectrum; one that melds the beauty of art and science – it's always going to produce individuals and architects with key strengths and weaknesses.

### **Who's been the biggest influence on your career?**

My father. He came from Holland at a young age and had a life of adversity and challenge. He is a talented engineer, a wonderful grandfather and a man I will always look up to. I have been fortunate enough to enjoy opportunities he never had. My drive in life and wish to succeed is derived from being given every chance and all the support I could ask for. If I can be half the man he is; I will be a happy man.

### **And what of the future?**

The recession of 2008/2009 was incredibly tough, but we came through it better and stronger. Unfortunately, I believe with the current climate

and the economic sentiment, I can foresee some tough times ahead for the profession. However, we are prepared with a great team, a strong balance sheet and very diverse project spread.

### **How are you shaping up for future challenges?**

Our newly promoted three directors ensure senior staff will drive our projects forward. We are now better equipped to further spread our project wings and tackle the larger scale commissions.

### **Do you have a mantra?**

Not really but I do subscribe to the saying "you can shear a sheep many times, but skin it only once." Essentially, it's about looking after your clients and adding value. Working with them and looking after all aspects of your business relationship, will deliver a far stronger and fruitful long term relationship.

### **What do you get up to outside of work?**

I keep fighting the middle aged spread by going to the gym. I also enjoy shooting, football, and golf, while finding the time to fit a little snowboarding in.

### **Favourite stuff?**

My favourite book is *The Road*; my favourite CD is *Blue Lines* by Massive Attack; and my favourite film is *The Lives Of Others*.

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

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# RISING STAR...

## PETER CONDREN

Being a tradesman was his big desire and from the age of 13, operations manager at Hodgson Sayers, Peter Condren, learnt multiple skills from his dad.

Growing up, Peter had contemplated a career in the army or police but his passion for multiple trades became apparent.

He joined Hodgson Sayers at the age of 16, after a short stint working alongside his Dad (Peter Condren SNR) at a local building firm. He enjoyed learning and working with multiple trades, bricklaying, block paving, flagging and drainage, joinery and plastering but wanted to embark on a full time apprenticeship.

Stephen Condren, his uncle, was a roofer at Hodgson Sayers and informed him about an apprenticeship opportunity.

Peter was successful and began a three year apprenticeship in bricklaying at Newcastle College. His thirst for learning became clear and he advanced to a more technical one year qualification.

Aged 19, Peter was beginning to shine and was leading his own team. He also embarked on a three day site supervising training scheme and followed this up with a five day site management and safety course.

His determination and ability was noticed and he was trusted to manage and supervise sites. Peter also began to work more closely with companies in the utilities sector, which he particularly enjoyed.

Although his career was progressing well, he decided to take a year out and travelled to the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Fiji, Australia, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Thailand, Laos and Hong-Kong, with a particular favourite being Laos.



In 2009, Peter returned to the UK in the midst of the financial crash. A vacancy for a position in site management was available at Hodgson Sayers and he jumped at the chance to return.

This is where his career took off, as he began surveying for utility companies. The work was well recognised for generating opportunities and recommendations and he began working with managing director, John Sayers and executive chairman, Billy Hodgson, more closely.

In 2012, he was appointed assistant contracts manager.

Peter said: "From there everything fell into place. I worked hard to achieve an HNC and HND in Construction and the Built Environment which enriched my learning, something the company has continually supported me with. People development is a key priority at Hodgson Sayers and is the reason why I am still here, today."

Following another internal promotion, Peter is now operations manager and works alongside commercial manager, Stephen Lumsdon, to oversee seven contracts managers, two

management apprentices, two contract and project administrators plus an estimator and BIM and ERP integrator.

"The challenge for me has been stepping away from a hands-on role to adjusting to become part of the senior management team. Working at Hodgson Sayers you always have advice and guidance on-hand. John Sayers and Billy Hodgson have really mentored and developed my managerial skills.

"We have a fantastic group of youngsters who are 'rising stars' in the business. Former apprentice, Paul James rose to the challenge when he entered local competitions and his success set a standard for new apprentices entering the company.

"Paul is well respected and looked up to by his younger colleagues and provided good advice to Jordan Condren and David Crank who recently competed in the WorldSkills roof, slating and tiling competition and won a fabulous silver and bronze, respectively. It is important that each of our 24 apprentices have the chance to develop to their full capacity, the opportunity is there. It is all about grabbing it with both hands."



Starting work on new homes in Darlington are (L-R) Zoey Hawthorne from Karbon, Steve Bell from Gus Robinson, and Stephen Riding from Karbon.



Karbon's new Director of Development and Asset Management Ged Walsh



Karbon has set out its five year Strong Foundations Strategy, with customers at its heart.



Karbon Chief Executive Paul Fiddaman

## BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The year of 2018 has been a period of great change, growth and progress at Karbon Homes and with a new strategy launched and new finances in place to deliver that strategy, the future is looking bright.

In November, the housing association announced it had issued £150m in new bonds to support the delivery of its ambitious 'Strong Foundations Strategy', with a further £100m retained for later sale.

The new strategy outlines a number of key aims, including plans to expand Karbon's build programme to develop at least 500 high quality new homes every year.

Describing itself as a 'profit for purpose' business, it provides a range of ways for customers to access homes: from homes to buy and shared ownership, to affordable housing, social housing and supported and specialised housing.

Karbon continues to invest in its almost 30,000 existing homes across the North East and Yorkshire, and has committed £180m in planned maintenance over the next ten years to ensure they are fit for the future.

The organisation's main business driver is to deliver excellent customer service, and it actively engages and listens to customers to shape its products and services.

Karbon wants to shape strong, sustainable places by prioritising safety and security, investing in community projects, and working in partnership to address key customer issues such as employability and financial inclusion.

The foundations to deliver this strategy have been firmly laid following a recent G1/V1 rating from the Regulator of Social Housing, the highest possible score for governance and viability, and a strong A+ credit rating from Standard & Poor's.

Having only been formed by a merger in April 2017, earlier this year Karbon announced further growth through the acquisition of over 1,300 homes from another social landlord, The Guinness Partnership. The multi-million pound deal represented a major stock acquisition within the UK's affordable housing sector.

The properties that transferred to Karbon are located in a similar geographical footprint to existing Karbon Homes' properties and so Karbon is able to easily deliver services to its new customers.

With that merger complete and bedding in, Karbon is focusing on delivering its strategy – including the key pledge to build 500 new homes each year.

Last month, Karbon announced it had begun work on two major sites in the Darlington area, worth a combined £17m and delivering 124 homes, both being delivered in partnership with Hartlepool-based Gus Robinson Developments.

And more recently, Karbon announced that work had begun on a £5.5m development of sheltered apartments for older residents in the centre of Hexham.

To help deliver these ambitious projects, Karbon has just appointed a new Director of Development and Asset Management, Ged Walsh.

Mr Walsh brings a wealth of experience from a range of senior level roles within the fields of housing development and asset management. His most recent role was at County Durham Housing Group where he was the Executive Director of Asset Management and Regeneration.

He's also worked for organisations including Yorkshire Housing, where he was responsible for building up and delivering a 600 home per year mixed tenure development programme, the former Homes and Communities Agency (now Homes England), and Home Group.

Paul Fiddaman, Chief Executive of Karbon Homes, summed up the confidence and ambition of the organisation to deliver on its new strategy.

He said: "We are extremely proud of our five year strategy which is driven by the needs of our customers.

"As a profit for purpose business, we invest any surplus into building, improving and maintaining homes, and providing sustainable outcomes for customers and places. Combining a sound business head, with a strong social heart, we have the financial strength to deliver our strategy, so we can build strong foundations for more people."

# W NORTH NAMED OUTSTANDING NE AGENCY BY CIPR



W North has been named the North East's Outstanding Agency at the region's annual CIPR awards ceremony.

The new consultancy, established in April last year by London-based W Communications, made it a hat-trick of awards on the night, also picking up Best Consumer Relations Campaign and Best Event for its campaign to take art brand Reeves to the people of

London, Dublin and Manchester.

W North, which now has ten full time staff, is W Communications' second UK office and was opened to offer extended knowledge to clients, including PG Tips and Red Dog Saloon, who required deeper and more meaningful communications activity in communities across the UK.

Head of W North, Christian Cerisola, said: "We've

come a long way in a really short space of time. Being recognised by our peers in the CIPR as the best in the region is testament to the growing team here. It's been an incredible start that we're intent on building on rapidly in 2019."

Multi award-winning W has grown to more than 100 staff, with successful operations in Amsterdam and Singapore, as well as Newcastle and its London HQ.

## MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST PROVES YOU CAN DO IT



A top marketing and communications expert in the region has proved you can do whatever you set your mind to by launching her own business, The Doer.

Debs Mullinder heads up the new consultancy which helps businesses better connect with the customer and drive growth through brand building, marketing, communications and developing operational excellence. The Doer will work with teams to reenergise and refocus business plans.

Whether the company is starting out, scaling up or is well established and in need of a reboot, the Doer will work out what is needed.

The business is focused around getting back to basics, building relationships and making better connections. In a market where there are so many ways to send messages to target audiences, it's more important than ever to understand how the audience wants to receive communications, what will make them listen and when's the best time to get their attention.

Debs has over 20 years' experience in brand, marketing, communications and campaign management. She said: "Every organisation needs a doer, a person who grasps the goals, works well with the team and gets the job done. I have built my reputation on exactly that."



## MEDIAWORKS ROUND OFF INCREDIBLE 2018 WITH THE DRUM TOP 100 LISTING

Mediaworks has been listed in The Drum Top 100 Independent Agencies for 2018, entering as the highest ranked North East Digital Marketing Agency at #37.

Factors including key financial information over a two-year period, comparisons by headcount and regional/client satisfaction scores were all determiners in the census.

2018 has been an incredible year for Mediaworks in relation to growth and investment. Having secured a number of large regional and national clients, increased headcount by 35% and invested in a new state-of-the-art HQ, the future is exciting at Mediaworks.

Speaking about the success, Managing Director Brett Jacobson said: "To be included in The Drum's Top 100 Independent Agencies for 2018 is the cherry on top of what has been the biggest year for Mediaworks to date. With the office move now complete, 30% growth in revenue over the past 12 months and now to be voted the No.1 agency in the North East, we are certainly in the perfect position to make 2019 the biggest year yet for Mediaworks."

**SarahHall**Consulting  
PR and marketing that builds profiles and profits

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# TRACK 1: HOTEL, MOTEL, HOLIDAY INN

So you're wondering why the lyrics from the 1979 hit by Sugarhill Gang has ended up in your monthly business read and more importantly why we are referring to it as a track. Well, what you read is not a test, but we're leading hospitality, and even though we don't go by the name of Lois Lane, we are Creativehill and here is our essential album to digital success in the hospitality sector.

When we began to write these articles, or as we will now refer to them; tracks, the aim was to deliver, inspire and change the way you think about your online presence. Track 1 is a representation of us and an introduction to the album ahead, each track represents a problem or issue faced by Hotels, Bars and Restaurants not just in the North East, but globally - our challenge is to combat these issues one by one and help the sector thrive through truly creative insights. My name is Adam Hill, founder of Creativehill and these are my chosen lyrics for the introduction to our business and what we are about to share with you.

Welcome to the ever-changing world of the hospitality sector, although if you're reading this, you probably already understand the importance of keeping ahead. Among the day-to-day challenges faced by any business in this sector, it is actually a small minority that understands their customers, their acquisition channels and their referral partners for online traffic. The question to start this article is, how do your customers find you?

In this all-embracing era of technology, we cannot ignore the social impact and brand awareness that comes from being online. The UK is the 8th largest tourist destination in the world as published by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation and given the physical size of our little rock in the Atlantic, that's fairly impressive. But this means your competition is everywhere, a constant battle for placement online, increased room bookings, wedding occupancy and table coverings - this is why I set up Creativehill.

We partner with hotels, bars and restaurants to fix all of the above, but this album of inspiration is about sharing some of our insights. Heading into 2019, 4 years on since it began for us, we have built a reputation of delivering desirability, which in-turn results in profitability for our customers. Along the way, we have predicted, collected, obtained and verified data about the sector through the projects we have delivered and the results thereafter. The following 11 tracks are your chance to see inside the industry, us as an organisation and understand our findings to improve your online attraction and the retention of your customers.

Let's start at the top, it's usually the best place. For those of you familiar with our work and process you will know that we don't use the word 'website' - had we have been around in the 90's we may refer to them as such, but the internet and the technology that harnesses it has come a long way from the days of three w's. We refer to them as a 'Digital Presence' - let's be honest it actually sums them up better.

A digital presence is your corner of the online world enabling users to interact with your business.

Most hoteliers go to an immense effort refining the customer experience on-site through staff training, renovation, seasonal menus and the latest technologies, but all of that is irrelevant if the first touch point of a brand is a poor web experience - I have actually left hotel websites during a reservation process based on a bad booking experience, and our data shows I'm not the only person.

