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INSIGHT INTO THE REGIONAL MARKETPLACE



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INSIGHT INTO THE REGIONAL MARKETPLACE

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Welcome

Welcome to the fifteenth edition of Imagine, Nigel Wright's annual in-house magazine for our regional markets across the North East of England, Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

Our combined region continues to deliver impressive results across employment, trade and business growth. Unemployment figures have reached a 40-year low, while employment is at an all-time high. Regional firms are enjoying strong domestic and export sales.

In 2017, the North East created more employment opportunities from foreign investment than anywhere else in the UK, bar London. A healthy business environment puts the region in an excellent position to attract further inward investment during the year of the Great Exhibition of the North, where the opportunity to shout about all the North's positives has never been greater.

It's no surprise that regional companies are confident of success in 2018. A recent report highlighted that around two thirds of businesses will recruit staff this year. Brexit remains a concern, though, as well as skill shortages and the retention of talent. As ever, firms must listen to the wishes of a changing workforce and improve their cultures to ensure they attract and retain the talent they need.

Nigel Wright is celebrating 30 years of strengthening employers' capabilities in 2018. This success follows investment in new offices, as well as building capability into our temporary recruitment practice while expanding further in Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

I'm also pleased to tell you that Nigel Wright collectively raised over £14,000 for its charity of choice, Cancer Research UK, in 2017. An incredible effort by the teams here in the UK and across Europe.

In this edition of Imagine, CEO Martin Lawlor explains how value-added thinking is behind Port of Blyth's ongoing success. HC-One's David Smith discusses investment and growth for the UK's largest care home provider, and Gentoo's Keith Lorraine OBE reveals the skills CEOs need to become effective Chairmen. Also included are articles on blockchain and procurement, and interviews with leaders from Premier Tech Aqua, Newcastle University, Armstrong Watson and The Great Run Company.

Thank you for your continued support and, as ever, we welcome any feedback on the content.

Mark Simpson
Group Executive Director

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FEEDBACK

We would be delighted to hear your comments on this edition of **imagine**.

Alternatively if you would like to contribute to the next edition, please contact us on 0191 222 0770.





Nigel Wright raises over **£14,000** to help combat cancer

Nigel Wright Group has been fundraising throughout 2016-17 for Cancer Research UK. Employees across our 13 European offices have been involved in activities that have raised over £14,000.

Fundraising has included regular initiatives such as a tuck shop, raffles, dress-down days, as well as one-off challenges. The biggest fundraising event took place during a weekend on 8-9 July 2017, when Nigel Wright employees accepted the challenge of completing The Yorkshire Three Peaks. Over 30 employees from across our offices participated in the walk.

Most of the group completed the challenge of walking more than 24 miles over the peaks of Pen-y-Ghent, Wharfedale and Ingleborough in under

12 hours and everyone enjoyed the experience however long it took. Nigel Wright's Marketing Director, Justin Barlow, commented: "We were delighted to complete this challenging event and other activities to raise over £14,000 this year. We have now raised well over £35,000 for Cancer Research UK during the last three years. If any employee has an idea for raising money for this worthwhile cause, then we'll happily support them."

Cancer Research UK's Carolyn Reynolds praised the Nigel Wright



Raffle prizes were kindly donated by some of our clients

team saying: "Nigel Wright staff are brilliant supporters of Cancer Research UK. It is fundraising like this that directly contributes to our research and in February we were delighted to invite staff from Nigel Wright to celebrate the discovery of a life-extending cancer drug developed in the region.

"Rucaparib offers a lifeline to women with advanced ovarian cancer. Rucaparib is one of an exciting new group of drugs known as PARP inhibitors that specifically exploit a defect found only in the cancer cells, allowing the tumour to be targeted with less harm to normal tissues than can be caused by less targeted treatments like chemotherapy. We receive no government funding for our research, so companies like Nigel Wright are the backbone of the work we do."



Tyne crew to take on 3,000-mile Atlantic rowing challenge

Team Tyne Innovation, a group of four North East professionals and amateur rowers, are preparing to take on the 3,000-mile Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge in 2018, the world's toughest rowing race.

TEAM **TYNE**
INNOVATION



In completing this extraordinary challenge, the team – led by former Reece Group CEO, Phil Kite – plans to demonstrate the innovative spirit alive and kicking in the region by incorporating products and services coming out of local businesses, colleges and universities, as well as to raise money for local charities.

Setting off in December from La Gomera in the Canary Island the team will work in pairs (two on two off) to row across the Atlantic Ocean on a 3,000-mile trip which ends in Antigua. The current record for a four-man crew is 35 days, but the four could face up to two months on the ocean as they battle the elements, 50-foot waves, and physical and mental fatigue.





To help them make the journey in the safest and fastest way possible, Tyne Team Innovation is seeking innovative products and services that will improve the speed of the boat, enhance crew performance, offer greater protection from the elements, generate energy for subsystems and improve communication.

The race attracts national and international media attention every year and getting involved means local organisations are guaranteed a platform from which to showcase their innovative wares to local and global audiences. Tyne Team Innovation also plans to leverage the Great Exhibition of the North, by touring their boat and its innovations around iconic North-East locations throughout the summer.

Several organisations have already offered their support including AkzoNobel, who will provide their latest marine coating paint; Newcastle University who offer expertise in Sports Science, Nutrition and Sports Psychology and Nigel Wright Recruitment, who will help with marketing, networking and funding support.

The Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge is a self-funded race, and while Team Tyne Innovation has set a goal of raising £100,000 for its chosen charities, they must also raise an additional

£100,000 to cover racing and equipment costs. To do so, they are offering Gold, Silver and Bronze sponsorship packages, as well as a 'membership club' for 250 businesses.

More people have been into space or climbed Everest than have rowed the Atlantic. This is a not only a herculean effort by four willing adventurers, but also a chance to raise the profile of the North East as a world leading center for innovation.

To find out more including how to get involved, please visit: www.teamtyneinnovation.com



Changing and embedding cultural transformation

When Paul Dickson was appointed to the Board of accountancy firm Armstrong Watson in 2008, it marked ten successful years with the business. During that time, he'd led and grown the financial services team as well as launching an asset management division, handling almost £900 million worth of client accounts.

Having joined Armstrong Watson in 1998, Paul had long enjoyed leadership oversight, gaining an intimate understanding of how the business operated across its multi-locations in the North of England and Scotland. What he determined was a mis-match between a fast-changing industry and Armstrong Watson's culture. In becoming a Board member, he proposed a project that would transform the 150-year-old firm and prepare it for the challenges ahead.

According to Paul, it became apparent to him early on there was no real clarity from a Board perspective around who Armstrong Watson was and what the firm was trying to achieve. While the different divisions had their plans, the business lacked a joined-up focus. Each Partner, he claimed, would have given a different response when quizzed about the firm's identity and objectives. With a workforce increasingly demanding structure and a sense of purpose from their chosen employer, as well as clients seeking "partners" offering "collaborative solutions" rather than traditional instructive accountants, it was necessary, in Paul's view, for Armstrong Watson to change its approach or risk falling behind competitors.

In 2008, an external consultancy was hired to facilitate strategy workshops at the firm where employees — including Directors, Partners and Managers — came together to conceive a road map for where Armstrong Watson was, where it wanted to get to and what it needed to do to from a cultural perspective to achieve its ambitions. Discussions focused on basic things such as what being part of Armstrong Watson meant, as well as "what good looked like" regarding the ideal employees the firm wanted to attract. Clients were also engaged as the firm sought to understand perceptions of what it was like to deal with Armstrong Watson.



Paul Dickson



The result of these sessions was agreement of the culture the business wished to adopt, underpinned by four core values — trust, honesty, passion and humanity. These became the starting part of the firm's cultural journey and transformation, which was formally launched in 2009.

In outlining the four values, Paul highlighted how they helped focus the business on meeting the needs of its clients while embedding a desirable culture. Companies don't hire accountants to tell them what to do anymore, he explained, but rather they want to find a partner who will "work with them, will get involved in their business and understand their issues." Associating its brand with 'Passion' reinforced the message that Armstrong Watson only hires people enthusiastic about what it does — helping family-owned clients run successful and profitable businesses, achieve prosperity and secure a future and peace of mind for their families. "Changing lives for the better," said Paul, adding: "Everybody at Armstrong Watson should be clear about this objective and passionate about delivering it."

Regarding trust, it was a simple sentiment, according to Paul — it reassured clients they could always be confident that the business would deliver on its promises. Internally too, in his words: "the value acts to remind employees to trust their colleagues, demonstrate integrity and, at the most basic level, be polite and invest time in each other." Honesty and humanity are linked to this. When conceiving the desirable culture of the firm, Paul and his peers expressed broad agreement on imbuing an open, honest and above all, fair working environment. Critical to achieving this was promoting an empathetic approach when dealing with difficult situations:

"Whether its performance management or having tough conversations with clients, having empathy for the other person is essential. Feedback must always be given in a humane way."

The process of "distilling what good looks like" at Armstrong Watson also led to establishing a further five key competencies (can-do positive attitude and work ethic; client-focused; commercial, practical and efficient; people-focused; and team working and internal influence) intrinsic to the firm. In addition to trust, passion, humanity and honesty, these nine factors became foundations for a competency framework allowing the business to test for these qualities, as well as technical skills when hiring. Even if a prospective hire demonstrates exceptional technical skills, if they have behavioural competency shortcomings, they won't get hired. Paul explains:

"The competency framework allows us to drill down exactly what we mean by each area; so, for 'can-do positive attitude,' we'll consider the language they use in their interview, and ask for examples of where they've gone the extra mile for a client or when they've taken ownership of a task. Everybody who comes for an interview at Armstrong Watson receives a copy of our culture booklet beforehand, to help them prepare. They can judge for themselves too — if they don't like what they read they can drop out of the process."

Paul admitted that even eight years since the launch of the cultural transformation project, the firm doesn't always get its hiring right. Once a person joins, though, and it becomes clear a disparity between the firm and the employee exists, the issue is soon rectified. The rule, he



"The result of these sessions was agreement of the culture the business wished to adopt, underpinned by four core values — trust, honesty, passion and humanity"



“It’s generally agreed that while an individual may show technical prowess if they don’t fit the culture they won’t fit with Armstrong Watson clients either”

noted, is to accept short-term pain for long-term gain. It’s generally agreed that while an individual may show technical prowess if they don’t fit the culture they won’t fit with Armstrong Watson clients either.

These circumstances, though, don’t arise often. Paul says the desirable objective, in line with Armstrong Watson’s values, is always to “develop people and help them become the best that they can be in their field.” This rationale approach, on a case by case basis, encourages managers to acknowledge that if someone has broadly ‘got it’, but has some behavioural competency development areas, the onus is to work with that person in the most appropriate way to improve certain areas, like any business would if an employee had a gap in their technical knowledge. The competency framework also forms parts of the firm’s appraisal process and employees are rewarded, and progress through the salary bands, based on their effective demonstration of the four values and five behaviours.

Ensuring the values and behaviours remain visible at the firm, and the competency framework linked with professional development and success helps provides clarity for employees about what is required if they wish to progress through the firm. Paul emphasised, however, how they don’t set out to produce clones. Armstrong Watson recognises that accountants by their nature are “detailed, careful, systematic types” who aren’t predisposed, for example, to expressive passion and enthusiasm. If they’re amiable, though, then there’s no reason they can’t succeed. In Paul’s words: “We want to make sure our people can grow and develop within their team, and that their manager is coaching and developing them. It’s all about professional development and career progression, looking after people and giving them a positive experience.”

When people do step-up to managerial level, however, some focused fine tuning takes place to engender the correct style. The firm uses external trainers as well as its management development academy to get the best results, and each year all Partners and Directors go through a 360 feedback process — receiving comments from people above and below them — to ensure consistent alignment: For us, a manager is a lens through which you see our organisation. Our managers, therefore, should always represent what we stand for, exactly.”

Commercial decisions too are integrity driven, even if it means losing out on monetary gains. As Paul explains: “Any opportunity, be it people or commercial, contrary to our values, is rejected. A prime example is that we don’t allow anyone who joins Armstrong Watson from a competitor firm to breach their restrictive covenants — it flies in the face of trust and honesty to do that — and even though our competitors will do it to us, we always revert to our values to make the right choices.”

These customs and practices have become so embedded at Armstrong Watson that the firm’s leaders like to think of them as ‘what happens when nobody is looking’. With multitable locations across the North of England and Scotland, however, Paul contends that achieving 100% consistency can be challenging and takes “time and effort” to get things right. All the leadership team are encouraged to make regular visits to other offices and as Managing Partner and CEO — a role he’s held since 2011 — Paul will always aim to work part of his week at a different location.

At all 17 of its sites, the firm appoints ‘employee culture champions’ tasked with collecting ideas and feeding them back to senior management. Communication is maintained throughout the year and feedback can influence anything from office refreshments, to which charitable endeavours the firm will support. An annual business conference, where all employees come together to talk about the future, further stimulates engagement and embeds values and behaviours; and Paul himself goes on a ‘CEO roadshow’ once or twice a year delivering future strategy presentations at each location. Staff parties, charitable events and employee of the month awards, too, all make Armstrong Watson a fun place to work, as well as imbue a serious “getting down to business” attitude.



“Working life is no longer nine-to-five, it’s twenty-four-seven and if a client wants a weekend or evening appointment, they should get one”

The professional services industry, however, continues to evolve. According to Paul, factors such as a shifting power dynamic between accountants and their clients, higher service expectations and the diminishing hierarchical structures within firms, pose new challenges that didn’t exist 20 years ago. Much of this is driven by emerging technologies and amplified by a competitive market for talent. Within this environment, Paul stresses that the changes adopted by Armstrong Watson in the last two decades, alone, aren’t enough to guarantee its ambitious growth plans. Investing in technology, therefore, as well as making further adjustments to its culture, are top priorities for the firm over the next few years.