Let's re-imagine your digital presence as a hotel, the signage on the way in is how you appear on Google attracting customers in, the front door is your homepage and the first impression point for the customer, the reception team is the user experience helping people navigate online and find what they are looking for and your booking engine is the management team and systems behind the scenes making sure you maximise bookings. - All of these elements help viewers make real-time decisions about your brand and if they will invest time and money on making a booking.

How does your digital presence attract new business and retain your existing customers? If it's not on brand, clunky, hard to navigate, a pain on mobile devices and creates a headache during the booking process why would customers choose you over a competitor?

Welcome to the world of creative solutions, if you're confident with your digital presence, our hospitality insight could give you the tools to take your business further. Over the next 11 tracks, we will share our data, experience and insights to get ahead of your competition. We are Creativehill, the hospitality specialists and this is your essential album to digital success.

**OUR TOP TIP:**  
Spend time building a strong brand both on and offline, make sure your digital presence represents the core values of your business and don't follow the crowd - they aren't always right.



Adam Hill, Founder

- Track 1: Hotel, Motel, Holiday Inn
- Track 2: Hello! Is it me you're looking for?
- Track 3: Oops!... I did it again
- Track 4: I believe in miracles
- Track 5: Ah, push it - push it real good
- Track 6: It's everything you ever want
- Track 7: We're gonna have a party tonight
- Track 8: What's cooler than being cool?
- Track 9: Some will win, some will lose
- Track 10: Don't believe me just watch
- Track 11: You've got a friend in me
- Track 12: Start spreadin' the news



Written for Northern Insight by  
Adam Hill, Founder of Creativehill  
The Hospitality Specialists

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## ASK SILVER BULLET...



# “HOW IS FACEBOOK’S RECENT ALGORITHM CHANGE AFFECTING BUSINESS PAGES?”

As some may be aware, last year Facebook changed the way in which users experience the platform. By changing its algorithms Facebook has made it more difficult for business pages to be seen and do well. Mark Zuckerberg announced he wanted to prioritise 'meaningful interactions' by making sure businesses took a back seat over family and friends.

Business Dictionary describes an algorithm as a 'step by step procedure designed to perform an operation'. Facebook has created a procedure in order for posts to be seen on a person's news feed which are of high quality to the individual. These algorithms have been put in place to create a social media that holds significance to the user.

Unfortunately for business pages this has put them at the back of an ever-growing queue, meaning companies have to work much harder to be seen on Facebook. For some B2C companies who have previously done a large portion of selling across the platform, they are seeing huge detrimental effects.

Facebook is not trying to penalise companies, but it is attempting to show its users higher quality content. Previously brands have only had to stay active on

the platform to get in front of people. Now, sharing quality brand content is the focus on all business pages. Facebook algorithms will purposely not show content of a business page if it does not believe it to be of interest to the individual. For general users this is great as it means everything that they see on their news feed should be of relevance. As a result, companies have to work much harder to create brand content that is of interest to the audience.

In response to the algorithm change, more businesses are turning to Facebook advertising. With the promise of sponsored content being posted in front of target audiences, some companies are seeing paid advertising as the only option. Whether this is what Facebook intended or not is questionable, we couldn't possibly comment...

So how can businesses improve engagement in the face of algorithm adversity? All is not lost; businesses with the deepest pockets don't always have to come out on top. First and foremost, get to know your target audience. Really get to know them. Who they are, where they are, and when they are there. Let this influence your content. Remember, relevance equals prominence.

Create exclusive content, preferably with the use of video and live video. Facebook recognises video as worthy content which it's happy to share with users. Creating this type of content that is exclusive to your Facebook page, such as contests or giveaways, will keep your audience engaged, giving them a reason to keep coming to your page.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket or they will get crushed. Algorithms will always change, as will social media channels and businesses need to be prepared to change tack when needed. Rather than relying on one, use multiple channels as long as they are relevant to your customer and this will maximise your potential reach.

Be prepared to ask the question – is Facebook right for you? Although an extremely useful tool, Facebook is not the be all and end all of marketing and believe it or not, it isn't right for everyone. Perhaps your business would benefit from other marketing strategies such as email marketing or alternative social media platforms. This takes us back to really knowing your audience – hit that nail on the head and you will find the answers you need.

**Do you need some assistance with your marketing, PR or design? Do you need to review your strategy or do you want to know how we can help your business? Talk to us. Email your questions anonymously to us today [hello@silverbulletmarketing.co.uk](mailto:hello@silverbulletmarketing.co.uk) or Tweet us (not so anonymously) @SilverBulletPR.**

**SPOTLIGHT**

Want your business to  
be in the **spotlight**?



Talk to the PR specialists  
at **MHW PR...**

We storyboard and implement communications campaigns that build client reputations. That involves generating and distributing persuasive, engaging content - online and offline.

We have years of knowledge to help make our clients more famous, putting them centre stage. We work across a range of business sectors from the corporate world to industrial, healthcare and hospitality.

Please call if you need your business putting in the spotlight.

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PR & MARKETING

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# FIVE THINGS TO EXPECT FROM YOUR PR PRACTITIONER

By Sarah Hall, managing director of Sarah Hall Consulting Limited

Public relations is highly misunderstood. It's much more than media relations and crisis management and when employed strategically, helps an organisation to decide its what, why and how – its purpose for being.

Here Sarah Hall, managing director of Sarah Hall Consulting, provides five points on what to expect from a good PR practitioner.

## #1 Someone who treats PR as a strategic management function

There are few barriers to entry in public relations. Anyone can set themselves up as a practitioner with a laptop and phone but it doesn't mean they are any good. All PR activity should align with your organisational objectives and result in clear business outcomes. Look for someone who is a member of a professional body like the CIPR (I'm its past president) or the PRCA, as it's an indicator that they understand the strategic value of PR, adhere to a code of conduct and are committed to continuous professional development (CPD).

## #2 Someone who continues their CPD

Time served is no measure of competence, particularly in an industry that evolves as quickly as public relations. You need someone who is aware of how the business of PR is changing, continually upskilling and encouraging those they work with to do the same. Check out the Global Alliance global capabilities framework to benchmark the skills your PR practitioner should display at different stages in their career. Invest time and effort in helping them achieve them. Business and management skills, as well as tactical competencies, are a must.

## #3 Someone who operates ethically

People can get a bit sneery about PR's 'higher purpose' but a public relations professional should act as an ethical safeguard – ie be the eyes, ears

and conscience of your organisation. A key part of the role is horizon-scanning and benchmarking, also working with management and operations to plan for any crises. PR starts with listening to understand your market and stakeholders, which then informs how you best engage with them. I used the word engage deliberately – businesses need to move away from broadcast mode and genuinely invest in two-way comms, acting on the feedback given to improve internal performance, which will ultimately positively impact the bottom line.

## #4 Someone who can speak truth to power

Which brings me on to needing someone who is able to speak truth to power. A confident and competent public relations professional should have the ear of the board and a full understanding of your business, including supply chains and areas of risk. If there is any question that the organisation is operating unethically, expect them to speak out

and advise corrective action. In today's day and age companies have to live their values. Any say-do gap will be called out by pressure groups, media or the public with the reputation damage and drop in profits that results.

## #5 Someone who measures effectively

Finally, it's pointless doing activity for the sake of it or jumping onto a new platform or app just because it's shiny and new. A good PR practitioner will provide a business case for proposed tactical plans. They will adhere to the latest sector standards in measurement and evaluation and will want to be measured on business outcomes, not outputs. Industry best practice would dictate the use of the free AMEC integrated evaluation framework, based on the industry Paid Earned Shared Owned (PESO) model. If your PR practitioner doesn't know what this or PESO is, you either need to help them develop their knowledge and skills fast, or you shouldn't be working with them.



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# YOU'VE "HIGHLIGHTED" OUR BUSINESS - DAYMON BRITTON

Highlights PR is a successful PR agency run by Keith Newman. Uniquely, their office is a boat based on the River Tyne. Here we look at how Highlights PR have helped one of their clients.

Getting media coverage for the premiere of a film made exclusively in the North East about the issue of arranged marriages was the challenge that established film director Daymon Britton gave Highlights PR to tackle.

Primarily shot on location in South Shields with some scenes in Newcastle, "Falling" raised questions about the tradition of arranged marriages, asking viewers to look at both sides of the issue. The story is a love story between a Muslim girl and a white British male who suddenly find barriers in the way of their relationship. The plot examines how innocent childhood friendship can grow into something neither they or their families can control and it examines the differences in their respective cultures and family traditions.

Daymon, who has previously had leading acting roles in TV series such as Byker Grove and Emmerdale as well as the cult Newcastle based movie, School of Seduction was delighted to be able to premiere his film in front of a local audience.



"Shooting a film in the region is very important to me. We have a wealth of creative talent locally and I've used two local actors, Jake Ashton-Nelson from Gosforth who plays Jack and Mahsa Hammat Bahary from Whickham as Farida," he said.

Highlights PR featured Daymon in a number of newspaper articles, online business sites and lifestyle magazines. Both Daymon and the film's

financial backers appeared on BBC radio over two consecutive days.

Daymon said; "Keith knows how to get the attention of the media and his work helped us to attract a large audience at the premiere of the film. We were particularly pleased with the interviews he arranged for us on peak time BBC radio."

To see how we can help you, let's have a no obligation chat about your PR and a coffee on-board Highlights – the floating office, call Keith on 07814 397951 or email Keith@highlightspr.co.uk



We're not about gimmicks, gizmos or giveaways - we're about getting you noticed.

Call Keith now  
on 07814 397 951

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www.highlightspr.co.uk



P.S. Free torch for every new customer (lol)

# LIFE IN A GLOBAL SOCIAL MEDIA AGENCY



Simon Curtis

Simon Curtis is the name and face behind one of the UK's leading social media management agencies, Curtis Gabriel. From humble beginnings in Gosforth, the company now employs over 30 members of staff, has offices in Newcastle, Leeds and London and can boast working with some of the biggest international brands in hospitality and transportation across the UK, Europe and North America.

This growth has taken a great deal of determination, belief, sacrifice and expertise from Simon, so we sat down together to find out more about his journey.

#### What does a working week look like for you?

My weeks are always varied - no two days are ever the same. I often have to split my time between our head office in Newcastle and meeting new and existing clients. There is a huge amount of travel involved in my role, both within the UK and more recently Continental Europe and America. We have clients from Portsmouth to Aberdeen and Cardiff to Ipswich in the UK alone. Whilst it does involve long days and time away from my young family I do enjoy visiting new places and meeting new people. Most recently I have visited Stockholm and Las Vegas and there are definitely worse places you could travel with work!

#### What is your role at Curtis Gabriel?

My title is Business Development Director and I play a key part in managing new and existing client relationships as well as being a founding director of the company. We have recently added to our senior management team appointing a CEO, Martin Such, which has enabled me to spend even more time with

our clients. We always provide a personal service, offering support and guidance as well as ensuring our clients get the best value and results from our products.

#### How do Curtis Gabriel work with their clients?

The important thing is that we really understand our client's business as ultimately, we see ourselves as an extension of it. From the moment I first meet the client through to our onboarding and ongoing management service we ensure all our activity is relevant and strategically aligned to their marketing and commercial objectives. This is headed up by a dedicated Account Manager who is the main point of contact for day to day communication as well as top line planning and reporting. We also provide an Evening and Weekend Account Manager to ensure our delivery is 7 days a week, 365 days a year from 9am to 10pm. So that we can continually deliver bespoke creative content we have an in-house studio and three regional Content Creation Managers who visit our clients regularly. We have also recently appointed a highly experienced head of digital based on demand from clients who like the way we work and wanted us to deliver SEO, PPC, web build, web maintenance, hosting, bespoke design and email marketing.

#### What's next for Curtis Gabriel?

This is a hard question to answer as we have already had to adapt so many times because social media changes so quickly. It doesn't seem long ago that I took the decision to focus on out sourced social media and it was a decision that paid off. We are already a UK leading social media agency and we intend to increase our presence and number of clients across the UK, Continental Europe and North America. We are excited to be working with Hilton, managing a number of their key accounts including their F&B account, Taste of Hilton which has a global reach. We also have a number of strategic partnerships within the private hire taxi industry in the UK and North America. Our plan is to capitalise on these clients and relationships, continuing to build our reputation and developing our product. Social media has become the most important form of marketing for any business and we want people to outsource to us, the experts.

That said, the North East will always be a special place for us as it is where it all began and where our head office is based. We are lucky to have a great team working with us in Newcastle and we are always looking to expand our client base and professional relationships within the area.

To find out more about Curtis Gabriel you can visit [www.curtisgabriel.com](http://www.curtisgabriel.com) or call their Newcastle office on 0191 340 3600



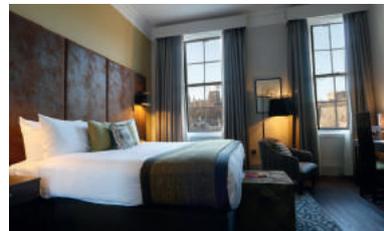
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Christian Cerisola

## GONG, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

At the very end of the year, we were named this region's Outstanding PR consultancy by our profession's chartered institute, the CIPR.

It was the culmination of what has been a brilliant 12 months for us. The well-wishes and congratulations were genuinely touching and came from all quarters in the days after the announcement; clients, colleagues, media contacts and even those who are supposed to be our PR industry 'rivals' in this region.

Importantly for me personally, it was our team here at W North who seemed the most thrilled. As is their wont, the posts to their chosen channels were numerous over that period and the mood in the office since the win has been off the charts... well, it was after the hangovers subsided, at least.

And here's the thing about awards. They're a source for enormous goodwill right across your networks. In those days afterwards, we enjoyed positive media articles, an uplift in staff positivity and more than a few enquiries about meetings to talk business. Results all round. Sometimes, it's all well and good you telling others that you're pretty good at your job, but its so much more powerful when others are saying it for you, isn't it?

We very nearly didn't enter. With little more than 18 months under our belt as an agency (even less when we submitted the application), we honestly

didn't know what chance we'd stand. But if you don't buy a ticket, you can't win the lottery, right?

We knew we'd achieved a lot: We'd executed some great campaigns for our clients (two of those campaigns also won awards on the night, as it turned out), we'd grown really quickly and had put in all the foundations to know where we were headed.

Some suspect, possibly justifiably, that awards ceremonies are a great money maker for the organisers. Well, yes, I see that point, but then its up to you to decipher which you think are the ones worth pursuing and which are, frankly, going to be lining the pockets of the organisers from the sale of tables at the swanky dinner.

Used correctly, awards and recognition add enormous weight to your business's currency. Awards and their value is something frequently asked of us as a part of a communications campaign.

Essentially, this is about applying solid PR practices. We approach it with a sense that the target market, that judge or panel of judges, is probably bored rigid of poorly written, poorly laid out and frankly boring submissions. What are you going to give them

to make them engage in a meaningful manner and buy in to what you're doing as a business or individual? You entry, as well as your business, must be something a bit special.

Some years ago, I remember working on the communications campaigns for Storey Carpets. Every year, they used to win a stack of gongs. None more so than at the Flooring Industry Awards. I remember it, because a national newspaper columnist at the time picked out these awards to talk about the very worst of what these ceremonies were all about. His argument, I seemed to remember, was that nobody cared.

Simon Heptinstall, the owner of Storey Carpets, was a brilliant businessman. He could see the benefit of these awards. Carpetright, the giant in the market at the time, was always in the same room and, no doubt, watched these upstarts from the North East chew into their customer base as well as their trophy cabinet. Eventually, Carpetright paid a gazillion pounds for that business. Don't tell me entering, and winning, those awards doesn't make sound business sense.

Christian Cerisola is head of W North, part of W Communications [www.wnorth.co.uk](http://www.wnorth.co.uk) @WCommNorth

# HATS OFF TO ALL OUR CIM GRADUATES

Graduation is a time to celebrate and reflect on your personal achievements. It's a special day, where emotions run high with so many achievements being recognised. nesma is delighted for all our graduates from the Certificate in Professional Marketing, the Diploma in Professional Marketing and the Marketing Leadership Programme.

Having donned their gowns and mortarboards in the Central Hall at Westminster on 17 November to enjoy their moment with the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Alison and Laura share their experience with us.

I'm really pleased I made the journey down to London to attend the graduation. Taking part in the ceremony was a really positive experience, and it felt like an exciting and tangible recognition of all the effort I have put into my studies over the last few years. It was also fantastic to see so many of my fellow graduates and share in the celebration with them in such a beautiful setting. The speeches and kind words offered by our hosts were a touching tribute to the dedication and hard work of every graduate in the room. In my current role, we are currently going through a hectic time and there are many challenges ahead, I'm positive that the knowledge gained from studying the CIM Diploma in Professional Marketing has put me in the best position to tackle them. I am very proud of my CIM qualifications and know it will be

one of the most valuable decisions I have made professionally as my career progresses.

**Laura Reed - Marketing and Communications Coordinator, Sunderland Culture.**

I didn't initially consider making the trip from Scotland to the graduation, but I'm glad that I did! The atmosphere at the amazing London venue was fabulous, and my attendance at the ceremony forced me to take a moment to celebrate, rather than just moving on without reflecting on what I had achieved. The Marketing Leadership programme demanded dedication and a fairly major time commitment. Fortunately, the subject matter of the assignments was a great fit to support my day job managing growth and change within our business. The qualification has helped me feel better prepared for the many strategic challenges involved in the day to day management of a growing business.

**Alison McEvoy - Financial & Business Development Director, McEvoy Engineering Ltd.**

As you've already heard from me, there are so many benefits to joining this elite marketing community and congratulations once again to all our graduates. You never fail to make me feel immensely proud and I'm looking forward to the new term starting on 14 January 2018.



Veronica Swindale

**Veronica Swindale, Director, Chartered Marketer, FCIM, CIM Ambassador of the North. Whether it's working on your current skill set or exploring a new area of expertise nesma has all your marketing and communication know-how covered.**  
[www.nesma.co.uk](http://www.nesma.co.uk) [hello@nesma.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesma.co.uk)

## NORTH EAST DIGITAL FIRM FLIES THE FLAG FOR INTERNATIONAL SKILLS EXPORT IN CANADA



Company directors at Canny Creative, Tony and Adrienne Hardy.

A Northumberland-based SME has been flying the flag for North East business at a sell-out event in Ontario, Canada.

Blyth-based graphic design and marketing agency, Canny Creative, organised and hosted the inaugural 'Canny Live' event to showcase how branding and digital marketing can be used to help businesses grow their presence overseas.

Attracting company owners from multiple industry sectors, all with an interest in either outsourcing work or exporting services into the UK marketplace, the success of Canny Live has opened up a number of

opportunities for businesses across the pond to start trading skills and expertise with the region.

"Canny Live provided us with a platform to educate businesses in Ontario about the opportunities that exist outside of their ordinary geographical scope, and how they can use digital marketing tools to help exploit them," said Tony Hardy, managing director at Canny Creative.

"Given the uncertainty that small businesses face with trading in Europe post-Brexit, we're proactively looking at the other side of the globe to see if we can open up opportunities to more small businesses

like ourselves by bridging the gap between the UK and Canadian markets and targeting businesses with which we can develop long-term relationships."

In order to make the event possible, Canny Creative received support from a local International Trade Adviser (ITA) at the Department for International Trade (DIT), who helped the business access matched-funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to meet the costs of travel.

David Coppock, Head of Region, North East, at DIT said: "Although exporting is often thought of in terms of goods, companies like Canny Creative are showing that there's a strong global demand for British services too.

"Helping businesses access funding through programmes such as ERDF is just one way we support firms looking to start or grow their exports. In addition to our network of North East-based ITAs, we also run regular trade missions overseas, and local masterclasses looking at everything from managing distributors to exporting through e-commerce.

"If a local business like Canny Creative can find export success, there's no reason many others can't too. We know that exporting can help businesses boost their profitability and increase their resilience, and I'd encourage anyone interested to get in touch with our team and see how we can help."

**Canny Creative specialises in branding, graphic and web design for companies operating across multiple industry sectors. For more information, visit [www.canny-creative.com](http://www.canny-creative.com).**



# The Bake One

Lebanese Sandwichs & Grill



Opening Hours: 10am - 12am

Tel: 0787 501 642

STACK Newcastle, Old Odeon  
Pilgrim Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne  
NE1 6QE

# STAYING POWER...

Longevity in business is something to be admired. In this series of features, we are celebrating some of the most accomplished professionals from across the North East business community. Aimed at major players with 20+ years' experience in their respective sectors, we provide a fascinating insight into what makes them tick and what we can learn from them.

This month we chat to...

## ABDULLAH ALDARWECH

The Bake One, Lebanese restaurant in Gosforth, Newcastle,  
STACK Container Village in Newcastle's city centre and Gateshead's Metro Centre.

### **Did you always envisage a career in the industry?**

Food is in our blood and as a family it is important to us to spend time together, so this is a way that we can do it. I started aged 18 in Durham and am 46 now, so you could say that I have a career in the food industry.

### **What is your favourite aspect of the job?**

My favourite part of the job is being a chef, I love to please people with food and as food draws people together - as everyone has to eat - it kills two birds with one stone.

### **What has been your career defining moment?**

Put simply, our superb reputation. We are well respected in the industry and the ground-breakers in the region for Lebanese food, so I would say that is pretty special and career defining.

### **How do you measure success?**

Again, reputation, turnover, respect from the business community, our customers and staff. All are equally as important.

### **What have been the biggest changes in the industry since you started?**

Lebanese food is quite unknown in this region and we are proud to be the ones to bring this to the area. It has been so well received too, so now with one in the Metro Centre, one in STACK, Newcastle and the original in Gosforth, then it is clear to see that the cuisine is much-loved and accepted.

### **How has your skillset developed accordingly?**

I am a creative person and take influences from my Lebanese background, but as a businessman I

continually strive to be better than I was yesterday. It's work in progress, but I am determined to succeed.

### **Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?**

A risk taker, 100% - any business is a risk, but nobody made their fortunes by just doing a job, you have to be bold and I am certainly that.

### **To what would you attribute your success?**

Working hard, determination to succeed, a love of what I do and to prove that Lebanese food is some of the finest cuisine in the world.

### **What's your biggest weakness and how have you managed this?**

I always learn from past mistakes and never repeat them. The definition of madness is to keep doing the same mistake over and over again and expecting a different result, so I try my best not to repeat bad habits.

### **How do you remain motivated?**

I keep working hard, look after my business and my staff/customers and I market my company well, so it makes me proud when I see the success we've achieved over the years and that keeps me very motivated.

### **Would you prefer to be liked or respected?**

Respected - as it is not important to always be liked, but it is always important to be respected.

### **I'll retire when?**

Maybe when I am 80, we'll have to see, but as Lebanese food is extremely healthy, then there is a good chance I will live to be a 100!



## METROMAIL HOLD A CHRISTMAS FAYRE FOR STAFF

Every year, MetroMail invite local businesses to sell their festive stocking fillers and allow staff to have some time out to do a spot of Christmas shopping.

This year's event took place on the 7th of December and it saw a variety of deli stalls, crafts and gifts on offer. MetroMail are accredited to Investors in People and hold the Continuing Excellence award for Better Health at Work due to all of the added value they offer employees.







## BIG DATA BUSINESS SET TO MAP FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS

Sunderland-based software company Geek Talent is hoping to shape the skills agenda with new technology that predicts what the jobs market will look like in the future.

By monitoring the current jobs market and marrying that together with data relating to industrial growth and investment trends, the company's latest technique aims to help regions pre-empt and address the skills shortages they might face.

The data, which is collated from a mix of job adverts and investment records, has helped shape the company's newest service offering, a workforce planning tool tailored to support organisations in both the private and public sectors.

The big data platform monitors job adverts in the UK and Europe, tracking salary changes, skill requirements and other key trends. Education providers, local authorities and businesses can then use the platform to predict future trends and prepare for the years ahead.



## SOFTWARE LAUNCH SET TO REVOLUTIONISE CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS

Recently launched by Washington-based company Sirius Telecom Ltd, a unique customer service software is set to revolutionise the way companies in the region handle multi-channel communications such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and email.

North East comedian, actor and founder of VIZ Magazine Simon Donald has brought some humour into the software launch, giving hilarious examples of customer service.

The software, which was written by CEO of Manchester-based company Gnatta, Jack Barmby, has already been successfully used by retail giant ASOS, with the North East contract secured exclusively by Sirius Telecom Limited.

Operations Manager Jolene Sundin explained: "This is unique software that puts multi-channel business enquiries from social media 'on your desk' within seconds, in real time. We already know that 97% of customers are now multichannel users, so the speed of response can save a company thousands in employee hours and turnover as well as their reputation."

## OCUCON ANNOUNCES APPOINTMENT



The world's first Video Surveillance as a Service system Ocucon has expanded its team with the appointment of Maral O'Brien as Business Operations Support Executive.

Breaking new ground in surveillance technology, Ocucon delivers a powerful, cloud-based storage and retrieval platform, combining intelligent data analytics with the facility to store, analyse and retrieve unlimited amounts of HD video surveillance footage from within the Ocucon portal. The Newcastle-based company is the first technology of its kind to offer unlimited cloud-based storage as a service.

Joining Ocucon from a marketing role, Maral will be responsible for aiding Ocucon's business development and furthering growth as the company continues to expand.

The announcement comes only a matter of weeks after the North East technology company announced it has signed an Original Equipment Manufacturing agreement with Hewlett Packard that will see the firm produce Ocucon-branded equipment for use on client sites.