With companies seeking accounting partners that will immerse themselves in their issues, together with the prevalence of communication tools such as email, smart phones and apps (e.g. WhatsApp), Paul highlighted how clients have naturally become more demanding of their accountants’ time. Consequently, interaction with clients is more varied with the workload, far greater. These changes, he notes, have required Armstrong Watson to take a more modern and flexible approach to work:

“Working life is no longer nine-to-five, it’s twenty-four-seven and if a client wants a weekend or evening appointment, they should get one. We acknowledge, however, that our people, too, want more agile and flexible working environments. And if they’re expected to operate outside of ‘normal’ business hours, they should have the required flexibility to meet these client needs. In 2018, the message to our people is ‘we don’t care when or where you work, as long as you’re delivering for our clients.’”

Offices will still play a key role though, providing venues for client meetings as well as encouraging collaboration and embedding the identity of the firm. Paul sees a collaborative team approach as being the “ultimate factor that will guarantee the right outcomes for clients.”

At the heart of Armstrong Watson’s cultural transformation process is a desire to become recognised as an attractive place to work, as well as the first point of call for family owned businesses seeking strategic advice on how to become successful and profitable. Paul is confident that the firm’s ongoing dedication to evolving and embedding its culture, has achieved both wishes. What is evident is the quality of talent the business has attracted in recent years — in some cases, even luring people from the ‘Big 4’ — as well as positive feedback received from clients. In Paul’s words: “All the hard work we’ve put into our culture is coming to life in the experiences of our clients. That’s incredibly rewarding.”

On the back of its 150th year celebrations in 2017, which included commissioning ten portraits of family owned clients — some of which the firm had represented for over 100 years — Armstrong Watson entered 2018 with a positive outlook for the future. Its current three-year plan sets the business on course to turn over £23 million by the end of this year, and over £32 million in 2020. That’s through organic growth, investing in people and technology and taking market share. If it is to become the go-to firm for family-owned businesses in the North of England and Scotland, Paul admits they will need a bigger presence in Leeds, North Lancashire and West Cumbria, as well as entering central Scotland – the acquisition of Haines Watts in Glasgow in January 2018 a first step in achieving that aim – and a gaining a profile in the North East. Achieving success in all these areas will see the firm double in size, but thinking big isn’t a problem for Paul:

“Fundamentally, we’re building a strong, profitable, regional firm. All the Partners are aligned and pulling in the same direction and we’ve got clarity on what it is we’re trying to do as a business. If we get hiring and training right and make shrewd investments in our infrastructure, anything is possible.”





Local manufacturer resurgent under new leadership

Premier Tech Aqua UK (PTAU) is an industry leader in packaged water and waste water solutions across the UK and Ireland. The business, previously known as Condor Products, first opened its doors in Peterlee, County Durham, 44-years ago. It since played an integral role in the UK's environmental technologies industry, offering an impressive range of innovative product lines. In 2013, the company became part of Canadian multinational, Premier Tech, adopting its name and integrating into its Environmental Technologies Group.



The move strengthened the company's position and enhanced Premier Tech Aqua's presence in Europe. Though, as with any integration, the process of embedding a new identity and engaging and uniting the workforce under a renewed vision, takes time. Since Steve Joyce's appointment as Managing Director

in mid-2016, however, that process has accelerated. He tells Nigel Wright what attracted him to the opportunity and outlines his achievements so far, as well as PTAU's plans for further growth during the next three years.

Premier Tech launched over 90 years ago in Québec State, Canada, where its Headquarters is still based. Today, it has over 3,800 team members across 24 countries and is a genuine global player in Agriculture & Horticulture, Packaging Machinery and Environmental Technologies markets. In managing a Premier Tech Business Unit (BU), Steve confirmed there's a high demand to deliver quality products at fair prices whilst continuing the growth plans for the BU and the Group:

"We're looking to grow quickly and, as well as being a leading brand, my attraction to this opportunity was the

level of autonomy afforded to the local Management Team. For me that means a winning combination of being a 'Glocal' partner for clients, with the flexibility to support local markets assisted by the global Premier Tech family. Our market growth potential and strong global identity will enable PTAU to play an integral part in the Group's ambitious expansion plans and develop the UK BU into a major player in the packaged, small flow wastewater treatment market in the coming years."

During the past 18 months, two significant teams have been brought together to develop the business in the UK. A new "dynamic" management team has been assembled which, in Steve's view, allows PTAU to align itself with up-to-date manufacturing methodologies and modern approaches to marketing and digital communication. Also, a fully resourced sales team will drive improved market share for PTAU's products and enable the



“Steve admits his most satisfying achievement so far has been the impact he and his team have had on morale”

business to achieve organic growth. Meanwhile, Steve and his leadership team have a target list of potential acquisitions that will help PTAU develop its existing portfolio, as well as enter new market segments: “We have a superb team in place to underpin the next phase of the growth strategy; a focused group of people offering depth and breadth across different areas, driven and excited about delivering a better business.”

While successful commercial and leadership improvements have been conceived and enacted during his first 18 months in the job, Steve admits his most satisfying achievement so far has been the impact he and his team have had on morale. Simple yet effective communication and actions have been the key to this development and Steve believes they have helped team members feel more engaged. This is evident in the number of improvement suggestions (over 100) and the number of Single Point Improvements (SPIs, again over 100) that the teams have been involved in during the past 12 months, allowing PTAU to make positive small-step changes: “Levels of inquisitiveness and more people wanting responsibility, immersing themselves in the team working ethic at PTAU, is having a snowball effect on organisational change. Team members now

show willingness to propose improvements and deliver them too.”

Recruitment at all levels has also been deliberately focused on re-energising PTAU's culture. Steve claims there's now a better mix of experience and emerging talent in the business. While 70% of the workforce has worked at the Peterlee site for more than ten years, 20% of team members joined within the last three years, creating a balance between experience and knowledge alongside new ideas and fresh energy. Furthermore, new development initiatives including measuring all team members on current and future skills and broadening internal training programmes to ensure people have the capabilities to perform their jobs, as well as provide cover for other roles, has facilitated positive change. This, Steve confirms, is driven by PTAU's mantra: 'recruit attitude; develop skill'.

The successful launch of Solido SMART – a shallow-dig waste treatment plant and a new addition to Premier Tech's global portfolio – was the first product launch managed entirely by PTAU, showcasing Steve and his team's impact during the last 18 months. While divisional input during early phases was provided by German and French team members; the final design,





“This illustration of hunger and ambition is indicative of the types of people we need in this business”

prototyping, testing, pre-production, production and marketing were all delivered by the Peterlee team. It was the first product from the Peterlee plant since Steve joined and he highlighted its effect on belief and confidence: “Everyone here recognises that we have the depth of experience and enough discipline and drive to deliver a successful project. We are now applying similar principles and cross BU teamworking to the transfer of the Ecoflo product from our French BU to Peterlee.”

A particularly pleasing outcome of the Solido SMART launch is the emergence of new talent. One young engineer, Dan Espley, for example, showed such appetite and desire to lead a successful project as part of the launch, that he will now join other team members in Premier Tech's Management development programme at the University of Premier Tech in Canada in early 2018: “This illustration of hunger and ambition is indicative of the types of people we need in this business and the University of Premier Tech, launched two years ago, will enable us to hone the skills and attitudes of PTAU's future managers.”

Steve noted several career development avenues available at Premier Tech, including internal training, as well as sponsorship for further education, internships and apprenticeships. He praised the region's educational structure which he believes has a depth from entry through to university level, and said PTAU has always been impressed with and benefited from training programs available across the North East to support individuals and the broader business community. A recent collaboration with Durham University saw two final year engineering students join PTAU during the summer to work on projects relevant to their dissertations. The research conducted by one of the students has had a big impact on the business, helping to identify where several process improvements could be made. That individual has since remained in contact with PTAU and plans to visit the site again soon.

PTAU will also take on apprentices for the first time in over a decade in 2018, offering them mixed experience across commercial, maintenance and manufacturing areas of the business, while three team members will work as enterprise advisers for a local schools' programme, promoting career opportunities within manufacturing: “As a North East employer, it's our responsibility to nurture local talent. We never overlook the region's



workforce when recruiting and participate in educating the available talent pool about manufacturing opportunities and the types of careers people can build within PTAU. There's a variety of manufacturing jobs at PTAU and your career has the potential to develop from Peterlee to anywhere in the world where Premier Tech operates.”

Other activities taking place since Steve's appointment have been focused on bringing PTAU and the other business units that form Premier Tech's Environmental Technologies European Division, closer together. During the summer, a new system for exchanging technologies, best practices and improvement ideas was launched and Steve confirmed regular pan-European visits which have helped team members across the group become familiar with how their peers work overseas. Steve himself has travelled to Canada and France several times this year, and other PTAU team members have visited sites in Portugal and France, with those from France and Germany joining the Peterlee team to take part in shared development activities.

Another mantra 'no surprise, never a surprise' – indicative of the genuine openness inside Premier Tech – is further reinforced by 282, the Group's global intranet, named after the shade of blue used in the business's logo. As Steve explained: “The emphasis is on sharing experiences, good and bad, enabling the emphasis to be on finding solutions. The platform enables visibility across the whole



Premier Tech enterprise, where team members can interact, see what is happening in different parts of the world, share ideas and cross pollinate between business units. Growing our digital presence is something we're focusing on during the next 12 months, and our partners can look forward to a clearer and easier interaction with PTAU on all digital platforms."

When asked about any insecurities he or PTAU may have about the future of manufacturing in the region, Steve remained upbeat. Firstly, he sees Peterlee as an ideal location for exporting, with good access to the main road arteries (A19 and the A1) and local ports. Beyond that, the heritage of manufacturing in the North East, for Steve, means given the correct levels of investment

and interest by Government, it will undoubtedly have a strong future. Even the prospect of Brexit isn't too alarming: "With the correct investment, the depth of knowledge and experience in manufacturing within the UK will ensure we'll maintain a successful manufacturing base."

As such, Steve says PTAU has no intention of leaving the region and confirmed a recently agreed 15-year extension to the Peterlee site, with plans to develop the infrastructure during the next two to three years. He added: "The key message is we're here for the long term. PTAU is proud to have roots here in the North East and we want to make the best possible improvements to the business because we're building here for the future."





CIPD North East of England HR&D Awards 2017



For the fifth year running, we were proud to be the main sponsors of the CIPD North East of England HR&D Awards 2017 which celebrate the region's best HR and Development practitioners and companies.

Nearly 400 professionals from across the North East gathered at the Newcastle Marriott Hotel in June 2017 to celebrate the 11th annual North East CIPD HR&D Awards. Nigel Wright was associate sponsor of the event, which recognised the achievements of some of the region's brightest and best employers.

Among the employers recognised were Balfour Beatty, Sunderland University, Home Group and Coveris Rigid.

Nigel Wright's Sue O'Donovan said: "This year's awards were a great showcase of North East talent, demonstrating innovative initiatives across organisations of all shapes, sizes and sectors. The judging process was competitive and selecting winners was tough due to the high quality of entries across all categories."

The winners:

Excellence in Organisational Development
All Together Better Sunderland

Excellence in Employability & Diversity
Your Homes Newcastle

HR&D Excellence in SMEs
Performance Horizon

Excellence in Health & Wellness
University of Sunderland

Excellence in People Development
Coveris Rigid UK Ltd

Excellence in Resourcing & Talent
Home Group

HR&D Team of the Year
Balfour Beatty

Inspirational Practitioner 2017 Award
Dawn Robinson



We encourage HR professionals in all organisations to consider entering their company and teams for an award. The 2018 Award Categories, which are available for individual sponsorship, are:

- HR&D Team of the Year
- Excellence in Employability and Diversity
- Excellence in Health and Wellness
- Excellence in Organisational Development
- Excellence in People Development
- Excellence in Resourcing and Talent Management
- HR&D Excellence in SMEs
- Excellence in Supporting Armed Forces Talent

These may be subject to change for 2018, based on input from category sponsors. To discuss becoming a sponsor please contact sarah@cipdne.co.uk

Martin Lawlor

CEO, Port of Blyth

The Port and surrounding estuary at Blyth has changed dramatically during the last decade. Overhead cranes, engineering workshops, warehouses and large complex machinery now dominate the landscape. There's a hotel too, restaurants and a new training centre, all there to accommodate the Port's growing clientele.

Engineering giant Royal IHC moved its entire UK base there in 2015 and other 'big players' such as DeepOcean, Global Marine Group and Osbit also have sizable and expanding operations at the site. Big tenants bring with them a broad supply chain too and, in all, 500 jobs are now

based on the land. "The whole place looks and feels different than it did ten years ago," says CEO Martin Lawlor. "It looks like a good place to invest."

These developments have taken place under Martin's astute leadership, who since joining the business as Commercial

Director in 1994 before his appointment as CEO in 2006, has overseen its transformation from a traditional "ship to shore" handling operation, to a unique "one-stop-shop" of Port related solutions. With a £23 million turnover and three back to back record years of growth, the Port of Blyth is one of the fastest growing Ports in the whole of the UK. Vision, geography and market forces, Martin tells Nigel Wright, have propelled the business forward.

It all started with a belief that modern Ports should seek ways to add value to customers. Traditionally, Port Authorities exist to ensure vessels arrive and dock, cargo is lifted to the terminal ready for collection, and the vessel is then moved out of the Port. All goods handling and warehousing services, though, are outsourced to third party suppliers. Most still adopt this approach too, Martin notes, following what's referred to as the '80-20 rule' whereby 80% of boxes go through a port unopened. Port of Blyth's "value adding mentality", however, has reversed this rule, as Martin explains:

"Our customers benefit from goods handling, warehousing, complex lift management, training and other





associated services. Around 80% of cargo passing through the Port is taken to our warehouses, emptied and palletised. Transped, our worldwide logistics subsidiary, does door-to-door and 'Just in Time' deliveries if required. And we offer these services across different sectors. Supermarkets, for example, and even the coal trade. Coal is a simple thing to handle but most Ports won't do it."

The main driver of its recent success, however, is the Port's emergence as a major offshore energy hub. With most Port activities now linked to renewables and oil and gas, according to Martin, they've met the needs of operators seeking to broaden their sector focus amidst challenging market conditions. Furthermore, because Blyth sits between Aberdeen and Great Yarmouth, two other large energy focused Port Authorities, Blyth has become a strategic mid-North Sea base for everything offshore energy related, as vessels no longer want to bypass the North East.

Because of its recent success, customers in this industry are flocking to Blyth to take advantage of the business' unique way of working. In Martin's words: "The growth of renewables and offshore wind has taken the edge off issues in

oil and gas. Diversification into other sectors like renewables helps vessel operators drive efficiencies by servicing different markets. Using different ports, too, as well as different methods and innovations, means the costs of production are improving. The sector has both stabilised and morphed into something more robust. Few purely oil and gas or renewables companies remain. We've offered a different solution to those companies who have been forced to rethink how they work — it's been a win-win for everyone."

Several organisations have moved into the Port in recent years, and it boasts some major tenancies like those previously mentioned. The Port, too, though, must continue to evolve to meet the high demands of these companies. Infrastructure, Martin highlights, is an essential part of the package and with rapid growth into different sectors, investment in strengthening quays, installing overhead cranes, building warehouses, as well as converting warehouses into workshops has been a major focus in recent years. Running alongside this is the 'Energy Central' proposal, a concept developed together with Northumberland County Council's development arm Arch in 2013, to help attract investment around the estuary. This work will



"With most Port activities now linked to renewables and oil and gas, they've met the needs of operators seeking to broaden their sector focus"

continue throughout 2018, alongside a bigger project of joining together the Bates and Wimbourne Quay Terminals. Martin explains:

"Our South Harbour Terminal is already close to capacity, so combining the Bates and Wimbourne Quay terminals represents the beginning of our next phase of growth. It means we will have one large 15-hectare terminal with access to the Enterprise Zone, which we've developed in conjunction with Northumberland County Council. The town, too, benefits because in completing the project we're also creating a new flood wall for Blyth. We expect the project will be completed in the summer."

Talent acquisition and retention is another critical factor the Port must get right. Big customers like Royal IHC, DeepOcean and Osbit need competent people and Martin says ensuring relevant high-level skills on site is all part of the Port's value-add way of thinking. Having its own training arm, Port Training Services is advantageous and through this organisation, the business up-skills employees to reinforce its reputation and expertise in renewables and oil and gas. Its industry leading Port Operations apprenticeship also welcomes applications every year and such is Port Training Services reputation that it now routinely delivers courses at other Port Authorities across the UK.

Moving forward, as part of the estuary expansion, Martin confirmed the business is working alongside key clients to establish a training hub with the view of introducing even more specialist skills. He added: "We're not just another Port Authority. We get under the skin of our customers, involved with their operations and aligned with their way of working. A true partner."

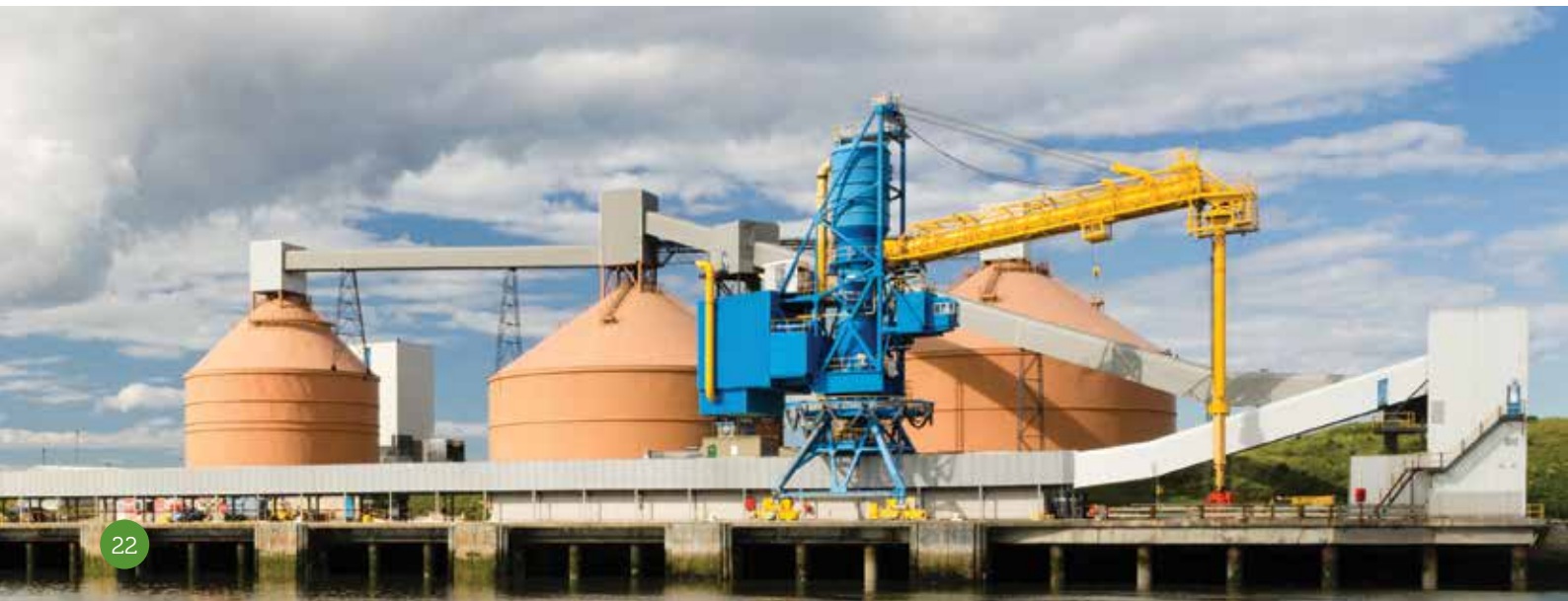
A brand new service offering with the Port acting as a decommissioning site for nearby oil and gas fields will become available soon. A two-year process to secure a licence was completed in November 2017, and conversations are now taking place with prospective partners. Focusing on small 'top-side' gas field structures located in the North Sea, as well as below the surface materials, Martin says it's a logical move given the Port's location, while several of its customers are also interested in offering decommissioning related services. Furthermore, the licence means guaranteed revenue streams for the Port regardless of the health of the oil and gas industry. In Martin's words:

"Much of the hard work is done and we're ready to go. Developing the site will only take a few months, but we're waiting to see which structures may come ashore first. In the meantime, we're talking to our land-side partners who would do the actual decommissioning. This is a long-term opportunity and we likely won't see much activity in this area until 2019."

It's all going extremely well, says Martin, and he expects the Port to continue its rapid growth through further investments over the next few years. The town of Blyth, too, will benefit from the Port's ongoing success. As well as the direct impact it's already had on the hospitality industry, initiatives such as inviting local primary school leavers to the Port's training centre to learn about potential careers, and attracting Newcastle University and Northumberland College to become part of the Blyth Education and Community Hub, all help raise the profile of the area as a place to live and work.

Through its collaboration with Northumberland County Council and Arch, the Energy Central concept is also going from strength to strength. Already home to the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult — the UK's flagship research centre for wind, wave and tidal energy — the estuary also now hosts the operational base for EDF's Offshore Demonstrator Wind Farm that is located just 5km off Blyth. This year, work will begin in earnest on the world's longest electricity interconnector — a 354-mile power cable that will stretch from the Northumberland shoreline to Norway, allowing for capacity sharing of electricity by the two countries. And the next catalyst for the area, Martin confirms, is the £26 million redevelopment of the former Blyth Power Station that will set the area up for the next decade and beyond, he explains:

"The site sits on 35 hectares of land and investment will focus on land reclamation as well as building a new quayside. Only a few developments of that scale are currently occurring in the UK and it will help us double the number of Energy Central jobs between now and 2022. All these achievements have a snowball effect, and what's more, we've got one or two other potential inward investments which we're expecting to announce over the course of the year."



Nigel Wright reveals its response to changing attitudes to work

“Organisations that refuse to adapt their tools, invest in the acquisition as well as training and development of skills, and completely rethink their environment, risk being left behind.” Sounds like pretty sound advice, who offered it? Oh... we did. Last year.

Published on September 20th in an article titled 'Work is changing: what does it mean for talent attraction and management?' we urged companies to align their talent acquisition and retention strategies to the modern world – acknowledging the changing nature of work, as well the pressures of modern life and how they impact the wants and needs of today's talent.

The piece is indicative of literature still 'doing the rounds' in the world of HR and management consultancy and, as any article purporting expertise, it made Nigel Wright itself appear 'on the ball' in this area. But were we? Maybe. We were certainly trying that's for sure though, at the time, it was more a case of 'Do as We Say, Not as We Do.' 12 months on, however, things have changed and we're now able to reveal solutions that have worked for us. First, a recap of the social and work-related factors driving companies to reimagine their approach to culture, training and talent management.

Insecurities have been paramount during the last ten years. As the world still recovers from the great recession, other endless socio-economic, geopolitical, demographic and environmental upheavals and events, underpinned by rapid technological advancement, still exasperate individual anxieties. Even now, during an apparent growth spurt for the world economy, as extreme poverty continues to fall and North America and much of Western Europe enjoy record rates of employment, a sense of uncertainty continues to pervade our social and working lives.





The recent World Mental Health Day was a timely reminder that although many people may appear to be thriving, they're in fact barely making it through the day. In the UK, for example, one in four people are affected by mental illness and annual prescriptions for mental health related drugs have doubled during the last ten years. While the factors listed above are likely part of the problem, it's also not uncommon for people to refer to everyday life as being too frantic — amplified perhaps by a perceived need to feel constantly connected via email, phone, social media etc. Overstimulation, psychologists say, which leads to mental fogginess and prevents us from being our best.

Amidst this environment, however, a backlash is taking place. Historically fixed attributes of work (hours, location, contracts) are being challenged as people try to claw back, if anything, the required headspace to cope with contemporary life as described. Working hours have been in decline across Europe for years and a recent report by PwC highlighted growing demands from workers to be released from the 'constraints' on 9-5 employment. Similarly, research by Dell has revealed how remote or home working is on the rise, while a move towards specialist and portfolio freelance work is dismantling traditional career paths and removing people from the talent pool.

These changes also coincide with a new breed of employee — the millennial. This 'Google generation' want instant access to a better career and they want it all too: A salary with perks, constant reassurance and praise, stability as well

as flexibility, and a job and working life that gives them purpose. Recent research from Gallup confirms, however, that millennials are in fact the driving force of workplace changes, leading the charge across organisations by demanding the things it turns out EVERYONE, regardless of their age, actually desires.

Working life isn't what it used to be and working life will continue to evolve. The challenges outlined above are faced by all companies and with talent hard to find, especially with high employment surely people investment is more important than ever before?

It is well documented how modern organisations are adapting to the new world of work by creating 'enriching environments' in an effort to make their talent want to stay. While factors like attractive remuneration and benefits packages remain important, initiatives that support personal growth, health and wellbeing and workplace culture, for example, that encourage genuine feelings of respect and dignity among staff, are become more important. Embedding company values and aligning organisations with perceived 'positive impact' causes, such as those linked to charitable or environmental affairs, also helps to boost beneficial reciprocity through tying people into a larger common purpose.

There is acknowledgement, however, that not all businesses are the same, and different approaches are needed in different contexts. That is exactly the attitude Nigel Wright took when seeking to embrace change, using an approach of genuine engagement, rather than



“These changes coincide with a new breed of employee — the millennial. This ‘Google generation’ want instant access to a better career and they want it all too”

cautious distrust. Starting with informal group discussions with millennial employees, we began to conceive solutions that worked for us, rather than following what other companies were doing. These conversations were then backed up with data from a formal annual employee survey giving us a broader insight of the needs and wants of our whole organisation.

Learning and development was the most popular request from millennials as well as from people at all levels in our 2016-17 employee survey. Furthermore, and perhaps unsurprisingly, our people generally wanted more money and more time off.

Starting with training, we wanted to recognise our internal strengths and utilise them in coaching, rather than outsourcing the problem. Now, all new starters at Nigel Wright receive 100 hours of formal training and development from managers and directors in their first six months. This is supplemented by on the job mentoring and coaching. Furthermore, all new managers across the group attend sessions at our North East HQ — the centre of excellence for employee training and development at Nigel Wright — and senior employees from the North East business visit other offices (e.g. London) to deliver training to the UK and international teams.

Yes, money and other perks are important but they need to be associated with the right behaviours. At Nigel Wright, hard work, good service and achieving results get rewarded. All our consultants enjoy uncapped bonuses based on effective efforts to win work and deliver it. Other perks are on offer too including our high flyers scheme — where each quarter a group of 'Top Billers'

take a day off to enjoy a paid-for trip to a city where one of our 13 offices is located. 'Top Trumps' is also available to those below senior or management level, where successful consultants are treated to food and drink at the company's expense.

Finally, in addressing the requests for more flexibility and time off we decided to broaden permission for informal working arrangements. All employees are now able to work from home and leave early or start later, to fit with personal commitments. Other formal flexible working patterns exist too. With regards to time off, an extra day off per year is now offered for every year's service completed, up to five years. Employees can also 'cash in' any additional holidays above 25 days if they wish. For those loyal employees who complete five years' service, they can enjoy a paid month-long sabbatical, to use in addition to their 30 day allowance, and do something they couldn't otherwise do while working a full-time job. This benefit is repeated again for all subsequent five year anniversaries.

The 2013 Trust Barometer report, published by global PR firm Edelman, confirmed that public trust in the opinions of employees far outweighs that of a company's PR department, CEO, or Founder. A combination of understanding the changing nature of work and the pressures of modern day life, together with listening to our employees and acting to satisfy their wants and needs – within a context that matches our ambitions and vision as a business – ensures that Nigel Wright staff tell great stories about their time here and encourage others to consider a rewarding career with us too.



From CEO to Chairman:

learning the art of subtle leadership

As Group Chief Executive of Isos Housing, Keith Loraine grew its housing stock from 800 to over 30,000 units during a 25-year tenure.