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Delegates at our regular security events often tell us we have opened their eyes to the true scale of the cyber threats they face.

If we tell you that in a recent free trial of a new security product we identified over 500 attack attempts on the network of one of our managed services clients in the first day alone, and that this is not an uncommon scenario, you will understand the extent of today's security environment.

The truth is that every organisation is under constant attack, and as users become more mobile the risk increases and the threats get smarter. In the past it was enough to build a perimeter wall around your organisation but as technology moved on, security has had to change alongside it.

Let's look at the factors in more detail.

Your users now connect from many locations and devices. They no longer need your carefully created virtual private network (VPN) to get work done, they use cloud services instead. As the shift to software as a service (SaaS) continues, using highly efficient cloud-delivered tools such as Office 365 Google Docs and Salesforce can lay the organisation open to threat if they are used over untrusted internet connections. You need a fast, easy way to protect users anywhere they access the internet.

Your threats continue to increase in sophistication but attackers often reuse the same infrastructure in multiple attacks, often leaving cyber fingerprints behind. You need to be able to use those fingerprints to uncover attacks before they launch.

Sadly, the problem doesn't end there, not when many of your branch offices connect directly to the internet instead of pushing traffic to your headquarters. You are left with limited or zero visibility into the threats targeting these users, and there is a need to protect those branch offices without adding another appliance or deploying endpoint security.

Your team may have been focussed on reducing the time to detect and defend against malware. Has this really increased your security, when you are still flooded with infections despite your existing protection? It's not enough to wait for malware to reach your network or endpoints before you try to detect and stop them, you need to be able to identify and block threats earlier.

For instance, committing to Cyber Essentials and Essentials Plus will give you a solid foundation for security. Carrying out a vulnerability assessment and penetration test is a must, but do not become complacent, you should be doing these on an

ongoing basis. And think about consolidating the number of vendors you deal with. Simplifying management can deliver more effective security.

One of the ways we keep our clients safe is to work with best of breed partners such as Cisco. Its cloud security platform Cisco Umbrella is the industry's first secure internet gateway in the cloud, providing the first line of defence against threats on the internet wherever users go.

Cisco Umbrella gives you the intelligence to uncover current and emerging threats; visibility of activity across all devices and ports; and stops phishing, malware, and ransomware earlier. A massive 84% of those who try it, buy it.

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# GENERATING A NORTH EAST DIGITAL AND TECH POWERHOUSE



CEO of Generator, Jim Mawdsley

With the aim of arming the region's creative digital, tech and music creatives with the skills, insight and guidance they need to grow and succeed, Generator has made great strides in 2018 and continues on its mission to position the North East as a digital powerhouse on a national scale.

Here, Generator's CEO, Jim Mawdsley, looks back at some of the business support agency's highlights over the last 12 months.

It's been an interesting year for us at Generator as we adapt and grow as a business in our own right, whilst also providing first-class support to businesses and creatives in the digital, tech and music industries.

We're lucky to have such a diverse pool of talent in the North East – the creative digital and tech sectors and music scene here are second to none. And this remains at the heart of everything we do at Generator, both through Digital Union, our business network, and our music development arm, Tipping Point.

Through Digital Union, which is the largest business network in the North East of England for creative digital and tech companies, we have built up strong relationships with all of our members and maintained regular, meaningful contact which has enabled us to develop an understanding of the challenges and opportunities that they face within their sectors.

This played a pivotal role in the creation and launch of the Digital Union Manifesto earlier in the year. The 12-point manifesto was developed for the North East's creative sector in a bid to tackle some of the biggest challenges currently facing tech businesses.

During the year, we've moved forward with a number of the key pledges identified in the manifesto, including the development of a Diversity Charter which is about to be launched, further partnership working with other organisations that is leading to a one sector, one region, one statement piece coming from those of us who represent the creative Digital and Tech businesses in the region and we've set up a series of skills exchange meetups and initiatives for

members.

Bridging the digital and tech skills gap has also been high on our agenda and we've continued to strengthen links with the region's universities as well as supporting the development of Evolve Jobs, a regionally-focused, sector-specific recruitment site. The manifesto is a long-term commitment for us and we are planning a refresh of the pledges early in 2019 to ensure we're continually addressing the changing needs of the sector for the benefit of all our members.

As 2018 came to a close, Digital Union membership was within touching distance of 200 and we've added to our impressive roster of sponsors which now includes Sage, Northumbria University, Blu Sky, Ward Hadaway, NBS and the University of Sunderland.

Delivery of programmes, workshops, events and specialist seminars are Generator's bread and butter. In the last year we have worked both independently and with partners to launch a number of initiatives aimed at digital and tech companies.

Supply Chain North East, which is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund, is a key partnership programme that we're currently supporting, which has been developed to help hundreds of businesses within key sectors diversify, broaden their customer base and unlock opportunities in new markets.

This year has also seen Generator move towards delivering more commercially-focused ventures. A large portion of our work supporting the development and growth of the creative digital and tech sectors in the region has been possible thanks to European Regional Development Funding, but with the country's imminent departure from the

European Union, it was vital that we took steps to prepare for the very real possibility that alternative funding won't be an option.

With this in mind we recently launched a new commercial venture - #DUSocial. Delivered by Digital Union, the #DUSocial series consists of monthly half-day masterclasses offering expert guidance and insight into the fast-paced world of social media.

In addition to this, we're also currently curating full-day masterclasses aimed at new starters working within the digital, design and tech sectors in the region, which will provide them with the skills they need to kick-start their careers.

Not forgetting our music industry roots, Tipping Point, Generator's dedicated artist development programme and record label, has also had a busy year. We have signed three artists, with more on the horizon, including Leeds-based synth pop trio Polo, A Festival, A Parade - who supported fellow North East singer, Sam Fender, on his UK tour - and the label's most recent signing, Vandebilt.

Generator's annual music event – Evo Emerging – continues to act as the go-to platform for emerging musicians and attracts music-lovers from across the region and beyond. Next year, there will be some big changes as we plan to build upon the event's continued success by adapting the format to cater for wider audiences, so stay tuned for exciting news there.

Despite the obvious uncertainty around Brexit, we're confident that the creative, digital and tech industry in the North East, which is one of the fastest growing outside London, is strong enough and dynamic enough to forge ahead in 2019.

# MULTI-MILLION POUND NHS WIN FOR TECH EXPERTS ITPS

Tech experts ITPS have won a multi-million pound contract to connect NHS organisations on 670 sites to the new NHS Health and Social Care Network (HSCN), as part of the Gateshead-based firm's long term strategy to carve out a bigger share of the public sector market.

HSCN is a new UK-wide network connecting thousands of NHS and public sector organisations with health and social care providers such as pharmacies, dentists, opticians and care homes.

Created as part of the government's bid to improve data sharing security and efficiency, HSCN is set to transform the way that health and social care providers can buy secure, high speed connectivity services. The new agreement allows them to buy from multiple suppliers in a competitive market place, and in collaboration with other health and social care organisations.

ITPS was awarded the three year contract by NHS North of England Commissioning Support (NECS) on behalf of NHS organisations across the North East and Derbyshire. The deal, which has the potential to add between eight and £10m of revenue to ITPS's books and will save the NHS millions of pounds, will see the ITPS team work with hospitals, foundation trusts, Clinical Commissioning Groups and GP practices across the North East and Derbyshire.

The contract is creating up to 10 new jobs and will see ITPS use the state of the art facilities at its own £3m high security North East data centre to provide high speed connections for thousands of health sector staff across the two regions.

Gateshead-based ITPS was established in 2000 and has a 130-strong team working with a national and international client base, delivering strategic IT consultancy, security, data centre services and unified communications, as well as support services and workspace and disaster recovery.

ITPS managing director Garry Sheriff said: "We are delighted with this win, which is an indicator of our track record and technical expertise.

"We have 20 years' expertise of delivering more for less to private sector clients, but without impacting

quality. Our inclusion on the HSCN framework means we can now apply that experience to deliver high capacity communications that benefit the NHS.

"ITPS is the only supplier in the North East, and one of only 17 UK organisations, judged to be capable of delivering services that meet NHS Digital's strict supplier standards, putting us in a select group of major players. The deal is also a validation of our decision to invest an extra £1.2m in our own core communications infrastructure, which exceeded NHS Digital requirements.

"A key element in our ability to deliver UK-wide connectivity services is our strong relationship as a Strategic Partner to Virgin Media Business. This underpins our ability to provide clients with reliable, scalable and dedicated connectivity solutions.

"HSCN is part of the digital transformation of NHS services and the biggest step change in health sector IT in decades. Opening up the market improves consumer choice, encourages collaborative working and fosters safe, efficient information sharing that will benefit everyone who uses NHS services. We are very proud to be playing our part in that."

Stephen Childs, managing director of NECS added: "This is a complex project involving hundreds of partners, including seven NHS organisations across the North East and Derbyshire. The project signals a positive step towards integrated, patient-centred care working across large health systems. It is critical that we invest in innovative IT solutions. To enable joined-up, effective care we must continue to evolve and embrace new technology.

"The team from ITPS demonstrated a fundamental grasp of the project, and had the technical expertise as well as the proven project management and engineering skills required to deliver a project of this size and scope within the required timescale."



Garry Sheriff and Michael Jopling



David Tickner

## SIXTH FORM DIPLOMA

By David Tickner, Headmaster at Newcastle School for Boys.

Qualifications are not enough. They get students to the next stage but will not necessarily allow them to thrive when they get there.

It was with this in mind that we have launched our new sixth form offer. From September 2019, boys in Newcastle School for Boys' sixth form will enjoy an enhanced and extended curriculum offer to help them prepare for life beyond school. It will have three main strands:

- Academic qualifications
- Character development
- Skills development/employability

Academic qualifications remain at the heart of that sixth form experience: three A levels or their equivalent. We offer some more practically based CTEC courses as well as insisting that each of our students undertakes an independent learning project.

Many of our students already undertake the well-regarded extended project qualification (EPQ). It is a good preparation for undergraduate study and carries UCAS points. It also helps develop the research and referencing skills required to be successful at university. In addition, our sixth

form students will now have the further option of courses that can be accessed through the platforms offered by the Open University, Futurelearn and Coursera. This will allow students to extend their learning and make links across subjects.

Character development is an increasingly strong feature of our school and plays a significant role in the boys and young men that we turn out. We will expect all of our sixth formers to participate in co-curricular activities inside or outside of school. There are also opportunities to extend their character development through mentoring or coaching younger pupils, undertaking leadership roles within school as well as completing the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme.

All of our sixth formers will also undertake a mental and emotional wellbeing programme to allow them to understand issues affecting their own and others' well-being.

We will encourage all of our sixth formers to undertake a programme of service. This is to help them understand the challenges faced by those

in society who are less fortunate than they are. It requires a genuine commitment of time and energy beyond just simple charitable donation and helps develop other qualities, including empathy, in our sixth formers.

Employers frequently bemoan the lack of key skills in young people and we are seeking to plug this gap by insisting that all of our sixth form students undertake a minimum of 30 hours' work experience or an internship. To become proficient in presentation and interview skills as well as undertaking a 'survival' skills course that will help them to be capable of mastering their personal finances and key domestic skills, such as cookery.

The result is a distinctive, compelling and relevant sixth form experience that prepares our students exceptionally well for their lives beyond school. We want employers and universities to understand the qualities and experiences they can expect in a student who has attended Newcastle School for Boys' sixth form.



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# HOW WILL YOU BE PROMOTING WELLBEING THIS YEAR?

Fiona Coleman, Head Teacher at Newcastle Preparatory School, explains why and how, wellbeing will be embedded in every day practice during 2019.

It's the first day back in January and you can't believe where the holiday has gone. The Christmas break has been exhausting: preparations, celebrations and visitations. The next thing you know is that you are at your first staff meeting of the New Year; you are numb to the world and the only consolation is that you know that you are not alone in how you are feeling.

How to motivate your staff or yourself at this time of year, especially in a school, where the success of its children depends on an energised, committed and purposeful team of professionals is a question which many individuals or leadership teams will be grappling with.

So during 2019 at Newcastle Preparatory School we will be putting the well-being of our staff and children first. There is absolutely no doubt that teaching brings with it incredible highs, but its demands are well documented. Both staff and children find aspects of school life a challenge, but are their experiences really so different? Whether you are returning to school as a member of a class or as a teacher of that very same class you are each essentially navigating the same 'frantic world' as best as you can (Williams and Penman, 2011). For this, you will need attention, resilience and an ability to respond skillfully to the day's demands. It is well acknowledged that there won't be any quick fixes out there but there may be a few things worth trying.