A lifetime advocate of social housing, he helped establish Isos's reputation for providing the highest quality affordable rented homes, building and managing a workforce of over 800 dedicated staff, and, through his involvement with the National Housing Federation, NECC and the CBI, playing an influential role in developing national housing policy. His achievements were recognised with an OBE in January 2017, which also marked the beginning of his retirement.

Nine months later, however, Keith was back into the fray as Chairman of Gentoo, the Sunderland based Housing Association

(HA) after they appointed a new Board following Group consolidation. Keith speaks to Nigel Wright about his motivations for re-joining the sector in this new capacity and gives an insight into the experience of transitioning from CEO to Chair.

After an "enriching and rewarding career" in social housing, in 2016, age 62, Keith felt it was time to step back and spend more time with family. As well as husband, father and grandfather duties, he was enjoying playing more golf while starting the process of ticking off his 'places to visit' list. He admitted he had no desire to return to work, but on hearing Gentoo was seeking a new





Keith Lorraine



“While both are responsible for business performance, unlike the Chief Executive, the Chair doesn’t carry the daily pressures”

board member, knew it was an opportunity he needed to pursue:

“After stepping down from an important job which carries an awful lot of pressures and excitement, you get used to being retired, but when something that you’re passionate about presents to you an opportunity which might not come up again, it’s hard to ignore. I’ve still got family in Sunderland and have an affinity with the area. Joining Gentoo means I’m giving something back to my hometown, after a successful career outside of it. When you’ve spent 40 years doing work which absorbs you in a cause, it’s hard to let go.”

Keith was the ideal man to guide Gentoo through a difficult period, but under no circumstances did he view this move as a backwards step. As a leading light in the local housing sector, Keith noted his enduring respect for Gentoo throughout his career and is confident that the business has the right infrastructure and attitude to continue delivering great services to people in Sunderland.

While Keith will play a vital role in repositioning Gentoo, it will be from a different perspective to his previous roles. Having worked with several Chairs over the years, he’s certain of how to make his appointment a success. As

Chairman, he noted, he enjoys the privileged position of having an overview of the entire business, identifying organisational strengths and weaknesses, and challenging the Chief Executive and executive team and their decisions and actions, but in a positive and constructive way. While both are responsible for business performance, unlike the Chief Executive, the Chair doesn’t carry the daily pressures and therefore has more space and thinking time to work on the business rather than in it — planning and stress-testing, while keeping business strategy and corporate structures under review.

Culturally, too, the Chairman and Board have significant input. Keith sees them as the guardians of the organisations values and highlights how, without any profit distribution, the main driver for a housing association is ensuring cultural alignment. Yes, over the years, HAs have become more diverse and commercial and not dependent on one area of business, but from an organisational perspective, Keith says this has created greater complexity requiring “sophisticated” leadership approaches to ensure service excellence: “You’re not solely thinking about the bottom line but rather focusing on making people’s lives better. Yes, building, repairing and refurbishing houses is what HAs do but it’s not the primary focus. The primary



“Delivering good governance can be tricky, especially when you’re not involved in the day-today activities”

focus is the people who inhabit them. Engaging our people and helping them connect with customers, therefore, is key. We often do this better than our private sector counterparts.”

As Chair, Keith must ensure that the right messages are coming from the very top. Effective board meetings and delivering good governance can be tricky, especially when you’re not involved in the day-today activities of the business. It’s important, he says, to peel back the layers and not always accept everything you hear at face value. During the limited time the board is given to satisfy their curiosity, it’s essential, in his view, for them to dig deeper and trust their professional and business instincts when faced with difficult or key decisions, flagging anything they sense will help expose risks or failures. After a meeting, the executive should never feel like they’ve had an easy ride.”

Therein lies the biggest challenge of a Chair — having a necessary impact while not treading too much on others, and particularly the Chief Executive’s, toes. The two jobs are very different and Keith says each must have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the partnership to work. Personal differences and differences in view on strategic direction are the catalysts of conflict. Firstly, the Board must select compatible people. Then, communication is key to avoid misunderstandings about who is doing what. Getting that relationship right will be a key determinant in achieving success. In his words:

“As Chairman, you’re not there to manage day to day operational activities, you’re there to offer a strategic overview, guidance and support. You’re often acting like a mentor to the Chief Executive, steering them to your way of thinking when appropriate, but not ever trying to do their job. Hands off as much as possible and hands on only when necessary — there will be occasions where you might have to intervene in the best interests of the business, but you shouldn’t make a habit of it — seeing the Chair around too much can be a warning sign that something’s not right.”

At Gentoo, the executive team’s response to Keith’s impact and involvement has been positive. Even though Keith revealed, there might be the odd uncomfortable moment in the Boardroom, the general feeling is that, following recent changes, the business is resilient and less likely to run into difficulties moving forward. Keith and Interim Chief Executive David Jepson already enjoy an honest and frank dialogue and have conducted several joint site visits

and staff briefings to build a bond of trust with employees. Keith has made it clear to David, however, that he shouldn’t hesitate to tell him if he feels he’s getting too involved: “I empathise with the Chief Executive. It’s like I’m a poacher turned gamekeeper. I’ve been through that experience on the other side and I know what I must do now I’m Chair, to make this a relationship which will help enrich the business.”

As well as giving back to Sunderland, performing a role which plays to his skills and experience, two other critical factors were at play in Keith’s decision to come out of retirement. Social housing, he highlights, is a political priority more so than it has been since the early days of Keith’s career. There’s widespread awareness in Government that unless we address the UK’s housing problems now, they may soon be unsolvable. Despite a lean period, a few years ago, during which HA rents were suppressed by the Government and fewer grants available to build new houses, Keith believes a new-found recognition of HA’s significant role in society has emerged:

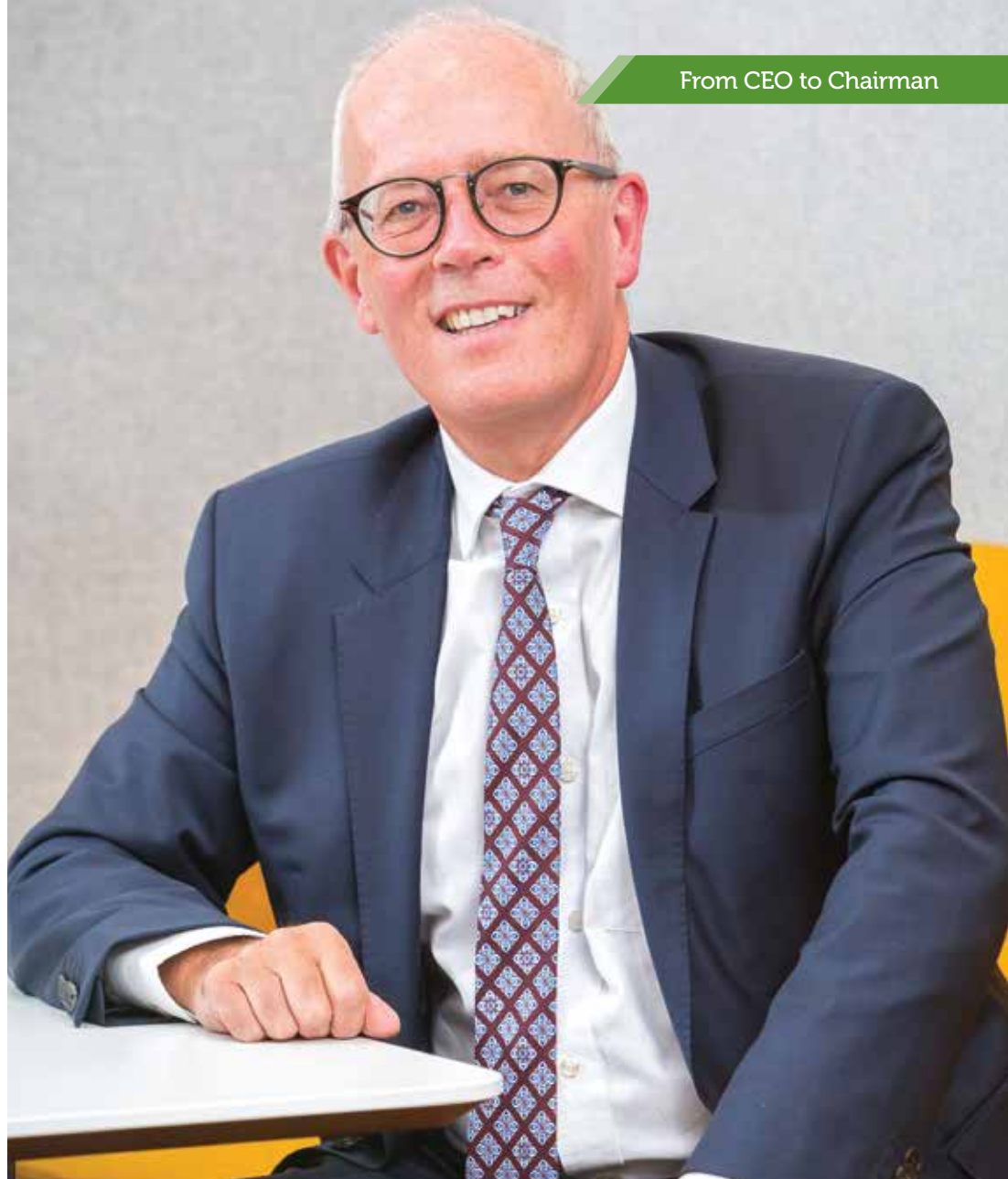
“We need to do far more than we have for a long time. Across the UK, we should be providing 300,000 new homes a year to keep pace with growing demand. The HA sector has an important role to play and Government recognises this. There’s nothing wrong with renting privately or through registered social landlords. Housing Associations provide high quality services and high-quality homes, further investment in them would help fix what many call a broken housing market.”

It’s the ambassadorial dimension of the Chairman’s role where Keith’s skills and experience come to the fore. After the Grenfell Tower tragedy and subsequent scrutiny given to building regulations — in addition to other prominent social housing issues such as universal credit — Keith explained how MPs are concerned about what’s going on in their constituencies and keen to gain insight into these areas, so they can share information with Parliament. Keith meets regularly with Sunderland’s three MPs and is impressed by their actions: “That it took the Grenfell disaster to raise the profile of social housing reflects the times we’re in, but we’ve got three terrific MPs here who want to help and who have been very supportive in recent months. As Chair, it’s vital I keep those lines of communication open.”

With almost 30,000 properties in the city, Keith estimates Gentoo has well over 70,000



“Gentoo will continue working in partnership with Sunderland City Council to build high quality homes, create improved affordable rental programmes and develop key sites”



customers. There's an awful lot expected of the Gentoo brand in Sunderland, he says, but is confident that during his three-year term as Chair, the needs of the tenants will be met. The first-year objective, Keith explains, is to satisfy the regulator that Gentoo has overcome its historical issues, that governance remains solid and its reputation as a first-class organisation is restored. With a new and capable Board in place and “up for the challenge” there's no reason, in his view, they won't achieve this. Beyond that Gentoo will continue working in partnership with Sunderland City Council to build high quality homes, create improved affordable rental programmes and develop key sites, helping the local authority meet its economic targets.

And after three years? Keith explained staying on in his capacity as Gentoo Chairman is possible if the Board decide that's what they want. Other opportunities, too, if they emerge could pique Keith's interest if it matched his professional

desire to help and have influence. Ultimately, though, he's focused on the job at hand:

“I want to concentrate my efforts on Gentoo and not dilute them with distracting thoughts about the future. Working in this sector is a privilege — getting close to tenants and seeing what makes folks tick, witnessing incredible people overcome adversity and pulling themselves through financial and familial difficulties continues being humbling and enriching. Would I stay on or accept a new challenge altogether? Never say never, but my main priority is to my family. My wife Sue likes to remind me that I'm effectively retired and there's still a few places — China, Australia and New Zealand for example — we'd like to see while we still can.”

Blockchain's revolutionary potential revealed

Slammed by JP Morgan, banned in China, its name synonymous with drug deals and data breaches, there's no doubt that Bitcoin has gone mainstream.



Launched in 2009 in the wake of the financial crash, it was the first of its kind, and many considered it a cursory novelty in the beginning. Yet this digital money continues to defy expectations, becoming the catalyst for an emerging cryptocurrency industry. While investors speculate about its future, selling opportunities amidst a cautionary trading environment, it is the technology which underpins Bitcoin which is now heralded as the true 'disrupter' of our times.

Blockchain is a fairly dull idea to explain. When two parties agree a transaction and Bitcoins are exchanged, a block forms around them preventing those bitcoins being used again by the person spending them. The technology solved the 'double-spending error' as each block becomes an immutable record confirming money has changed hands. As currency passes

on, chains of blocks become established where each block identifies with the previous block making it possible to trace exchanges back to where they began. Creating this 'distributed ledger' enables distributed control and verification of transactions in the chain.

So, what's the big deal? According to digital strategist and Blockchain expert, Kate Baucherel, the implications of the technology are huge. Currency aside, distributed immutable records (Blockchains) are now mooted for other types of exchange. These include for use in identity processing (proving who you are), asset tracking (proving previous ownership) and even within the burgeoning Internet of Things industry (e.g. preventing centralised control of CCTV data). For 'the man on the street' it could mean faster, smoother and safer

distribution of data by removing layers of bureaucracy and empowering individuals.

Much of this is hypothetical at present, of course, but Kate says we should expect profound changes once solutions emerge: "There's acknowledgment that the technology is powerful, but its true potential isn't yet realised. We don't know, for example, what the blockchain equivalent of social media will be; or what behavioural shifts will occur because of its adoption. It will, however, be massively disruptive. And the accelerating pace of change means in 20 years' time, Blockchain will have evolved a lot further than the internet did between 1997-2017."

Recent controversies surrounding Bitcoin and the subsequent restrictions on its use shouldn't stifle Blockchain innovation, according to Kate. Issues with Bitcoin lie in the unregulated nature of cryptocurrency.