### Building Flexibility into the Working Day

School holidays obviously compensate for the demands of the job, although it should be acknowledged that many teachers use a considerable amount of this time to prepare for the term ahead. If you didn't you'd simply sink. If you work full time term working hours are very rigid



Fiona Coleman

and teachers are often working between 50 and 60 hours per week or more. You can't book a day's leave as and when you need it. This year we will be looking at introducing the possibility of some late starts or early finishes for our full time staff. Whilst this is a small token, we feel it is a step in the right direction. We believe that feeling valued has a positive impact, not only on the children we teach but also on the school community as a whole.

### Focusing on the Unity of the Head, the Heart and the Hand

Achieving a sense of balance will be a key focus for school this year. We will be exploring the different ways we can best learn, teach and develop a sense of fulfillment by focusing on the power of the mind. Paying attention to what motivates us, inspires or moves us will engage our hearts and opportunities to be creative will put those hands to good use. A Wellbeing Committee has been created which will ensure that our policies are fully embedded and practical.

### Gaining National Recognition

To provide a framework for these important developments NPS will be embarking on some national awards. The Wellbeing award for Schools offers a robust framework developed in partnership

with NCB (National Children's Bureau), offering schools a nationally recognised accreditation and opportunity to show their commitment to promoting emotional wellbeing and positive mental health, as a part of school life.

We will also be creating opportunities for Mental Health First Aid training. This training is designed to help people to recognise the symptoms of mental health so that they can support those who are affected by it.

The Teacher Well Being Index of 2018- shows that workplace stress is something that our teaching profession cannot afford to ignore. So at Newcastle Preparatory School we will begin the term as we mean to go on: prioritising mental well-being, raising awareness and taking the time to value and understand how the physical, spiritual and intellectual components of ourselves are interdependent and equally important. As we embark on this New Year we are committed to taking pleasure in the moment and learning the value of taking the time to stop and think. Who knows what great things all this thinking may lead to?

**Have a mindful 2019 from all at NPS.**



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# OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR FOR 2019

By Kieran McLaughlin,  
Headmaster at Durham School.

Happy New Year! Traditionally at this time of year we both look back on the last twelve months and reflect on our achievements as well as looking forward to the opportunities and challenges the new year brings.

**This is no less true in the world of education; a world where at once it seems everything is changing yet, somehow, much remains the same.**

So is it with a sense of optimism we can look forward to 2019? Well, partly. Much of the turbulence of educational reform has abated now. New courses at both GCSE and A Level are now embedded and teachers can concentrate on consolidating their practice rather than constantly rewriting their lesson plans. There also seems to be good news coming out of Ofsted's headquarters (education's year-round pantomime villains) with, supposedly, less emphasis on pure examination results and more judgment of a school's curriculum and the concomitant quality of pupil experience. The growing emphasis on T levels and degree-level apprenticeships is welcome too, as youngsters look more and more towards alternatives to university with, in some cases, better employability statistics as well as better financial implications.

Not all is rosy in the garden of education, however, and the new year brings some familiar problems. I was asked recently by a colleague what I thought the biggest challenge facing education was and my reply was instant: teacher recruitment. It is no exaggeration to say that we are facing a crisis in recruiting suitably qualified graduates to teach in our schools. In shortage subjects such as maths and physics, schools are routinely forced into either employing teachers without a degree in the subject or twisting the arms of the teachers they already have outside of their specialism. It's a problem that isn't going to go away; the population of school children is climbing steadily and more and more teachers will need to be found to avoid increasing class sizes to unacceptably large levels.

So why aren't our top graduates going into



Kieran McLaughlin

teaching? It's a question that isn't difficult to answer. A casual flick through the education pages of any national newspaper would be enough to frighten anyone off. The multi-pronged peril of workload, pay, behaviour, the aforementioned Ofsted and the bewildering variety of societal issues teachers are required to address mean the profession just looks too daunting. And it's not just recruitment of youngsters into the profession – it's retention too. Around 10% of teachers leave the profession every year and whilst some of this is due to retirements and so on, more are getting out because there are less-stressful better paid options elsewhere. The problem is worse at headteacher level too, with fewer and fewer deputies wanting to make that final step up. Who can blame them, with the current "heads will roll" approach to appointments. A couple of bad years of results and the Chair of governors can resemble the chairman

of a premier league football club; small wonder that taking over a school in a challenging area has been described as playing Russian roulette with your career.

In many ways I am lucky. We in the independent sector are sheltered from many if not all of these problems. But it's hard not to despair when looking at our colleagues in the maintained sector. Can anything be done? In many ways, the key strength of the job is what it always has been: the joy of working with young people and making a difference, however small, to their lives. Whether it is helping them, to get the grades to access the course they want, inspiring them to study your subject at a higher level or simply just making their lives a little bit better, I believe teaching has few rivals as a rewarding career. We need to allow teachers to get back to those interactions because, fundamentally, they are what education is all about.

**For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 731 9270, email [admissions@durhamschool.co.uk](mailto:admissions@durhamschool.co.uk) or visit [www.durhamschool.co.uk](http://www.durhamschool.co.uk)**



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## SUNDERLAND EMPIRE ARE STRUTTING INTO THEIR NEW SEASON



## LEGENDARY MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA RETURNS TO SUNDERLAND EMPIRE

Trigger Happy TV star Dom Joly will take to the Sunderland Empire stage to perform the iconic role of Narrator as more members of the cast are announced for the new national tour of the legendary musical extravaganza *The Rocky Horror Show*. This critically-acclaimed production is now back by popular demand and returns for a 12-month UK tour starting at Brighton's Theatre Royal, with a run at Sunderland Empire (28 Jan – 2 Feb 2019).

Dom Joly will join the previously announced cast, *Strictly Come Dancing* Champion Joanne Clifton as Janet, a1's Ben Adams as Brad and West End star Stephen Webb as Frank.

Directed by Christopher Luscombe, the smash hit show features all of the famous musical numbers which have made *The Rocky Horror Show* such a huge hit for over four decades, including Sweet Transvestite, Dammit Janet and, of course, the timeless floor-filler *The Time-Warp*.

*The Rocky Horror Show* tells the story of Brad and his fiancée Janet, two squeaky clean college kids who meet Dr Frank'n'Furter by chance when their car breaks down outside his house. It's an adventure they'll never forget, with fun, frolics, frocks and frivolity, bursting with timeless songs and outrageous outfits.

Sunderland Empire is set to sparkle as must-see shows are unveiled and a new What's On guide drops. Check into 2019 with the smash-hit comedy *Benidorm Live* (14-19 Jan). Since opening, *Benidorm Live* already has audiences across the country rushing to book their tickets for one of the year's most anticipated theatre events.

Don't miss the awe-inspiring production of *War Horse* (6-23 Feb) when it returns as part of its 10th Anniversary tour. *War Horse* is an unforgettable theatrical event which takes audiences on an extraordinary journey from the fields of rural Devon to the trenches of First World War France.

Believe all over again with *Ghost - The Musical* (12-16 Mar). Walking back to their apartment late one night, a tragic encounter sees Sam murdered and his beloved girlfriend Molly alone. But with the help of a phoney storefront psychic, Sam tries to communicate with Molly in the hope of saving her from grave danger.

Birmingham Royal Ballet present *Beauty and the Beast* (28-30 Mar). A cruel Prince, cursed to spend the rest of his life living in a fantastical castle with the animals he callously hunted, finds salvation in the heart of a beautiful girl.

## CIVIL SERVANT WINS COMEDY AWARD



For the fourth year running, the team behind *Sunday for Sammy* hosted a competition to find a talented new comedy sketch writer with the winner receiving the coveted Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais Comedy Award.

As well as seeing the six shortlisted sketches performed by South Tyneside's Laffalang Gang, the capacity audience were treated to individual performances by Gavin Webster, Steffen Peddie, Cal Halbert, Josh Daniels and Louise Young.

Celebrity judges deliberated over the winning sketch, which may be considered for inclusion in a future *Sunday for Sammy* show. Judges included actress, presenter, writer and producer Kim Tserkezie, comedy writer Elliott Kerrigan and Chairman of the *Sunday for Sammy* Trust Tim Healy.

The winner of the competition with his sketch entitled 'The Club Doctor' was civil servant Ian McCormick from Shiremoor. His winning sketch featured a character who qualified for free prescriptions and capitalised on it by getting medication free of charge for his friends down at the local working men's club.

*Sunday for Sammy* are completely self-funded by income from show tickets and DVD sales which allows the trust to fund young performers. The latest DVD is now on sale from JG Windows.

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## ELLINGHAM HALL INVITES LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS TO CORPORATE RELAUNCH

Business owners and event professionals from across the North East were given the chance to explore a grand Northumberland mansion as part of a VIP event.

Ellingham Hall welcomed dozens of businesses to relaunch the historic stately home as a prime location for corporate events.

The stunning building is already well known for being a wedding venue, but the Hall is planning to increase business by becoming a destination for company meetings and events.

The corporate showcase coincided with an event being held by the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC), which saw businesses from across the region represented.

The relaunch was well received by the business community. Clare McCabe, from NECC, said: "It's a hidden gem. It's a fantastic place for corporate events because it's such a stunning building in a beautiful setting."

Lindsay Benton, who owns her own business, Northumberland Nutrition, and organises events for another business said: "Ellingham Hall is amazing. I'd never been before, but after being able to look around at all the rooms, I'd say it is one of the best events venues in the region.

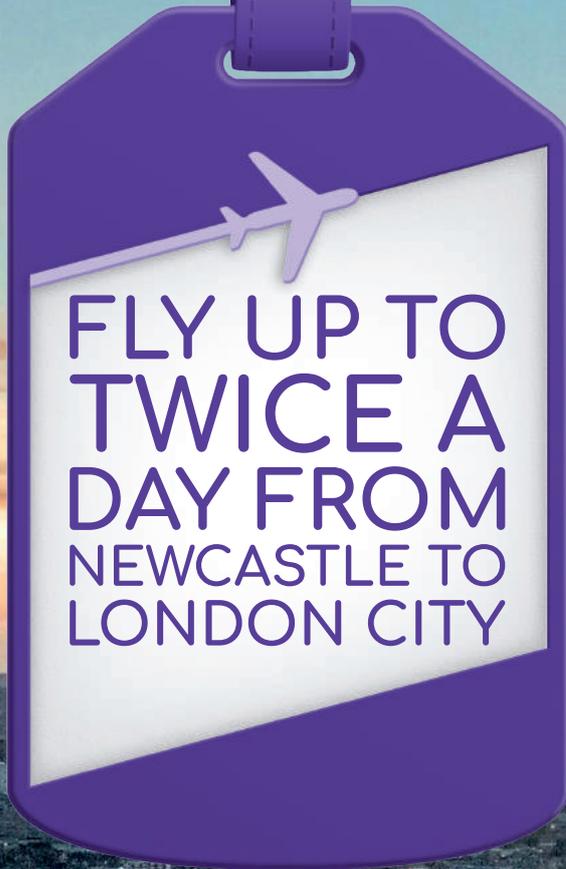
Sales and Marketing Manager Lynn Sanderson said the relaunch was held to raise awareness and to help drive future business to the Hall.

"We're known as a wedding venue because bridal parties hire the whole Hall and grounds," she explained.

"But we are also perfect for corporate events because we are private. Unlike a hotel, you aren't sharing the rooms and grounds with anyone else, so you have greater flexibility for your events."

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# OUT & ABOUT - CHATHILL FOR ELLINGHAM HALL



Most of my visits for this column are to towns and cities, but small rural stations sometimes yield useful places to visit.

I was in need of a "writing day" and settled upon Ellingham Hall in north Northumberland for a day out, using the small station at Chathill only 1.5 miles away, and less if I had walked across the fields on 13th November (in the dark) which I did not!

Ellingham Hall is an exclusive wedding venue inland from Seahouses, with 18 well-appointed bedrooms and five rooms inside the Hall for weddings and corporate events, the largest accommodating 140 seated delegates. I arranged to go on a quiet day between weddings, and had use of the mezzanine floor in the former chapel, which had a good wifi signal and pleasant views. The dining room and drawing room, as well as the entrance hall can be used for events. Unsurprisingly, most people come by car.

They advertise rail access to Morpeth 28.5 miles away and Berwick 23 miles away, but Alnmouth is better for long-distance trains, and Chathill even closer but this only has one train (the "Chathill Flyer") from Newcastle and back – more heavily loaded - in the morning peak, and one return trip in the evening.

The day did not start off too well. There was a serious incident at Killingworth and the 0555 from Newcastle was cancelled. I was put into a taxi which took me all the way to Ellingham so I still arrived on time. My local taxi firm estimated the fare at £80, whilst I had paid £18.30 (without railcard) for the return ticket. Following that, I enjoyed a much-needed cup of coffee, before an orientation tour of the building and its extensive facilities. Later I saw some of the seven spacious self-catering stone cottages. I had three hours solid work time until I set off to explore the village and have a seafood salad lunch in the excellent Pack Horse pub. Since I was the only guest in the Hall, the kitchen was not unreasonably closed for the day.