“Yes, there’ll be a protracted period of instability, but because Bitcoin is now established, it’s likely here to stay”

With over 2,000 different digital currencies now in circulation, Kate suggests misuse is unsurprising as it opens the door to charlatans who trade money with little real worth or value: “It’s completely different to fiat currency because there are no gold reserves and it’s not secured, but regulation will change that. People realise that regulation is needed and are working to establish adequate systems. Yes, there’ll be a protracted period of instability, but because Bitcoin is now established, it’s likely here to stay, and evolving and broadening the uses of Blockchain remain important.”

What Bitcoin, Blockchain and the subsequent discussions of security and regulation have brought to the fore, Kate argues, is a reimagining of transparency and trust online. During the early days of the internet there existed a code of trust, whereby people relied on each other’s honour when making transactions. Now that the internet is large and unwieldy, the trust

element has disappeared and this can be seen in the pervasiveness of encryption. Kate warns us, though, that encryption’s days are numbered and new ways to keep personal data safe will evolve: “Pretty soon everything will be crackable and the solution may exist somewhere between the two extremes of transparency and anonymity. Blockchains facilitate semi-transparency by protecting data in immutable records while allowing the tracking of transactions. There’s no reason to label transparency as a bad thing, because trust can be built over time through observing behaviours.”

The assumption that Blockchain and Bitcoin facilitate criminal activity, in this sense, is misleading. Following the WannaCry ransomware attack in April, for example, no one claimed the ransom because it was paid into a Blockchain wallet. If anyone accesses it, they will be immediately traced. The recent

Kate Baucherel





“Blockchains retain data transparency while preventing data theft in a form which is usable”



Equifax hack, too, hints at the potential for Blockchain to provide greater reassurance to victims of cyber-crime. Kate explains: “If Equifax data were stored in Blockchains it would have been impossible to access it all in one single hack because data would be separated into different blocks. Even if you stole data in one block, it would be impossible to claim a whole identity without the entire algorithmic backup. Blockchains retain data transparency while preventing data theft in a form which is usable.”

With the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) enforceable from May 2018, Kate sees conversations focused on developing solutions from Blockchain technology as timely and vital. This regulation is much tighter than those which existed previously, requiring businesses to guarantee data transparency and protection while placing authority of the use of data in its owners' hands. GDPR is aimed at larger firms and Kate stresses that encouraging big companies – where there's sizable investment and pay-off in terms of improved services and cost savings – to implement Blockchain technologies first is necessary to accelerate the overall pace of adoption.

Following 25 years working in a variety of finance roles up to FD level – as the “accountant who could do tech” – Kate established Galia Digital, a freelance consultancy in 2012, which advises businesses developing or using emerging technologies. Working from Teesside, Kate believes the region has the potential to play a key role in shaping Blockchain's future: “The North East is home to some talented people with extraordinary ideas. However, the tech-economy is still relatively new, and as well as needing more established businesses driving innovation, there should be clearer ways

for people with great ideas to make the right connections and turn their ideas into marketable products. Once we achieve a start-up ecosystem with these elements, something amazing will emerge here.”

When she's not working with clients, Kate travels the world speaking at international conferences and contributing to the literature on the use of digital tools and the legislation and ethics surrounding them. Like many technology experts, however, Kate is also an avid fan of science fiction and in October she published her debut novel, *Bitcoin Hurricane*. The story introduces the mysterious @SimCavalier, a cyber-crime fighter operating in 2040s London who, while defusing a routine cyberattack in a city bank, uncovers a major global threat. Originally planned as non-fiction book, the challenge was laid down to make the topic of cyber-security more accessible, in the form of science fiction. Kate admits she knew little about writing fiction prior to embarking on the 12 month process. Now, however, she's caught the bug and revealed a @SimCavalier series is in development: “I love writing, but you've got to write about what you know. I don't want to end up writing about things that are obsolete, I want to keep learning, and I expect the output of what I learn will end up coming out in more novels.”

To find out more about Kate Baucherel's work as a digital strategist, speaker and author please visit: www.galiadigital.co.uk



Brewing growth stirs overseas markets



Founded in 1886, C. E. Taylors & Sons, a Yorkshire based tea and coffee merchants, would have faded into history like countless other small regional tea and coffee importers – but for the fact that in 1962 it was purchased by Bettys, the iconic Yorkshire Tea Rooms.

Since then – and renamed as Taylors of Harrogate – it has grown to become a national treasure. With turnover tripling in the last decade, profits increasing and its flagship brand Yorkshire Tea securing a place amongst the UK's best-loved brands, the business continues to prove that doing things 'proper' leads to success. But what does 'proper' mean to the Harrogate headquartered company? Taylors Managing Director, Andy Brown, says it's simple: "A combination of making great products, creating consumer love and doing the right thing for the long term. Through sticking to these principles, our business has gained a reputation for compelling brands and great tasting products, being a great place to work and for really caring about what we do in relation to people and the planet."

A veteran of the FMCG industry, Andy swapped a 'blue-chip' career following roles at P&G, Mars and Asda to join Bettys & Taylors as Group Finance Director in 2001, becoming Taylors of Harrogate Managing Director in 2009. And it's under Andy's helm that the business has made significant inroads into a UK beverage market for years dominated by iconic staple brands. His priority early on, he recalls, was building a team to create a strategy for growth and to develop best practice: "I've always been a strong believer in recruiting the best people and building a strong team. From the start, it was a top priority for me. I sought to form a team with a mixture of experienced members and some key new appointments - notably new marketing, sales and HR directors. Together we then developed a strategy for Taylors centred on growth across several different platforms, whilst strengthening our business's capability."

Those senior appointments enhanced and, in some cases, brought new skills into the business; introducing better agencies and forming external partnerships along the way. The result, as



Andy Brown

Andy highlights, was a significant step change in performance: "I believed that getting the right people in place would give us the foundation we needed to deliver our objectives. As we strengthened capability in the business and our brands gained greater prominence, so our results started to improve. And bigger brands with a stronger reputation allowed us to be more influential, accelerate growth and attract even better people. We



“We’ve produced some engaging and compelling campaigns that have given the brand a strong personality”

built confidence and created momentum that allowed us to do more significant things and deliver even stronger results.”

Taylors growth has principally been driven by Yorkshire Tea, which accounts for one in six cups of tea drunk in the UK, making it the second black tea brand behind market leader PG Tips. It has also ranked in YouGov’s Brand Index of the UK’s top ten most loved brands for the last three years and is the only FMCG brand to make the cut. Investment has been focused on brand building as Andy explains: “We’ve produced some engaging and compelling campaigns that have given the brand a strong personality. It’s seen as being fun – not taking itself too seriously.” He’s adamant, however, that while brand affinity is important, the product must taste great and in the case of Yorkshire Tea, the quality has remained the best: “When someone drinks a cup of Yorkshire Tea for the first time, we want them to appreciate how good it tasted and to come back for more. Our advertising and promotions help to make this an easy choice for them the next time they’re in the supermarket – even if it means paying a little bit more.”

Taylors of Harrogate coffee is also the UK’s leading filter & cafetiere ground coffee brand with a third share of the market and best-selling products such as ‘Lazy Sunday’, ‘Rich Italian’ and ‘Hot Lava Java’.

What’s most impressive about the meteoric rise of Taylors is that its core brands have grown in shrinking markets. Consumption of black tea has been declining in the UK for several years. And

while coffee consumption is increasing on the high street, growth at home is being driven by new formats like coffee capsules and pods, and not in traditional ground coffee which had been Taylors’ mainstay. Andy and his team recognised their main markets were offering limited returns and set about investigating in new strands to complement them. Their solution was threefold: launch a range of speciality fruit, herb and green teas in supermarkets; start producing coffee capsules and bags; and grow international sales.

The first two, Andy explained, are UK focused and about delivering Taylors’ superior quality to consumers through different formats: “At home, people are experimenting with different flavours of tea, as well as using more equipment, especially when making coffee. Not so long ago, you had a box of black tea in your cupboard and some instant coffee. Now consumers often have an array of speciality teas, coffee capsules and filter coffee too. We need to ensure that we satisfy these changing tastes and avoid being too narrow in our focus.” He added that the trend in North America for iced tea and chilled coffee is spreading to the UK and Taylors has recently established an R&D function with a newly appointed Head that will seek to drive high-quality technical innovation across different product formats to meet diverse tastes.

The main opportunity for growth, however, is international. Taylors, Andy explained, has long had a small international export business, but since targeting new markets and creating new distribution agreements for Yorkshire Tea, sales have tripled. In Andy’s words: “A breakthrough

occurred four years ago when Coles and Woolworths, the biggest grocery retailers in Australia, started to sell Yorkshire Tea." Other markets followed and Taylors now export to over 20 countries. A newly appointed International Director will now focus on growing these markets as well as developing business in new ones.

While growing Taylors brands internationally will be a priority for the next few years, closer to home Taylors is focusing on building greater awareness of the Taylors of Harrogate brand. Although the market leader in the ground coffee category with a presence in speciality tea, the brand is relatively unknown. "We want Taylors of Harrogate to be more widely recognised as a quality brand with a creative portfolio of products developed through our passion for extraordinary flavour" said Andy. "We're currently relaunching new packaging designs, range extensions and advertising to support this."

The family business is also building capacity and infrastructure for the future, with plans in place to invest in IT, new buildings, machinery and facilities – as well as people – over the next two to three years. Investments in new tea blending and packing facilities are planned at Taylors manufacturing base in Harrogate, with work due to start later this year. As Andy explains: "One of our aims is to have a manufacturing site beyond compare." A new Operations Director has been brought in to support this development.

Bettys & Taylors Group employs 1,400 people across Yorkshire, 400 of which work for the Taylors business based at its Harrogate factory and nearby distribution warehouse in Knaresborough. As Andy highlighted, having most employees based on one site facilitates a highly collaborative and engaging culture – something that is very important to the family shareholders – the descendants of Bettys founder, Frederick Belmont. And while Taylors uses a limited number of co-manufacturers, there's a long term commitment to the manufacturing base in Harrogate.

Maintaining the sense of 'connection' and building strong relationships is also something which extends to the business's supply chain, where a strategy of working in partnership with farmers and producers has led to recognition by various bodies including the Rainforest Alliance and a prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise for Sustainable Development. In Andy's words:



"We're committed to working collaboratively with farmers and suppliers to promote long-term sustainability of supply. Our supply chain embraces 1 million workers and farmers in 24 countries, mostly developing nations facing mounting challenges such as the impact of climate change, decreasing productivity and quality, and rural poverty. Our aim is to establish partnerships with suppliers, underpinned by the belief that 'we're both in this together'. In practice this involves working with them to identify and address sustainability challenges and establishing long-term contracts that provide suppliers with security."

Just one example of the business's impact is its work in Kenya. Here, the family business has worked with suppliers to install rainwater harvesting and filtration systems in 50 schools and community centres, bringing fresh water to 27,000 people, and supported secondary school children with educational bursaries. While many of the projects are funded solely by Taylors, the business also works in partnerships with others, such as an initiative in India with UNICEF and other tea companies to address the issues facing adolescent girls. A significant, long-term project in Rwanda to help rebuild the tea and coffee industry following the 1994 genocide, with funding from the Department for International Development, has allowed Taylors to significantly increase purchases of quality tea and coffee from Rwanda, whilst improving standards and working conditions.

These activities, however, are not restricted to the business's activities overseas, as Andy revealed. "We've been promoting environmental protection and supporting our communities since 1990 when former chairman and CEO, Jonathan Wild, established our Trees for Life campaign. During the last 25 years, the business has enlisted the support of customers and employees to plant more than three million trees worldwide." A current partnership with Woodland Trust is supporting tree planting in schools and getting children interested in the environment. Andy confirmed Trees for Life is also extended to Kenya, where the business is working to plant a further million trees: "The trees will provide tea smallholders and farming communities with fruit and additional income, as well as deliver environmental benefits such as soil conservation and carbon sequestration."

A strong consumer brand and reputation for high ethical standards, Andy claims, improves your employer brand and makes attracting the best people easier. The business has also worked hard to create a culture which reflects the personality of Yorkshire Tea — open, friendly, warm, informal but professional, where everyone is encouraged to take pride in 'doing things properly' while at the same time enjoying their work, having some fun and 'not taking ourselves too seriously'.

When asked if the Harrogate base was ever an issue for recruiting staff, Andy admitted that attracting city based 'blue-chip' talent can be a problem in some disciplines, though on balance, the location seems to be an advantage for Taylors: "People often want to get away from city life, particularly if they have families. Harrogate is a nice place to live and offers a great quality of life." The scale of the Taylors business, he highlighted, is also attractive to those who want to develop their career away from a big corporate as



“A strong consumer brand and reputation for high ethical standards, improves your employer brand and makes attracting the best people easier”

it's "...small enough for individuals to have real influence and impact on the business, whilst large enough to do meaningful things in the world, with sizeable household brands and international reach."



The most impactful aspect of the Taylors of Harrogate culture, however, is the emphasis on collaborative and cross functional working, something, which Andy noted, is modelled from the top: "We don't have one Group CEO. The job is shared between myself and four of my executive colleagues, forming what we call our 'Collaborative CEO'". This unique model provides leadership and oversight of the strategy and development of the Group, whilst supporting the businesses in delivering their independent strategies. Leaders at all levels of the business are encouraged to influence decisions across functions rather than 'just because they're the boss' and as Andy explains, this allows people to have a better understanding of how the whole business operates "from bean or leaf to the cup". Team and personal development focuses on individual needs as well as those of the business, with Andy asserting the importance of ensuring employees have "fulfilling roles in which they are able to be themselves and show their full potential". This, he says "is the key to a happy workplace and a successful business."

North East Marketing Awards 2018

Following the success of the North East Accountancy Awards and the CIPD North East of England HR&D Awards, we're delighted to announce that we are involved in launching the North East Marketing Awards 2018 with event organisers, Echo Events.

There is a huge wealth of talent in the marketing sector in the North East and we want to celebrate and showcase the creativity, innovation and passion that stems from teams across the region.

The Awards recognise excellence in the fields of marketing, digital and PR from all industry sectors operating in the North East. Whether you are a marketing agency, in-house marketing team, service provider or a public sector organisation we encourage nominations and attendance from all marketing teams and individuals.

There's no better feeling than walking on stage and collecting that award. Knowing all your hard work, enthusiasm and diligence

have been recognised, not only by your company and clients but by the whole region.

But there's more to the Awards than that. The journey starts long before the night of the awards and is a fantastic way of placing your company in the spotlight. Finalists are announced months before the awards through the press, social media and industry bodies, as well as the awards website and email marketing. Promo banners are sent to display on your email signature and website, offering valuable promotional activity for you and your company.

The Awards dinner will take place on Thursday 18th October 2018 at The Biscuit Factory, Newcastle upon Tyne. The evening is a celebratory black-tie event which includes a welcome reception, a three-course meal and the awards ceremony.

This is your chance to nominate your company's marketing team and individuals to receive the recognition they deserve. For more information and to submit your nominations for free, please visit northeastmarketingawards.co.uk.

Deadline for nominations is Monday 16 July 2018.

Award categories:

- Rising Star of the Year
- Marketer of the Year
- Marketing Director of the Year
- Digital Campaign of the Year
- Integrated Campaign of the Year
- Not for Profit Campaign of the Year
- Brand Creation of the Year
- Product Launch of the Year
- Agency of the Year
- In-House Marketing Team of the Year
- Outstanding Achievement Award



Investment in temporary recruitment practice

The number of people employed on temporary contracts in the UK has doubled during the last two decades and some reports suggest it could double again by the end of this one as more people strive for greater flexibility and autonomy in their working lives.

A recent study confirmed that rather than temporary work being the bastion of Millennials, it's those over 55 who represent the fastest growing age bracket attracted to an impermanent working lifestyle.

This should be good news for employers, as experienced contractors can make an immediate impact with little or no intervention. Companies can expect higher standards in terms of knowledge as well as the right qualifications and motivation. Furthermore, those operating at a senior level are adept at assimilating into new environments and driving change, turning projects around and communicating with key stakeholders without fear of raising sensitive issues.

Building capability into its interim recruitment practice is a major priority for Nigel Wright. Launching a new office in Wynyard was a key part of this development and we've also hired three senior consultants during the last 12 months to fast-track our contractor market expansion. We have dedicated temp recruiters specialising in finance, sales, marketing, HR, engineering, manufacturing and supply chain across our Newcastle and Teesside sites and expect to add further capability in the months ahead.

One new face at Nigel Wright is Jackie Coppell, who joined the business in June 2017 to manage our IT contracts team. Jackie has been involved with talent acquisition in the technology industry for over 20 years. After 15 years working and living across Australia, New Zealand and South-

East Asia, Jackie returned to the UK in 2014 and, prior to joining Nigel Wright, developed a new EMEA division for a global recruitment business.

Associate Director, Ben Debnam commented on the appointment: "I'm delighted to welcome Jackie to our business. Her appointment will help us consolidate our status in IT Contractor management, and grow market share in this vital area of the economy. Jackie has an excellent reputation for finding and placing high quality candidates so I'm confident she'll be a huge asset to our clients."

Jackie commented on her new role, saying: "Nigel Wright is a fantastic brand with a strong reputation in the region, and I'm pleased to have joined the business at an exciting time.

We have big plans to expand our service offering across my specialist area and with a great team behind me, I'm sure it will be a success."



New national data centre to provide skills boost to UK businesses

Newcastle will be the home of the UK's National Innovation Centre for Data (NICD) in 2019 when a new thirty-million-pound facility opens at Science Central in December that year.

Newcastle will be the home of the UK's National Innovation Centre for Data (NICD) in 2019 when a new £30 million facility opens at Science Central in December that year. Co-funded by Newcastle University with an additional £15 million investment from Government, the centre is a huge coup for the region and will guarantee jobs and inward investment, as well as delivering much-needed upskilling to the local talent pool. Steve Caughey, who's been involved in developing NICD since its origins inside the University's Digital Institute, explains to Nigel Wright the untapped potential and visionary thinking behind the initiative.

According to Steve, academics working across several disciplines at Newcastle University have, for a long time, struggled with data analytics and data visualisation. Historically, he highlighted, people would approach IT for help in accessing the latest analytics technologies but solutions weren't always forthcoming. A leading group of data researchers based at Newcastle University discovered this sticking point in the journey of research and, a few years ago, they established a virtual team to assist other departments to analyse their data. This became known as the Digital Institute (DI) and since its inception, DI has helped to raise an additional £50-100 million pounds for the university, by helping academics produce better quality proposals and do better research.

Because of DI's success, Steve and his colleagues decided to approach local Government for funding to enable the team to take their solution beyond the walls of the University, and proactively approach businesses to see if they could help them better leverage data. Recognising its potential, Newcastle City Council together with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, awarded

DI £1 million in 2015 which it used to build the Cloud Innovation Centre (CIC) in Newcastle.

As head of the Cloud Innovation Centre, Steve has spent two years meeting with businesses to explain how important big data analytics technologies are, outlining implications of these technologies on business models. Part of this engagement, he explained, included those involved with CIC leading 'design reviews' where firms could trial some of the analytics technologies used by researchers and see what they could achieve, as well as



Steve Caughey

learn some 'do's and don'ts' when engaging with data. The CIC engaged with over 250 companies and Steve says a consistent message emerged:

"All the businesses we spoke to were convinced, after seeing what's possible using the latest technologies and approaches to data science, that they needed help. The reality is that factors such as social media or the increased use of sensors and IoT, means companies of all sizes are collecting a vast amount of information on customers and employees. They know there's gold there somewhere — insight that would enable them to improve operational efficiency, products or services — but are aware that internal tools and skills are inadequate to tease wisdom out of the data."

The perspectives gleaned from those who attended CIC's workshops are reinforced by a CIO Insight study that indicated 66% of decision makers say they don't have the skills to implement Big Data solutions, despite 90% identifying Big Data insight as relevant for their business. Furthermore, recent OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) research demonstrated how companies that adopt big data analytics can increase productivity by 5-10% more than companies that do not. Given that, according to ONS, compared with the rest of the G7, the UK has below average productivity growth in both output per hour and output per worker, Steve was emphatic about the importance of marrying together data scientists with business, to unleash data potential:

"By only scratching the surface of their data, organisations risk failing fast in today's digital

driven economy. Huge digital skills shortages, with data analysts and data scientists being particularly rare, means data scientists are now the highest paid graduates within 18 months of leaving university. Without the necessary tools and skills in-house, nor with those tools and skills forthcoming any time soon, the CIC model was clearly the answer to this business dilemma."

Steve notes that the data skill "sweet-spot" is combining computer science and maths — maths to understand the problems, computer science to find the best solutions. Those who study for a Ph.D. at Newcastle University's Digital Institute are either mathematicians or computer scientists trained in each other's disciplines for a year before they go on to do a formal Ph.D. Businesses, according to Steve, find it difficult to find these people; attracting them to Newcastle is another stretch, as is luring them away from big banks and other 'high paying' employers. He added: "The ideal for employers, therefore, is to train their own people in specific skills, using their tools, working on their data, and solving their problems — that's what we at CIC facilitated through our joint projects."

When Steve and his colleagues at CIC approached the Treasury, armed with stats and case studies from two years' worth of design reviews, they were awarded £15 million to build NICD (National Innovation Centre for Data). Newcastle University then matched the £15 million invested by Government. Steve says Government is willing to fund this initiative because it recognises a pressing need to break down barriers between business and academia. Academics, he argues, are measured and



"They know there's gold there somewhere — insight that would enable them to improve operational efficiency, products or services — but are aware that internal tools and skills are inadequate to tease wisdom out of the data"



“Companies interested in partnering with NICD will identify problems and send employees to the centre who will work alongside these data scientists to solve them”



rewarded on research output with the result being a vibrant academic eco-system that rarely spills over into business:

“Researchers locked away inside universities largely don’t understand the needs of business, and businesses don’t realise what’s available behind university walls. NICD is all about engagement. It’s about creating links between universities and the public and private sector; bringing them together and helping them extract value from their data while providing them with valuable skills and even IP. There are few formal measures that determine the success of an academic career and organisation beyond its contribution to research. The situation is changing, though, and NICD is part of the solution.”

So how will it work? Steve says NICD is “CIC plus” and will deliver data assistance to businesses but on a much grander scale. The centre itself will employ a core team of around ten experts in data analytics. Companies interested in partnering with NICD will identify problems and send employees to the centre who will work alongside these data scientists to solve them. Projects will typically last three to six months and the result will be a tangible data driven solution — such as a piece of bespoke software – with employees returning upskilled and enthused to train colleagues in what they’ve learned. In addition, NICD will host events and seminars aimed at a broad range of businesses and sectors, as well as provide commercial spaces where data analysts from companies

can hot-desk, and refresh their skills and upskill while visiting. “It will be an iconic, warm, attractive building. There are two floors of public space, seminar rooms, a 3D theatre, a TED-style theatre, workshop spaces, and a café on the ground floor. NICD will have one floor as will the National Innovation Centre for Ageing. Then the top floor is the commercial space.”

Steve anticipates it will be bigger companies with large amounts of stock, distribution networks and supply chains and large customer bases that will benefit most from NICD services. Often, in these contexts, company data is still held on paper, spreadsheets or Access database format and isolated in silos. NICD will help these companies to get their data into one place and then perform analysis on it, discovering problems and gaps, patterns and anomalies, and ultimately, solutions. Examples include measuring the success of marketing campaigns by analysing unstructured social media data, interrogating UX data to fine tune products and services, and utilising sensor data to help manufacturers to achieve incremental improvements and efficiencies:

“These scenarios require ‘scalable cloud computing’ to crunch large quantities of data and the application of complex maths to achieve results. Those are areas where we can add value. We’re not a consultancy, though; we’re not doing the work for these companies, we’re working with them to help them understand how to go about solving these forms of problems. NICD will be driven by the demands of business



“Large organisations are rarely agile or flexible. So, the way big organisations can innovate is to engage with SMEs doing innovative stuff”

and in working with us, they will learn things that will help them grow.”

Steve confirmed that one NICD project is already live and enquiries are starting to come in from local businesses as well as companies considering relocating to, or housing data analysis practices in the region, to be near the centre. While NICD has a national remit, Steve pointed out that co-location will make it easier for firms to engage NICD on projects and in the wider data “eco-system” it hopes to create. This not only refers to the events, seminars, workshops and other learning and networking opportunities taking place but also to the specialist skills provided by SMEs who will be brought in to assist on projects, adding to the overall value chain. He explains:

“Large organisations are rarely agile or flexible. Rather than investing in R&D, many are primarily focused on being operational and efficient. The outcome is a lack of digital innovation taking place within these companies. So, the way big organisations can innovate is to engage with

SMEs doing innovative stuff, and then buy them or their products, thus creating a digital eco-system. With an SME based eco-system, you can get much closer engagement with the people doing innovative work — and they can transform your business.”

At NICD, Steve envisions a vibrant community of technologists, business development, sales and marketing professionals, and venture capitalists, all located in the same space. The centre will also retain close links with other relevant bodies such as Scotland's Data Lab, the Alan Turing Institute, The Open Data Institute and the Digital Catapult, all which conduct research into data science and promote the sharing and access of public sector data, as well as digital transformation generally.

He added: “The question is not whether you could form a Google or a Facebook, but whether you can create an eco-system which might create a Google or a Facebook. We firmly believe NICD is an essential piece of the jigsaw to help release the potential of UK businesses and launch them onto the world stage.”





The World's Favourite Run

Running the business smarter

Paul Foster became CEO at The Great Run Company in 2017, determined to continue the success of the business his father, Brendan, founded in the 1980s. The former BBC Producer and Director of Match of the Day had spent the last ten years running FilmNova, The Great Run Company's TV production arm.



Paul Foster

While the CEO opportunity came around quicker than expected, he told Nigel Wright he had no hesitation in stepping up and taking the reins:

"My career in sports production has always been focused on developing the skills, knowledge and experience that would enable me to progress into bigger roles. I've moved from being a TV producer to running a TV production company and, naturally, I've become more involved

with the wider Great Run Company business during that time. When the CEO opportunity came up I knew I was ready for the next challenge — it's a fantastic opportunity, with an iconic brand."

The Great Run Company's story began in 1979 when Brendan Foster, a former medal winning Olympian and long-distance runner from County Durham, took part in the 'Round the Bays Race' in New Zealand. Already in its seventh year, this mass participation event has grown

from one to several thousand runners and was now a regular 'big occasion' for Auckland City. It was like nothing Brendan had seen before in the UK, and in returning to the North East, he became determined to create something similar in Newcastle.

Fellow members of Gateshead Harriers athletics club thought him crazy — running still being a niche activity at that time — but Brendan's energy and enthusiasm got the event off the ground and the first ever Great North Run took place in 1981. It was indeed the first of its kind in the UK and, almost 40 years on has stood the test of time.

Throughout the 1980s the event became so successful that it warranted organisational support to facilitate its growth. In 1988 Nova International was formed to provide various functions including managing race operations, the 'View From' sportswear brand, a PR agency and magazine publishing division, as well as FilmNova. It was during the 1990s, however, that Nova International



“Throughout its formative years and up to the present day, the business has always been emotionally invested and entrepreneurial in its approach”

sharpened its focus, launching several additional events across the UK such as The Great South Run and Great Manchester Run, increasing its annual participant numbers to over 300,000.

Today, The Great Run Company – the name chosen following Nova International's rebrand in 2014 – manages over 20 annual nationwide running events, employing 70+ people between its Newcastle and London offices. Despite its phenomenal growth and now global ambitions, Paul says the company's founding principles will always remain embedded in the firm's culture: “Brendan is an evangelist for running and still believes more people should engage with the sport. All he's ever wanted to do is inspire people to give running a go. 38 years on that aspiration is still at the heart of our brand. Wherever we go — be it the North East, the UK or anywhere else in the world — The Great Run Company wants to inspire you to get active and take part.”