I had free access to the whole building including the games room in the cellar but took a walk to visit St. Maurice's church close by. The unlocked Anglican church features a fascinating stained-glass window featuring the four major building projects of the age which were, in order, the Ark in 2248 BC, the Temple at Jerusalem in 1012 BC, the building of Durham Cathedral in 1093 AD and the rebuilding of Ellingham Church in 1862! I think Archbishop Ussher's chronology, which dated the start of creation to the 22nd October 4004 BC at 6pm, was still in use in nineteenth century Ellingham. The churchyard, pictured, was interesting but I never found the way to St. Maurice's Well, and returned to the Hall an hour after lunch for some more work.

By six o'clock I was ready to return home, although the staff were concerned for my welfare walking on dark roads back to the station with my little torch. I allowed an hour to get to Chathill but that was ample, and a young woman picked me up on the road, as they do in rural Northumberland, and gave me a lift to the station and its informative little waiting room. The 1915 return train was on time,

comfortable and almost empty, and arrived in Newcastle at 2016 with only one other passenger. It may not have been the easiest way to get to Ellingham, but it made for a memorable day. Thanks to Anthony Hunter (GM) and his team for their hospitality.

Contact Lynn Sanderson, Sales and Marketing Manager, 01665 568118 or visit [www.ellingham-hall.co.uk](http://www.ellingham-hall.co.uk)



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## NEW LEISURE CLUB & SPA OPENS AT REDWORTH HALL HOTEL

The Newcastle-based Cairn Hotel Group has unveiled the stunning new Retreat Leisure Club & Spa at Redworth Hall Hotel following a £2m investment, marking the completion of the first phase of a massive refurbishment and development programme at the local landmark hotel.

The leisure and spa facilities have been totally reconfigured and transformed to create a dedicated spa with six luxurious treatment rooms, a tranquillity room and spa reception with a unique foliage backdrop, as well as a stunning new L'Oreal hair & nail salon.

The Retreat's indulgent treatment rooms are bathed in soft light with a warm, peaceful ambience. Guests can select from a huge array of individual head to toe treatments and therapies, as well as an indulgent selection of Spa packages and residential breaks.

To facilitate the creation of the new spa, the existing gym has been relocated to the first floor and is now an expansive, fully air-conditioned space featuring an array of Technogym equipment. There is also a new purpose-built exercise studio featuring a state-of-the-art 'Fitness on Demand' virtual class system, offering over 2500 class options. The Retreat facilities also include a 14-metre indoor swimming pool, sauna, Jacuzzi and steam room.

## TAKE THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD TO THE LOBSTER BALL 2019!

Fans of The Beatles can come together at one of the most exciting fund-raising events on the North East calendar. The next Lobster Charity Ball, which takes place annually at Hardwick Hall Hotel, Sedgefield, will be headlined this time round by one of the world's leading tribute bands, The Bootleg Beatles.

The band has been playing together for more than 30 years to audiences around the globe and will take to the stage at Hardwick Hall Hotel on 17 May 2019, performing all The Beatles' greatest hits.

Also appearing on the night will be singer Diane Shaw, who will recreate the magic of Motown, with a fashion show featuring the clothes of award-winning Durham menswear shop Woven.

The event includes a drinks reception and canapés and a four-course surf and turf dinner, with complimentary wine, lager and beer.

The evening will once again be compered by Steve Walls, with proceeds going to Daisy Chain autism charity.



John Adamson, owner of Hardwick Hall Hotel, said: "The Lobster Ball has always attracted fantastic performers, but I think the Bootleg Beatles will bring an added wow factor to the evening."

## NEWCASTLE RESTAURANT WINS TASTE OF THE NORTH EAST AWARD FOR THE SECOND TIME



The team at Blackfriars Restaurant in Newcastle is celebrating after being announced the winner of the Taste of the North East award for the second time.

The North East England Tourism Awards were organised and delivered by NewcastleGateshead Initiative in partnership with the North East Tourism Alliance and were recently hosted by BBC Radio Newcastle breakfast show presenter Alfie Joey at Newcastle Civic Centre.

Blackfriars, which also won the award in 2012, is believed to be the oldest purpose-built dining rooms in the UK, having served as the refectory for

the 'Black Friars' of Newcastle since 1239. Today it serves a gutsy seasonal and local menu by head chef Chris Wardale. The restaurant has been owned by Andy and Sam Hook since 2001 who have lovingly restored the complex which now includes a 92-seat restaurant, 50-seat banquet Hall, Parlour Bar, Cookery School and a wine/beer/whisky tasting room.

Andy said: "We are delighted to have won this prestigious award for the second time. We have invested a great deal in developing the complex at Blackfriars. The friars were big on hospitality and we are proud custodians of the building which is steeped in history."

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# MEET THE GM...

## NORRIE OSWALD

General Manager,  
Holiday Inn Newcastle, Gosforth Park

### Did you always envisage a career in the Hotel industry?

Whilst at school I kept my options open with a variety of subjects however the turning point proved to be a visit to my local college. The information available highlighted what a great industry this is and the wide variety of skills required in each department particularly appealed to me. The breadth of subjects included science along with economics, law, finance, how to cook and clean alongside HR, marketing, plus many more - although I am sure the study programme has changed over time.

### Describe your career path so far?

I qualified from college in Dundee then followed a graduate programme with Thistle Hotels all the way up to General Manager. I lived initially in Newcastle followed by Cheltenham, London, Weybridge, St Albans, Glasgow and then back to Newcastle.

### What is the best part of your job?

Variety!

### Describe a typical day?

The Holiday Inn Newcastle, near Seaton Burn, is a family owned business and our processes are very much guest focused. We are not big into report writing unless something is going to be done with it which is very refreshing. We receive some great reports from IHG (the Holiday Inn brand owners) to allow us to make quick decisions and these reports are reviewed daily. This can include future bedroom booking levels on a day by day basis, current guest feedback and market trends with past performance. Holiday Inn Newcastle is always developing and growing which means communication with the management team and training the team is crucial. Communicating with other hoteliers is also part of a typical week.



Norrie Oswald

Over the past 4 years we have also spent near £4 million refurbishing and redeveloping the hotel so I have had my fair share of meetings, late night contractor calls and upheaval. The results are amazing and we could not have got to where we are without our understanding and appreciative guests alongside the hard work and dedication from the team at the hotel.

### What is the Holiday Inn Newcastle's greatest asset?

The obvious answer is its people and in particular for this hotel there are some key long serving personnel who cover sales, accounts, reception, breakfast, housekeeping, maintenance, nightshift and the bar.

Our guest feedback regularly highlights the local team and their friendliness.

### Can you summarise some of your proudest career achievements?

Some years ago in another hotel after an inspection we were delighted to learn that we had achieved an AA rosette. This was a complete surprise as external recognition wasn't the objective.

More recently, the Holiday Inn Newcastle received an award for the biggest improvement in one year

for Guest Satisfaction in all of IHG European Hotels – comprising around 360 hotels. Last month, our guest satisfaction was the highest in 130 Holiday Inns within UK & Ireland and 5th highest in Europe.

This month the AA have also reconfirmed our 4 star status with a Merit score of 81%.

On a more personal note, another achievement is watching people I have worked with grow and develop.

### What are you currently working on?

The restaurant, bar and lounge have all been transformed over the summer with the final touches taking place before Christmas. Currently we are also creating an Express Spa to accompany our Spa and Leisure facilities.

Our larger event space will be another main focus of 2019 and we hoping to make announcements on this soon along with another major piece of news.

### How do you relax after hours?

A week of two halves it is probably fair to say. Midweek is generally quiet whilst the weekends usually involve meeting up with family and friends in "The Toon" dining out. I have been known to show support to a local bar or two!

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## ESCAPE TO THE COUNTRY

By Michael Grahamslaw

For those of you feeling the January blues, a trip out to the countryside can often be the perfect antidote. One country hotel with a burgeoning reputation is the Coquetvale, a handsome 14-bedroom venue in the heart of Rothbury – Northumberland's historic market town.

Dating back to the 19th century, the property possesses a rich history originally built by 1st Baron, William Armstrong in the 1870's as a railway house at which to service guests visiting his beloved Cragside House.

Today, Cragside is but one of a number of nearby local attractions which also include Northumberland National Park, Alnwick Castle, Kielder Water, Brinkburn Priory and Rothbury Golf Course. For those adventurous folk, the site also offers numerous country walks/hikes, clean trout-fishing rivers and heart-stopping stargazing opportunities all within a close proximity. You could say that there's nowhere better to reacquaint with nature.

When all of this demands a break, the Coquetvale offers deluxe accommodation furnished to an impeccable standard. Rooms are divided into three categories – classic, superior and loft – each with their own charms and amenities.

Classic rooms form the hotel's basic offering, all

complete with Flat Screen TVs, bespoke Hypno beds and en-suite bathrooms. These also include a range of twin, double and family options.

The hotel's recently-refurbished Superior rooms, the "Ingram" and the "Cheviot" are spacious affairs at the front of the property. These huge, 26 square metre bedrooms feature double aspect windows affording sweeping views across Northumberland National Park and the Coquet Valley. These are perfect for those who prize a little extra space with dedicated seating areas.

The Coquetvale's four 'loft' rooms are cosy and characterful with sloping ceilings and canvases from local artists, Dave Pickard and David Tallberg, adorning the walls.

Whilst Rothbury's bars & restaurants are all within short walking distance, the Coquetvale also boasts its own in-house eatery which serves seasonal food in refined surroundings alongside a swish bar area stocked with world beers, guest ales and fine wines. The dining area has been sympathetically designed,

retaining its original features such as its ornate period cornicing and decorative ceiling roses. Again, large double windows showcase the hotel's idyllic surroundings.

Its menu is a vibrant mix of locally-supplied meat /poultry dishes and Italian pizza/pasta favourites. A capacious, double-deck pizza oven also supplies a takeaway pizza service during which guests can drop in and collect as they fancy.

For those dropping in, The Coquetvale also caters for a range of meeting and events from day meetings for companies and local organisations to residential meetings for those from further afield. The Coquetvale also accommodates a number of sporting groups, from golfing trips to shooting parties to those looking to explore the Cheviots by foot or mountain bike.

For those looking to escape the hustle and bustle of city life – be it for business or leisure purposes – The Coquetvale in Rothbury has to be on your radar.

For more information, visit their website [coquetvale.co.uk](http://coquetvale.co.uk)

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## HORTON GRANGE COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

By Michael Grahamslaw

After reading a few glowing reports of Horton Grange Country House Hotel, I thought it was high time to review the experience for readers of Northern Insight.

Accompanied by my wife Lisa, we checked into this privately-owned Grade-II listed historic country house hotel for an overnight stay. Despite having just nine bedrooms, it is very imposing and oozes charm and class. All nine traditional bedrooms are extremely well furnished with quality period furniture giving it a very relaxed, comfortable feel whilst still retaining its upmarket country house appeal. That said, all bedrooms come with modern flat screen TVs, writing desks and high-speed complimentary wi-fi.

We checked in on a biting cold Winter's day, warmed ourselves in front of a log fire in its stately guest lounge before checking in to our bedroom. After a shower we retired to the lounge for a livener before dinner.

We dined in its light and airy conservatory where a new a la carte menu had recently been introduced. I'd heard some great reviews in recent times so we looked forward to it with great anticipation.

Lisa kicked off somewhat adventurously with the Thai marinated gravadlax with spiced remoulade before following up with the pan seared fillet of

beef with creamed potatoes, confit shallots and heritage carrots.

I took much deliberation over a thoughtful and enticing menu, swerving some of the more exotic options in favour of more hearty fare. To begin, I chose the smoked ham hock with fried quails egg and red onion ketchup before tucking into the slow cooked belly pork in a honey & soy glaze with a smear of apple gel.

To finish, I picked a warmed marmalade pudding – sharpened with a good glug of Cointreau – with orange curd. Lisa meanwhile tucked into a board of traditional farmhouse cheeses which rounded off what had been an exemplary meal. Serving modern British cuisine seven nights a week, I can fully understand why Horton Grange Country House Hotel is such a popular spot with guests and non-residents alike.

Many hotels talk the talk about being continually committed to using only sustainable and welfare friendly ingredients but this hotel also walks the walk by no longer using foie gras in any of its dishes. Good for them. Formal afternoon tea is also very popular occurrence with non-residents because, as

with everything at Horton Grange Country House Hotel, it is done properly.

In its country estate setting, this is a great venue for wedding or other significant private function as it has a "wow" factor and is certainly impressive.

This high-end hotel is only 5.7 miles from Newcastle Airport but because of its size, it is probably overlooked by business travellers in favour of the bigger formula type hotels. It is there loss. They don't know what they are missing. The saying goes that big is beautiful but, if done properly, small can be too. For one thing, the service to customer ratio is also greatly enhanced and this was very evident during dinner where the charming and efficient Roxanne, one of the hotel's Senior Supervisors, showered attention upon us throughout our meal.

Horton Grange Country House Hotel is only minutes away from Newcastle but it seems country miles away in tranquillity terms and on this experience, I can thoroughly recommend it.

This is an independent hotel ticking all the boxes – for all the right reasons!

For more information, visit their website [www.hortongrange.co.uk](http://www.hortongrange.co.uk)



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Nick Shottel

## NEWCASTLE'S OWN MR HOSPITALITY

Nick Shottel – otherwise known as Mr Hospitality - recently celebrated 30 years with Terry Laybourne's 21 Hospitality Group, in Newcastle. Nick outlines his career in hospitality and rise to become operations director of one of the leading independent restaurant groups in the North East.

### What attracted you into hospitality?

Hospitality was the first job I got after school. Friends I knew near Brentwood were working as dishwashers in a restaurant and earning money to buy 12" singles when I could only afford 7" singles. I ended up as a waiter at the Heybridge Moat House, Ingatestone, in Essex, and loved the whole environment of restaurants. I fell into it after that, and realised I had a flair for the job.

### How did your career take you from Essex to Newcastle?

After leaving school and working for a while I realised I needed to learn the trade. Switzerland was the place to go but I couldn't afford to get there. Instead, I went to Jersey for three years working at Hotel La Place, St Aubin, where I learned classic service. It was here I met my future wife Jayne, a Geordie. And strangely, at this point I worked with another Geordie who recommended, that when I returned to England, I should try the Fisherman's Lodge in Newcastle.

### How did you meet Terry Laybourne?

I left Jersey for the North East but there were no jobs going at the Fisherman's Lodge. In Newcastle, back then, this was the restaurant to work in and be seen at. I got my first job on the old Tuxedo Princess. Eventually, I got a job at Fisherman's Lodge and it was then I met the head chef, Terry Laybourne.

### How did things develop with Terry?

We hit it off almost straight away. Every Thursday a crowd of us went into town en masse. We usually ended up at the Stage Door. Terry and I loved soul music, and had a similar sense of humour. We could also talk about restaurants and things we'd like to do in the sector; which then led onto Terry talking about starting his own restaurant; there were lots of talks. He wanted a trusted team around him and he wanted me to join. I refused initially, but finally, I said 'yes' and for the next three months or more, after leaving the Lodge, we were all involved in preparing for the opening of 21 Queen Street, in 1988.

### 21 Queen Street became an iconic name; was it an overnight success?

It took around 18 months to take off. Remember that back then there was no internet or email. I had to go around knocking on doors, writing letters to people and building word-of-mouth. I was the restaurant manager, Terry was head chef and his wife, Susan, worked alongside me, front-of-house. We were aiming to create a restaurant that was inspired by the best in London. Getting into the Good Food Guide and then picking up an Egon Ronay Star in 1991 really helped put us on the map. Winning the Michelin Star in 1992 took us to a different level. We then started expanding and opening restaurants elsewhere.

### Your stand-out career defining moment(s)?

Winning the Michelin and gaining the recognition we got for Queen Street were the first big achievements. And then, in 2013, becoming a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts was a proud moment. There are only 50 Fellows in the entire industry and it's recognition from all your peers. It's also been quite a thrill to judge the Annual Awards of Excellence for Service, alongside real stars in the industry.

### If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be?

James Brown, David Bowie, Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield and my dad, who died when I was only six.

### Your favourite meal and tittle?

This all depends on the weather and who I'm with. I tend to like big heavy reds, but also a nice Pinot Noir such as a Red Sancerre. I like a good steak, scallops or halibut. If I'm at home, I love my wife's shepherd's pie.

### How do you relax?

Listening to music, particularly soul and funk. My favourite times are with my wife and our son Jack; spending time together, travelling up to Edinburgh or going to Tyneside Cinema.

[www.21hospitality.co.uk](http://www.21hospitality.co.uk)



## BUSINESS LUNCH AT ST. VINCENT

They say if you can remember the sixties then you weren't really there and I guess the same could be said of a good business lunch. Such was the verdict the morning after our first visit to the classy St.Vincent on Newcastle's Quayside!

Like many diners, I couldn't be more surprised to learn of the closure of Caffè Vivo. The buzzy Italian bistro was a fixture on the city's Broad Chare for over a decade and a much-loved favourite of Terry Laybourne's 21 Hospitality Group. In its place comes St.Vincent, a chic new wine-bar café inspired by the neighbourhood bars of France and Italy.

The St.Vincent concept is simple; this is a place to sample interesting – often lesser known wines – over small plates of simple food done well. Whilst we've all noted the boom in craft beers in recent years, there's also been a sizeable shift in the wine sector, with many of St.Vincent's wines handpicked from small, emerging vineyards.

Fans of Vivo will notice a drastic revamp of the restaurant's dining area. Warm shades of red and chocolate create a cosy ambience whilst steel pillars and exposed brickwork provide a nod to the area's industrial heritage. A long, capacious bar area has also been installed which makes it a great spot just to drop in and sample the wares.

St.Vincent serves food all day from morning to moonlight with this lack of fixed sittings offering much freedom to the diner. Breakfast is served Tuesday to Friday from 8:30am which is perfect for early business meetings whilst take-out coffee and treats are also on the menu.

The kitchen really gets into its stride of a lunchtime and from then is open all day. After a long day of meetings, I linked up with my son Jack for a late lunch to combat the mid-afternoon lull.

On hand to meet us was Matt, the restaurant's super-friendly Maitre D' who explained a little more about their food offering. This is not a place for your typical starters/mains. Diners can instead snack over a glass or two, or go all-out with a full-blown tapas style meal.

To kick off, Matt poured us a generous glug of "Cloudy Prosecco" a unique new palate cleanser -made organically with few chemicals - which proved an instant hit with father and son.

From there, we were invited to try a selection of appetisers which included Lindisfarne oysters,

house baked sourdough and a charcuterie sharing plank featuring Saucisson Sec, Rillettes and duck terrine. This was all washed down with a lively, young Macedonian red which is unlikely to be found on any other wine list in Newcastle.

Following on, we ordered another feast of small plates comprising Coq au Vin with buttered coquilles, sautéed tiger prawns with chilli and garlic, potted salmon with cucumber dressing and the stand-out steamed mussels with pinot des charentes and sweet spices. To complement this, we really upped the ante with a glass of dry sparkling red which tied the flavours together perfectly.

To round off proceedings, we tucked into a plateful of Florentine doughnuts with strawberry jam and Chantilly cream as well as an epic slab of Tiramisu.

St.Vincent is certain to make its mark with diners at various points in the day. In addition to its daily small plates menu, it also offers weekend brunch served 10am – 3pm every Saturday and Sunday.

It seems Terry Laybourne has done it again!

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



## THE PERFECT ENGAGEMENT

The wedding industry sees the festive period as engagement season; December is the most popular month to pop the question.

Did you find an engagement ring in your stocking this Christmas or did you say yes as the clock chimed goodbye to 2018? Many couple's will have also woken on New Year's Day with the elation that they would be getting married this year! Many congratulations to you all, this will be a super exciting chapter of your life.

I often get asked what makes the perfect engagement; with the influence of social media and our natural competitiveness, engagements have become an occasion within itself. Couple's are being more adventurous and the rings and gifts more elaborate. Every day we see stunning engagement images being shared, from couple's standing under a waterfall to teetering on top of a mountain whilst exchanging huge sparkly rocks. A public declaration to the world of the love you share and commit to is driving our creativeness of the act.

I myself was whisked off to Rome and my partner got down on bended knee on a rooftop overlooking Vatican City and St Peter's Basilica presenting me with a beautiful bespoke ring. However, we both knew it wasn't how or where he proposed or whether he even had a ring; I would still have said yes. My parents' story is one of true love, a relationship and marriage built on love, respect, friendship, trust and working hard. I love their engagement story; living at opposite ends of the town, my Dad would take my Mam home on the bus then make the return journey home. They met at 18 on a night out and 8 months later my Dad popped the question. Sat on the No.6 bus and with no ring my Dad asked my Mam to marry him and of course she said yes. My Mother has since had several engagement rings, due to her clumsiness ha-ha but I am super proud that in 2019 and five grandchildren later they will celebrate their 43 years of marriage! Exactly what perfect engagements are made of.

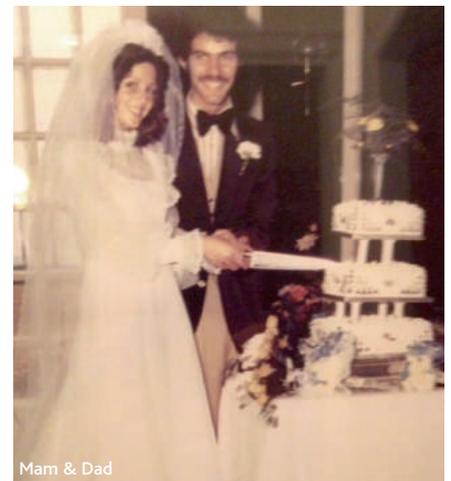


Michelle Jones



The perfect engagement should be all about you. As a wedding planner I design weddings that are unique to the individual couple. Both should absolutely reflect you, as a couple and as individuals whether it's sat on the back of a bus or exploring the coral reef. Here in the North East we are blessed with such a beautiful region with lots of amazing opportunities for loved up couples to make special memories; a perfect Geordie spot to express your love would be on top of Newcastle Castle overlooking our iconic bridges. Whether you choose to seal with a ring or a special gift we are fortunate that our High Streets boost many independent jewellers providing that personal touch such as Dytham Jewellery Design who offer a bespoke design service enabling a couple to create a symbol as unique as the love you share.

For me, the perfect engagement is that you will be celebrating your story for many, many years and as we say in our wedding vows 'until death do you part'.



Mam & Dad

For more information visit [www.mjweddingplanner.co.uk](http://www.mjweddingplanner.co.uk)

## DARCEY'S DREAM

There can't be anything more traumatic than losing an infant to sudden death but when that infant is one of twins, it's not only the parents who are affected but the sibling which has a special bond with their brother or sister.

**Petra Williams and her husband suffered that terrible fate when their daughter, Darcey passed away.**

Following a fruitless search for help in the aftermath of her daughter's death, Petra found to her astonishment there was little in the way of support for families affected by the same fate.

As a result, 'Darcey's Dream – My family and siblings matter' was formed to address the problem of support. It's a charity which is doing sterling work, helping to relieve terrible situations for families far and wide.

"When Darcey and her sister were born they left hospital and were healthy, happy little girls. A few weeks later, Darcey became unwell with flu like symptoms which got no better," Petra points out.

Constantly told the problem was viral, The GP's and hospital were insistent the mother was being paranoid. Cutting a long and tragic story short, the outcome was devastatingly bad and Darcey subsequently died.

In particular, Petra found there was little help for siblings, like Darcey's older sister, so the charity was born.

The charity provides help for the whole family but also to a range of other child death related aspects like terminal illness. It provides counselling services for siblings and parents, breathing monitors, final photo shoots, specialist sibling boxes, and a host of other things beside.

In a world which makes charitable demands on all of us, money and support is tight. What this charity needs is corporate sponsorship, to secure its future. For anyone in the business world who have perhaps gone through early infant death and want to do something to relieve the suffering of other parents in a similar situation but it's also a charity which may be attractive for support from other companies just wanting to help.

Without this support, the charity has made significant inroads in helping families to cope with appalling situations.

In early 2019, the charity will be opening an office in Blyth entirely manned by



volunteers and later in the year they are hoping to open a bereavement suite where parents can spend their last night after death with their child. It goes some way to cutting out the Chapel of Rest situation where their child is only available for them to spend time with at certain moments of the day. It's a vital cog in the wheel of farewell.

The charity has a number of trustees and patrons who have given unstintingly of their time and availability, the charity just needs further support to enhance the work they already do for this worthy cause.

Life is sacrosanct as we all know and it's tragic to think a child is born, only for its life to be cut painfully short. This charity obviously can't stop that happening but they can go a long way to relieving some of the suffering of those left behind.

For anyone interested in supporting this worthwhile cause, please visit [www.darceysdream.com](http://www.darceysdream.com)

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# New Year, time for Wellness at Work

By Claire Hawes, Co-director and Osteopath  
Back to Balance

Research shows that January and February have the highest levels of sickness absence rates throughout the year, and that's not really surprising when we think about how we all feel during the dark winter months, and how often there is a cold or lurgy floating around the office.

And while it is true that according to the Office for National Statistics, the most common sickness absence reason is for minor illness (cold/flu etc) with 34 million days lost, the second most common reason is for musculoskeletal pain (low back, neck or limb pain) with 30.8 million days lost in the UK in 2016. The 'other' (including stress and mental health) category which comes in third with 15.8 million days lost.