It's this culture piece where Paul's leadership will come to the fore. He explained that throughout its formative years and up to the present day, the business has always been emotionally invested and entrepreneurial in its approach. While there's nothing wrong with this, the sheer size and logistical complexity of its operation today means smarter informed decisions, and less spontaneity, is necessary to drive it forward. To achieve this, Paul is clear about what he must do: “It's my job to ensure everybody here understands how The Great Run Company works, what its competitive advantages are and

is clear about our objectives and the strategies that will help it achieve them. This deeper understanding will empower our people to make smart decisions — led by the head as well as the heart — at all levels, enabling them to reach further and contribute to the success of the business.”

This isn't, however, something that will happen overnight as Paul explained. First, he says The Great Run Company's vertically integrated model means each division and function — with teams covering commercial, marketing and communications, customer services, IT, Finance, HR and Project Management in addition to Event Operations, Film Nova and the publishing division — require different strategies, but alignment at the same time. Another aspect underpinning the drive for smarter thinking is competition. While the Great North Run may have been a unique concept in the UK during the 1980s, it's not anymore. And, as Paul highlights, since the 2012 Olympic Games the market for running and other mass participation events has grown, whereby in most 'Great Run' cities other running, as well cycling and sporting challenges such as Tough Mudder, now take place throughout the year. These two factors are at the heart of Paul's vision for change:

“We've had to respond to the competitive environment in a commercial way — innovating our digital offering and investing in our products to ensure we get the best television coverage and PR. We're a complicated business, though, and there's not one size fits all solution. What





“If we embed our objectives and promote an ethos of good decision making at all levels, the company will become more efficient and quicker to react to challenges and opportunities”

we do know is that a top-down decision-making structure creates too many bottlenecks and stops us innovating quickly. If we embed our objectives and promote an ethos of good decision making at all levels, the company will become more efficient and quicker to react to challenges and opportunities. That's what I want to hammer home. I intend to spend as much time as needed to ensure we get in this position.”

Obviously, this means building a team of smart, motivated people prepared to accept and take-on responsibility. Paul says his current team already demonstrate many of the qualities he seeks in the business. He's also enthused by The Great Run Company's emergence as an employer of choice, particularly in the North East, indicative in some of the successful 'senior' appointments the business has made, following competitive recruitment processes. It's building capability within the digital sphere, however, which has had the most impact recently.

While The Great Run Company delivers physical experiences, Paul explained how the online community that's sprung up around its events is now the “round the clock heartbeat of the business.” Learning how to maximise that opportunity whilst giving more value to customers is a key priority. Furthermore, Paul revealed the business is currently building a second generation online entry platform, replacing a system developed back in 2006, which is more geared towards modern digital marketing and CRM. With 300,000 customers a year, The Great Run Company must use new technologies to get closer to them, understand their needs, provide better experiences and offer support throughout the process of training and right up until the race itself. He added:

“Digital is the single biggest transformation in our business during the last decade and for anyone with an interest in developing a career in digital marketing, working at The Great Run Company will allow you to make a big difference if you bring fresh ideas and skills. Also, it's rewarding. What may start as connections on social media, or via a successful email campaign, leads to you watching people pouring over the finish line. That's a unique perspective of how marketing works.”

Cultural transformation as well as investments in talent and infrastructure, while helping to consolidate The Great Run Company as a market leader in the UK, will also facilitate its future expansion overseas. A recent partnership with Belgium based Golazo Group, for example, will see The Great Run Company increase the footprint of its brand in various European markets. Golazo operates mass participation running, cycling and other elite sporting challenges across Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal and Italy. Through association with these events, the Great Run brand will reach over a million participants during the year. Founder, Bob Verbeeck, like Brendan, is also a former Olympian, and Paul believes his energy together with the synergies between the two brands will lead to several beneficial opportunities down the line:

“It's a fantastic partnership whereby we'll maximise opportunities in the UK and Europe – and eventually outside of Europe – to try and take the Great Run brand global. This is advantageous for Golazo too because it ties them into the Great Run's heritage and story. It won't be an overnight success, but it represents genuine long-term potential.”



Will further expansion though – especially outside of the UK – risk diluting the heritage of the Great Run brand? Absolutely not, according to Paul. He says a gradual change over the years in how the business managed its event portfolio has strengthened rather than weakened its brand. During the early days, he explained, the Great North Run formed a key part of all Great Run event marketing. This was wrong, Paul says, because trying to replicate its success in other cities rendered everything that was special and unique about the seminal event meaningless. When it became apparent that creating the Great North Run everywhere wasn't feasible, the business shifted its approach. In Paul's words:

"The Great North Run is unique because it's one of the first events of its kind. What we celebrate during the Great North Run is the strength and identity of our region. It's the character of the city and its people, as much as anything, that makes the event. Now, when we host events elsewhere, the focus is on promoting the heritage of those areas, rather than that we're the brand behind the Great North Run. We work alongside local authorities and the press to promote the event as celebrating the area and those taking part. Our messages are clear — it's an amazing run in your city, open to everybody and that which the whole area can enjoy."

Creating these local connections has had a powerful impact on Great Run events. The Great South Run, for example, which takes place in Portsmouth, is now in its 29th year and has around 25,000 annual participants. Its runners, Paul says, are multi-generational, and by telling their stories — i.e. 'my grandfather took part in the first ever event, so it became a family tradition' — The Great Run Company

has been able to create a legacy for that area. Other Great Run events in Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow also benefit from their long association with local communities: "Everybody knows somebody who's taken part before and it encourages people to talk about one day running it themselves." Paul added: "These events are 'big deals' in their own cities. It's wrong to compare them to the Great North Run."

And what about the Great North Run? Well, Paul says it's a landmark event for the North East and as famous as the region's football clubs. While its heritage and history are important features of its enduring success, in his view, the most significant factor is the race's "huge impact" on the local economy. The Great Run Company's most recent economic impact study showed a return of £23.7 million pounds to the North East coffers. With 60% of runners travelling from outside the region bringing, on average, two additional people it's easy to see how the event has a beneficial cumulative effect. What's important too, according to Paul, is it's consistent — "you can set your clock by it" — and the national attention given to the region through TV coverage is always positive.

Following its one millionth finish in 2014, Paul and his team are now setting their sights on the 40th staging of the race in 2020. He notes that the current average age of Great North Runners is 38, so in 2020 the run will, in fact, be older than most of the people taking part. This interesting detail, which provides a nice reminder of the longevity of the event, is helping inform ideas of how the team will celebrate this milestone. Paul confirmed that some "TV moments" will form part of the day, though conversations are taking place about creating a more permanent reminder of the occasion. He added:

"The Great North Run remains the UK's favourite running event. Last year we had a record number of finishers and we're delighted with its ongoing success. Our other events, too, continue to go from strength to strength. Great Manchester Run is now the third biggest running event in the country, while the Great South Run has the fifth highest number of participants year-on-year. Customer loyalty is what makes these occasions special. Those that come out and support races along their routes are as important as the runners themselves. We hope to see more people again in 2018 and our plan is to continue celebrating the cities and regions which host us."





University embraces art of the possible in HR modernisation programme

When Judith Whitaker heard Newcastle University needed a new Executive Director for HR, she knew she had to apply.



Judith Whitaker

The Lancashire born former HRD turned COO of the DVLA previously worked in the region for several years, delivering transformation and change at Newcastle Primary Care Trust and later the Audit Commission. Joining the DVLA and moving to Wales in 2008, she admitted she never wanted to leave the North East. Now she's back and since January 2017 has been busy developing a programme of modernisation which will see HR play a central role in supporting Newcastle University staff to become the best that they can be. She talked to Nigel Wright about her passion for HR and shared details of the major actions taken so far to unleash people potential.

HR plays a critical role at Newcastle University. With 6,000 employees covering everything from gardeners and cleaners to world leading musicians and neuroscientists, it presents a complex though enticing proposition. This, as well as the University's values and visionary outlook, persuaded Judith that it was the perfect reason to return to her adopted home:

"My husband was an undergraduate here and stayed for 30 years; my daughter spent her formative years up

here too. We love the North East, but I did my due diligence first anyway to understand the University's values. What I discovered was all good. The culture is very inclusive, challenging and respectful and the leadership team is totally committed to organisational development. Those on the Executive Board work closely together and all decisions are made in a considered way. It's a solid, sensible, aspirational and people-centric organisation and it feels good being here."

In some ways, Judith admitted, one of the most difficult aspects of her role early on was selling the idea that internal change was needed. Her 80-staff covering HR, health and safety, organisational development and talent management — based in Newcastle as well as the university's campuses overseas in Malaysia and Singapore and supporting its campus in London — in her words are "brilliant" and "have been doing a fantastic job for several years." The new Vice Chancellor and President, Professor Chris Day, however, was very clear when hiring Judith that her modernising approach and skills across the whole of HR would help stimulate his broader aim of making Newcastle University achieve its potential. Judith explains:

"Chris and the Executive Team's view is that, compared to other Russell Group universities, Newcastle doesn't



“Nothing needs fixing, but it can all get incrementally better”

shout as much about all the brilliant things it does. To change that, it needs to develop its technology as well as its culture to deliver its emerging vision and strategy. I'm not, however, here to change the world. Rather, I'm looking to maximise the opportunities for the brilliant people who work here. Nothing needs fixing, but it can all get incrementally better.”

Judith's HR modernisation programme will focus on improving four key areas, the first being IT, and specifically the platform for recruitment. With thousands of UK and international vacancies to process each year, Newcastle University's recruitment system must be slick and reengineering technical processes is something Judith is familiar with from her time at the DVLA when, as COO, she led its transition from paper to digital tax discs. To become an employer of choice, she notes, the University must also raise the profile of its brand. Making each interaction a memorable one is part of that process: “I must be sure that every single person who applies to one of our vacancies has a positive experience.”

Recruitment and onboarding is the second area of the modernising initiative. Working alongside Abi Kelly, Executive Director of Corporate Affairs, HR is seeking ways to link the corporate brand with staff and student recruitment, while reinforcing service delivery. During the last 10 months, Judith has established an internal consultancy looking at the overall recruitment process, identifying training needs and coaching people to “focus on the customer and act how an external supplier would.” She added: “I have people in my team who have worked here for

over 20 years. There's a real sense of community that should be reflected in our service.”

Developing professional (non-academic) careers is a third area identified as limiting the potential of the University. In coming into her role, Judith was aware of the 'parity of esteem' of professional staff, who don't feel as valued as their academic peers. She referred to a NASA janitor, who in 1962, when asked by US President John F. Kennedy what their job was, replied 'I'm helping put a man on the moon' as indicative of what successful cultural engagement is. This is how she envisions Newcastle University's culture evolving over the next few years: “People are a university's most important asset. From an HR perspective, you must work hard to understand everyone's needs and how HR can have the biggest impact on working lives. It's about valuing everybody and giving their career direction and purpose.”

While professional careers will remain a focus during the programme, this won't deter academic career development. With student numbers increasing, Newcastle University has recruited an additional 400 academic staff during the last four years across its three faculties (Humanities & Social Sciences, Medical Sciences, and Science, Agriculture & Engineering). Whilst it's difficult recruiting people who, in most cases, are a scarce resource, Judith says retention is the panacea of success. Helping academics focus on research and teaching is essential, and Judith expects HR to lighten the burden of bureaucracy. She also notes, however, that many academics hold aspirations beyond their research, such

as having leadership roles, and it's HR's responsibility to enable those goals by being a critical friend, not accepting the status quo, and continuously striving for improvement:

"You must win hearts and minds at a University. It isn't like the Civil Service where you make decisions and instruct people what to do. Your approach should be collegial — having conversations and building trust before developing strategy. Are we welcomed everywhere with open arms? Not at all. There's lots of bureaucracy that we still need to unpick. Encouraging career development also means recruiting effectively and training in leadership so academics can inspire researchers to become world renowned in their areas of expertise."



"Encouraging career development also means recruiting effectively and training in leadership"

The fourth area is longer term cultural transformation, focused on encouraging staff to become the best that they can be and how HR can support and facilitate this behaviour. Judith notes that this is ambitious but is confident she has the staff and an agreed vision to start delivering, at pace, the necessary actions to meet this objective.

Of course, several developments have already occurred during Judith's first year in the role. In addition to upgrading some systems, recruitment now has a greater focus with the appointment of a recruitment business partner and some restructuring has taken place in HR to effect change and get people motivated. One initiative, in particular, has had a big impact: "Early on, I created a new Assistant Director role and promoted HR Manager, Craig Armstrong, into it. He's now leading aspects of the HR modernisation project, both technical and cultural, managing the interface with the Workforce Information System and changing the way people think and work. Promoting someone from within HR was considered unusual. There's been few opportunities for people within the Directorate, for all sorts of reasons, and his appointment has created a real buzz."

While Craig's knowledge and networks across the University allow him to "make things happen at all levels" Judith admits he has had a baptism of fire, and is learning new skills daily and gaining knowledge in a very challenging environment."

Craig's promotion, as well as Richard Boggie's to Assistant Director for Policy and Reward and Chris Walton to Acting Head of Occupational Health and Safety, has released vacancies throughout the HR team, leading to several

more internal moves. These have been complemented by new hires into key areas, such as Karen Povey from Egger as HR Business Partner for Recruitment, and Lisette Nicholson from Hive as Assistant Director of Organisational Development and Talent. Judith commented:

"Many HR staff have been here a long time and it's been helpful to learn from other sectors. All those who have started new roles are learning from each other and there's a positive and supportive attitude about the place. I want myself and my team to continue to challenge ourselves, however, and rise to the challenge. Next year, I plan to rotate colleagues and expose them to areas outside of their own. It's about supporting leadership development and taking





“Reviewing how the University promotes itself as an employer of choice to underrepresented groups will be a key project”

the burden off managers. People are definitely keen to do this as long as it's done sensibly and that they know my door is always open.”

Furthermore, in 2018, the HR team will attend lectures run by Newcastle University's own “leading edge” HR theorists based in the business school. Likewise, students studying HR will be given opportunities to spend time in the HR directorate applying theory to practice.