These are important statistics to be aware of – because as anyone who is part of a team knows, when someone is off sick, you may well have an increase in work load, a drop in team morale or be firefighting queries you may not be equipped or have the knowledge to deal with. As a manager or team leader you will be aware of the potential increased costs relating to locum cover and reduced productivity. With these thoughts in mind – it is worth thinking about how you can minimise the impact of sickness absence within your team and why 'wellness' plays such an important role for companies.

Reducing sickness absence must be a priority for businesses who are looking to improve their bottom line. And, by engaging in wellness initiatives, you can do this by firstly addressing reasons for sickness absence – musculoskeletal health and stress and mental health. Improving musculoskeletal health can be done by offering Pilates or yoga classes that your staff can attend – you could even make these during the working day, this will give your staff an incentive to go, but also the evidence shows that performance will increase ie they will still get the same amount of work done even with the hour off for a back care class! Whilst this is perhaps the most effective and cost-efficient form of addressing musculoskeletal problems in the workplace, you could also offer work place massages as a perk – shorter time than the Pilates class but impactful because it gives employees a moment to themselves during the day and encourages cohesion between them and management – which leads to better performance. At Back to Balance, I often diagnose and treat

employees who are sent to me from companies for back, neck or limb problems – a really effective way to avoid people taking time off.

When it comes to reducing stress in the work place, encouraging mindfulness classes in the same way I have mentioned Pilates or yoga – the evidence behind this and why it is such a huge draw at the moment is because it actually gives you real benefits including; clarity of thought, better quality sleep, the ability to show more compassion to your work colleagues and to be realistic with yourself and those you work with in terms of goal setting and deadlines. With reduced stress, you are looking at reducing alcohol consumption, mental health problems and improving the immune system.

The improvement of the immune system is vitally important, as it is not only improved by dealing with stress, but also better physical health too. And, this means that you can reduce the main reason for sickness absence – minor illness; by helping your staff improve their immune system function through wellness care.

If you'd like more information about how wellness can work for your team, call or email for a no obligation chat with myself or Nicky. [contact@back-to-balance.co.uk](mailto:contact@back-to-balance.co.uk) 01914661441. Start the new year with wellness in your team.

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## Mains

### BRASATO AL CANNONAU

Braised Beef in Cannonau Wine,  
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Roasted Root Veg

### MAIALETTO

#### ARROSTO SARDA

Sardinian Suckling Pig, Roast  
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# MAKE 2019 A YEAR OF POSITIVE CHANGE!

By that I mean introducing consistent lifestyle changes.

Ditch the word diet, bin the quick fix plan that only works in the short term, lose the unrealistic New Year resolutions, that you make after a few drinks, think positive and achieve what you have wanted to do for years.

Everything is in your own hands, and yes make changes in January, but subtle ones which are realistic and will last over time. Not only will you look much better but will feel energized and positive throughout the year.

Here are some ideas on changes you could look to introduce that over time, not just through January, could be life changing:

- **Eat smaller portions.** It's simple and it works, eating less calories each day will lead to weight loss.
- **Buy smaller plates.** You can trick your mind into thinking you are eating a large meal if the small plate is full.
- **Cut out snacks** between meals, eating more protein at your main meals should help, it will keep you fuller for longer.
- **Try to limit the amount of bread you eat per day.** If you cut down from four to two slices, you would have saved 730 slices of bread calories a year.
- **Ditch your scales!** Use your clothes and how you feel as a real measure of your progress. Work towards fitting into a pair of jeans, dress, or shirt.
- **Serious about weight loss?** Be mindful of your sugar intake - four grams is equal to one teaspoon, more than eight teaspoons for an adult is above the recommended daily allowance.
- **Until there is a vast reduction in the sugar content of most cereals, stop eating them!** Pull back on these and you will have taken a big step forward in reducing your daily sugar intake. Eggs for breakfast is the way forward.
- **Keep your body functioning well** and stave off hunger by sticking to a daily routine of drinking water - adult two-three litres a day.
- **Move more everyday!** Take every opportunity to walk/exercise eg while on the phone walk, on your lunch hour, look to take the stairs not the lift.



David Fairlamb

Moving more means burning more calories.

- **Take the word diet out of your vocabulary,** eat fresh healthy ingredients where possible. Bulk your plate out with vegetables alongside lean meats and fish.

- **Cut down/replace carbs.** Replace potato or white rice with a cauliflower version and instead of cooking noodles try replacing them with spiralized courgette. This will hugely cut down your calorie intake and actually tastes good.

- **If you are stuck in the same exercise routine which you dread, change it.** Find an exercise or class you enjoy, this way you are more lightly to attend regularly and give 100%, leading to better results.

- **Make time not excuses.** Replace idle time on your mobile phone to do more productive things eg to cook fresh food or go for a run/walk, I think we could all learn from this.

- **A mental approach** is just as important as a physical one, try adding a relaxation class into your regime, this will help keep you calm and positive.

- **Take your time implementing these changes,** try adding one of two ideas every few weeks, this will help sustain your focus.

Let's face facts, if you are battling your weight and failing, you need to make changes. Even if you only follow a few of the above tips you will see a big difference over time as long as you stay consistent.

## DAVID'S SUMMING UP

***Make 2019 a year where you make time for yourself, rediscover your shape and regain your health, fitness and self-confidence.***

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PROSECCO  
FLOW



Chris Land

## CHRIS LAND

North East Centre Manager, Rutherford Cancer Centre North East.

### **Tell us about the inception of the Rutherford Cancer Centre North East?**

We have been working towards bringing high energy proton beam therapy to the North East since 2015, when Proton Partners International (the company which runs the Rutherford Cancer Centres) decided to open a world-leading cancer centre in the area which would provide high energy proton therapy to those who need it.

There are more than 90,000 cancer patients in the UK every year who are treated with radical radiotherapy. We – and our European medical counterparts – believe that around 10% of these patients could be better treated with proton therapy. This treatment isn't new – it has been used in the USA and mainland Europe for over 30 years, however it only became available in the UK for the first time this year when our sister centre, the Rutherford Cancer Centre South Wales, began treating patients in April. We wanted to ensure that patients in the North East had access to this treatment locally, and have been working hard to make it happen.

### **What services do you provide?**

We have been providing radiotherapy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy and imaging services since our centre opened at the end of Summer 2018. This Spring, our proton therapy suite will be complete and we will be able to start treating patients on-site. However, Proton Partners International runs all of the Rutherford Cancer Centres via a centralised network which means that patients can move seamlessly from one of our centres to the other – ideal if a patient has to travel

or relocates during the treatment process. Because of this, a patient at our North East centre can have consultations for proton therapy and then be treated at the South Wales centre ahead of our own unit opening. The process is very straightforward and designed to minimise disruption wherever possible.

### **What is your proudest achievement?**

In under two years the centre, which was a complex build, was built to an incredibly high standard, we recruited and trained all the clinical and admin teams, recruited leading oncologists to work with us, gained CQC (health and social care regulator in England) approval without any conditions and finally treated our first patient in August this year. A great team effort topped off by receiving wonderful patient feedback.

### **Tell us about your team?**

The team is a mixture of clinical and admin. The clinical roles consist of Therapy & Diagnostic Radiographers, Senior Dosimetrists, Medical Physicists, and Oncology trained nurses. With most independent healthcare providers, we do not directly employ our oncologists, they are granted practising privileges that mirror their NHS clinical practice. The admin teams are here to ensure the patient referral pathways are seamless, always making sure our patients have rapid access to our services and that advice, guidance and treatments are personalised at every step of their journey.

I'm immensely proud of the team, in particular around their development and knowledge of Proton Beam Therapy. I believe this part really sets them apart as experts in their respective fields as they

are collectively giving patients of the UK a different, potentially more effective treatment.

### **What are the Centre's core visions and values?**

For us, patient wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do. Cancer diagnosis and treatment can be a hugely stressful and demanding time for patients and their families, so we aim to offer a calm, welcoming space which is centred around the patient's needs and comfort.

### **What does 2019 hold for the Centre?**

2019 is a big year for us – we will be opening our proton therapy suite and treating our first proton therapy patients, which is a first for the region. We are all really excited to bring this treatment to those who need it, and ensure that the UK remains at the forefront of medical innovation in the fight against cancer.

### **Where do you see the Rutherford Cancer Centre in five years time?**

In five years time, Proton Partners International will have a network of Rutherford Cancer Centres up and down the country, meaning that 75% of the UK population will live within 90 minutes' drive of a centre. This will mean that we can provide access to proton beam therapy treatment for those who need it, wherever they are in the UK. I see the Rutherford Cancer Centre North East as being a centre of excellence throughout Northumberland, continuing to innovate and adapt to technological and medical advances in cancer care over the coming years, all the while doing our best to make sure patients have as positive an experience as possible.

# TRANSFORMING CANCER CARE.



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Cancer Centre North East

# COMMENT WITH... Barry Speker

barry.speker@sintons.co.uk



“

**In the UK  
the gilet only  
announces  
who is the fire  
alarm monitor  
in the office.**

”

As Christmas approached, there was total confusion about what would be a welcome Christmas present. Perhaps some semblance of confidence about the future of the nation was an unrealistic expectation. The possibilities were almost endless - acceptance of Mrs May's deal of a lifetime, rejection of it as the worst of all deals, a 'people's vote' with a variety of options, a pleading return to the EU to tinker with the terms, a Norway Plus, a general election, a TV debate if the broadcasting channel could be agreed, a Tory leadership contest, withdrawal of our Article 50 to leave the EU, a delayed vote and extension of the leaving date to give us more time and uncertainty - for further national flagellation as a path to salvation.

With all this heightened debate, we may have feared that the country would be stricken by violent protests in the streets, leavers against remainers, demanding that our elected representatives concentrate on the national interest and progress from party posturing or the pursuit of personal political ambitions. Fortunately there has been no imitation of the French Revolution going on in and around France, with tens of thousands of riot police striving to control hordes of demonstrators.

And what had brought these thousands of protestors onto the streets in the style of 1789, 1830 and 1848? Rising fuel prices plus some amorphous assault on the ruling class.

Looking across the Channel at this, the main comment in Britain was about the 'gilets jaunes', the luminous yellow vests which have become the uniform as the symbol of rejection of the established order.

Since 2008, all French motorists have been required by law to carry such a high vis vest in their vehicles in case of an accident. Like our old clunk-click campaign, the French Government had Karl Lagerfeld modelling the yellow vest saying 'It's yellow, it's ugly, it doesn't go with anything, but it might save your life'. At a stroke the angry mob was provided with a uniform to face the water-cannons and tear gas.

It seems this was one law, not(yet) imposed on us by the EU. In the UK the gilet only announces who is the fire alarm monitor in the office.

But then the French have always been ahead of us, even in terms of revolutionary outfits, from sans-culottes to bonnets rouges, note the famous Delacroix painting of Marianne, symbol of the French Revolution wearing the red Phrygian or liberty cap.

The gilet shows that it is not just about being revolutionary but about being seen to be revolutionary. In this, the gilet has enabled them to

be truly high visibility. And very economical. But not so chic!

The serious risks to health from smoking and drinking as well as the adverse social consequences of alcohol excess, have produced strict legal limitations and dubious warnings such as 'drink responsibly'.

At last there is now to be some effort to control the ills from excessive betting. As President of NECA (North East Council on Addictions), I am well aware of the widespread misery resulting from addiction to gambling.

The reliance of sport upon gambling is not confined to commercial TV channels. With nine out of 20 Premier League Clubs and 17 of 24 in the Championship carrying adverts for betting companies on their shirts, even the BBC becomes an advocate by the visibility of betting advertising.

The betting industry through the Remote Gambling Association suggests there are 430,000 'problem gamblers' in Britain (55,000 aged 11 to 16) and a further two million at risk of becoming one.

It is refreshing, and a relief, that the RGA has agreed a voluntary ban on advertising during live sports broadcasts. This may be an end to the gravelly and growling East End voice of Ray Winstone during televised matches urging on line betting - '10 to 1 on Hazard to score next' - 'but bet responsibly!'.

This may be a tactical move by the bookmakers in the knowledge of mounting political pressure against them and their vast profits - the real focus is on uncontrolled social media advertising of betting, and the conduct of it online. Controlling that will be a greater challenge.

The announcement of Fiona Bruce (54) as the replacement for David Dimbleby (80) as the new host of BBC's *Question Time* from January was said to be from her impressing the interviewers with her 'authority, warmth and ability to connect with the audience'. Impressive that the other candidates she beat to the job were Nick Robinson, Kirsty Walk and Victoria Derbyshire.

There may be a Beeb financial saving. Her salary is expected to rise to £550,000 (still rather less than Gary Lineker's £1.75m) but to the relief of her adoring fans she will continue to present the *Antiques Roadshow* and *Fake or Fortune*.

Will those gentle shows prepare her to control the inflated egos and verbosity of the Panel of 5, 6, 7 politicians, keeping them to the point and making them answer the question, while engaging with many haranguing audience members?

Happy 2019 to all!



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