In Judith's words “there's lots going on.” Following a recent trip to Singapore and Malaysia, HR is now working on improving the interface with overseas teams, making sure they get the support they need. A new occupational health strategy is being rolled out and Judith is making final touches to a new people strategy, due for launch next year. Further afield, HR is exploring how more apprentices could be introduced into the University.

Reviewing how the University promotes itself as an employer of choice to underrepresented groups will be a key project for Judith in 2018. Much progress has already been achieved in gender equality, something that was recognised in 2016 when Newcastle was presented with the Athena SWAN Silver Award, one of only eleven UK universities to achieve this status at the time. In other areas, Judith will be looking to progress on disability, LGBT and BAME equality, recognising that only a fully engaged and inclusive University can achieve its true potential. HR will also support several forthcoming developments such as the National Centre for Ageing and National Centre for

Data; the new Urban Sciences Building and a new learning and teaching centre as well as the Research and Innovation Centre in Singapore. Fine tuning and maximising the potential of her team will see HR succeed in these endeavours:

“From an HR perspective, we are on a journey of continuous improvement. If you don't get the people aspect right, though, then things won't flow and you won't deliver to your potential. We all need to challenge ourselves to be the best we can.”



Investment in people and infrastructure for the UK's largest care home provider

When HC-One acquired 110 care homes from BUPA in 2017, the £300 million deal became the biggest in care home history, making HC-One the largest social care provider in the UK.

It marked six years of hard work for a leadership team who, back in 2011, rescued the failing Southern Cross Healthcare business, gaining financial backers who invested over £130 million refurbishing and upgrading 260 homes, improving training and development for 15,000 employees, and raising the quality of lives of 11,000 residents. It's a story of turnaround and transformation, and as CFO David Smith tells Nigel Wright, in many ways it's only getting started.

HC-One is The Kind Care Company. Making a positive difference to the lives of its residents, while being an employer of choice for nursing and care staff, are two factors which drive the culture of the business. They're top of mind for all employees every day, explains David, and is why he believes HC-One represents the very best in social care provision in the UK. A former senior manager at PwC, David joined the 'Big 4' accountancy firm from University and enjoyed a ten-year career with the business, living all over the world. It was a yearning to return to his northern roots and "make a difference through meaningful work," however, that led him to join Southern Cross in 2006. 13 years on, he's never looked back:

"Kindness and caring are everywhere in the sector. At HC-One, for example, these qualities are ingrained in all employees' internal and external interactions. This creates bonds, cultivates friendships and builds positive relationships while encouraging a feeling of harmony within the homes, which of course is paramount. It must be one of the most rewarding jobs in the world because, regardless of your role, the lives of our elderly, often vulnerable, residents are improved because of your actions. I can't imagine doing anything else."

While some – especially those with a blue-chip pedigree like David – may find all that a little 'woolly,' David is under no illusion that HC-One is a commercial enterprise; private equity backed, heavily scrutinised and operating in a competitive underfunded market. All his fiscal adroitness, therefore, was needed as the leadership team executed an ambitious plan which has seen HC-One overcome inherited quality and occupancy issues in its



David Smith



homes, as well as general business challenges, to achieve growth. As CFO, David's focus has since been on capital raising and financing acquisitions. Having made four in five years, he's pleased with progress:

"Acquisitions were achieved through combining additional equity and some third-party debt placed at a prudent level. Because of our strong robust balance-sheet and business model, financial backers have engaged with confidence in the long-term future of HC-One. We're delighted with our achievements in gaining investment as well as how we've chosen to spend that money. Private equity, too, should feel pride in its efforts in raising the funds we need to deliver high quality services."

With assets now totalling over 350 care homes, comprising 20,000 residents, in mid-2017 HC-One began bolstering its headquarters in Darlington, hiring 130 new staff and expanding and refurbishing its offices to mirror its size and ambitions. New jobs cover a variety of support functions including IT, property, procurement, HR, finance and administration. The business is also introducing back-office employees from BUPA, with colleagues in residence at the new-look site. David confirmed HC-One has agreed a ten-year lease with its landlord in a deal encompassing adding an extra floor to its three-floor occupancy, as well as a complete renovation of the whole building. All four floors are now open plan with breakout areas and meeting rooms. Showers have been installed and there's also a company congregation area which acts as a training centre. In David's words:

"Announcing 130 new jobs in Darlington reinforced our reputation as one of the leading employers in the area and strengthened our commitment to the local community. Acquiring BUPA's homes increased the number of our residents and care home workers by 80%. Consequently, increasing the capability of our support function as well as the capacity of our offices was essential. It's a significant investment and without a doubt the nicest office environment I've ever worked in."

Are further acquisitions on the horizon in 2018? With the top five UK care providers accounting for less than 20% of the sector, ongoing consolidation is likely but David says it won't distract HC-One from its main priorities. Future acquisition opportunities, he says, will be reviewed within the context of how they contribute to the business's mission of being The Kind Care Company: "Giving secure, consistent and excellent care to our residents, and supporting our colleagues are always at the heart of commercial decisions. Any deal activity is predicated on satisfying those principles."

Its career opportunities too, David argues, make the business attractive for prospective employees. A recent investment in training and development means HC-One now boasts the best training platform in the care sector. Touchstone is an online learning management system that assigns, delivers, records and reports on individual learning, giving everyone a tailored programme dependent on their role. Diverse subjects include infection control, emergency procedures and caring for those at End of Life. The platform is online, too, allowing staff the



"Announcing 130 new jobs in Darlington reinforced our reputation as one of the leading employers in the area"



“With around 50 bespoke online modules, video clips, workbook activities and links, David believes it’s one of the best training systems across any industry”

flexibility to learn when is convenient for them, while providing training managers instant visibility of employee progress. With around 50 bespoke online modules, video clips, mini movies, animations, workbook activities and links to many helpful websites, David believes it’s one of the best training systems across any industry:

“Since Touchtone launched HC-One has delivered 1.8million learning events for employees. Because we’ve developed the content for our programmes we know they’re unique, relevant and personal. Most are accredited too — we’re the only UK care provider offering training courses with Skills for Care Centre of Excellence status. We’re also recognised by the CIPD, Investors in People and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, winning no less than eight international and national awards in the last few years. Bottom line is we provide achievable career pathways, free to those committed to learning and growing in confidence and competence with HC-One.”

In addition to specialist skills for care staff, all employees – from the CEO to field-based support – must complete mandatory basic training which focuses on areas of compliance, safeguarding and nutrition for residents. This, David notes, is tied in to HC-One’s organisational structure which places residents at the top with the Board at the bottom, while reinforcing the point that everyone is responsible for making a positive difference to

residents’ lives. Furthermore, the HC-One Nurse Assistant Programme, first launched in 2016 in response to the national and international shortage of nurses, and soon to be revitalised later this year, is the first of its kind in the sector. Courses focus on upskilling Senior Carers to enable them to fulfil some introductory tasks, such as wound care and the administering of non-controlled drugs, freeing up nurses’ time to utilise their higher-level skills.

With Glasgow based Senior Care Home Manager, Robert Murray, winning Leader of the Year at the 2017 Scottish Care Awards and Julie Noble, a nurse at HC-One’s Jack Dormand Care Home in Horden, announced as Nurse of the Year at the 2017 National Care Awards too, it’s clear HC-One’s investments and approach are working. Third-party endorsements are important, says David, and he sees these awards as exemplifying the business’s commitment to providing industry leading social care services.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, since the BUPA acquisition, some senior BUPA employees have applied for and been appointed into top roles at HC-One. Professor Graham Stokes is indicative of the overall quality. Recognised as a leader in dementia care, he brings significant experience and value to the business as it seeks to expand its dementia care provision. Six months earlier, another industry ‘big hitter’ joined HC-One’s Board. CEO Justin Hutchens moved from North America where he’d enjoyed a 20+ year career in the industry, starting as





“The UK’s ageing population means by 2025 the number of people 85 or over will have tripled”



a care giver and working his way up through Home Manager and Regional Director to CEO. David confirmed HC-One is thrilled with these appointments, both of which offer broad operational experience and knowledge of the sector.

Following its flurry of successes in 2017, what does the future hold for HC-One? David says one key issue needs addressing to ensure the future prosperity of care service providers and their residents. A lack of funding from central and local government is exasperated by a rising demand for social care. The UK’s ageing population means by 2025 the number of people 85 or over will have tripled. With local authorities closing homes across the country, and no public-sector investment forthcoming to support an industry which relies on public pay, it’s the elderly people in care communities that

suffer. There’s a need for private investment into high quality services, according to David, and while he expects more investment opportunities in the short term, he sees a long-term combined solution for health and social care as being the ultimate panacea:

“The care sector is under pressure and Government needs to start paying attention. Recent chronic issues within the NHS, too, has reinforced the challenges both sectors face. The average cost of keeping an elderly person in an acute hospital bed is three times what it is to keep an elderly person in a care home. We need a funding environment that acknowledges this and a coherent long-term strategy to ease pressures on both sectors. Hopefully, the recent Government re-shuffle and forthcoming green paper will lead to the changes we would like to see.”



What **business leaders** should know about the **value of procurement**

After leaving college with a BTEC Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Business and Finance, **Jocelyn Hedley** joined Blyth-based Welwyn Systems, a small electronics manufacturer, on a YTS Purchasing scheme. She has since enjoyed a 20-year procurement career across a broad range of sectors.



Jocelyn Hedley

Now back in the electronics sector and working for a world leading organisation; in this article, she gives her perspectives on how the procurement discipline has evolved during the last two decades, as her career has weaved through a variety of senior procurement roles in the pharmaceutical and technology sectors. Jocelyn also outlines her thoughts on what good procurement practice is and the positive impact it has on business success.

In Jocelyn's view, the procurement discipline didn't exist in the early 1990s. Procurement, she highlights, is a term that has become prominent in line with the gradual professionalisation of the function during her career. "I started in purchasing, which is 'buying stuff'. Procurement is more strategic and encompasses a broader range of responsibilities. There's been a big change in remit and scope of the role which has required a more diverse set of skills." Yet, despite its evolution into a specialised practice area, many businesses still don't value the role it plays. To understand why, Jocelyn finds it helpful to look back to her early career.

Based on her experience of purchasing in the early stages of her career, Jocelyn outlined that the purchasing team only got involved with direct cost negotiation and reduction: i.e. buying materials related to final products. "It was all about getting the product out with no attention given to other types of costs savings." She added that purchasing wasn't always classed as a proper role either. Departments often consisted of people who didn't fit

anywhere else. Supplier relationships were also driven by a "treat them mean, keep them keen" approach.

The legacy of purchasing, explained Jocelyn, means that a lack of understanding of the positive impact modern procurement has on cost savings as well as service exists. The tendency, in her view, is for divisional leaders to see procurement as the "gatekeeper" or "the last fix." "If someone in another department can't get their own way in a negotiation they pass it to procurement to secure a better price." When this attitude prevails, procurement becomes marginalised when it should play a key role in all business areas from the outset.

Strong leadership is the driver to removing these negative perceptions. Jocelyn explained, "The value of procurement is diluted when it's not driven by someone on the board. If you've got a good director, whether they're in the supply chain, operations or finance, they'll push to get procurement recognised in the business." Directors, she noted, also tend



“The role is less one of a gatekeeper and more a ‘value business partner’, working alongside budget stakeholders to instigate change”

to get procurement involved in wider strategy planning, leading to a “shared methodology” across the business. In these scenarios, the role is less one of a gatekeeper and more a “value business partner”, working alongside budget stakeholders to instigate change.

When asked about her experiences working in different sectors, Jocelyn was clear that good and bad management of procurement isn't industry specific. Positive and negative experiences are reported by procurement professionals from a broad spectrum of industries and Jocelyn reiterated that they're usually relative to procurement's place in an organisation's structure, and the strength of leadership and support afforded it. “When the value is understood, then procurement is given the support it should have and you can thrive in your role.” Examples of enabling behaviours include setting KPIs around savings targets and awarding bonuses, as well as investing in training and events.

Even with the backing of a board level director, Jocelyn highlighted that influencing stakeholders and changing perceptions of what procurement delivers is a guaranteed part of any procurement role. She explained how, in the management positions she's held, positive change within the business has occurred over time through a focus on three core areas: centralisation of spend, supplier reduction and supplier relationship management.

Starting with the centralisation of spend, Jocelyn noted that the first action a procurement professional should make in any organisation is taking spending control away from budget holders. In her words, “sense check all spending” and identify “maverick spend” by analysing budgets and invoices; talk to finance and “get oversight of everything that's going on.” Where once purchasing would only get involved in direct spend, modern procurement is (or should be) involved in all outsourced purchasing, with an “open policy to speak to suppliers.” In businesses with large facilities and no centralised procurement function, maverick spend, in Jocelyn's experience, is usually rife. “Often, especially when the supplier base is limited, most gains can be leveraged through the cost savings associated with the control of maverick spend in an organisation”.

The inevitable knock-on effect of centralising all contract negotiation is supplier reduction. As Jocelyn pointed out, “If everyone in the company has been a buyer, there will be too many unnecessary suppliers.” The benefits of supplier rationalisation are far-reaching. Not only does it allow procurement to better control spending, it also opens doors for more cooperative internal and external relationships. For example, working alongside budget stakeholders from the beginning of a procurement process, Jocelyn reveals, leads to a “stronger understanding of needs, greater leverage for negotiation





“Relationships turn collaborative too because there’s a realisation that to get the best arrangement you must work together”

with suppliers, and delivery of more effective solutions.” It also minimises a business’s exposure to bribery and fraud.

Once rationalisation and consolidated spending are achieved, Jocelyn indicated a robust supplier relationship management strategy can be implemented. “You become a bigger fish in a smaller pond enabling you to get better value from suppliers. Value, in her view, should be at the forefront of negotiation to secure long-term relationships. Introducing governance around contracts, doing tenders, establishing KPIs and benchmarking suppliers creates healthy competition leading to increased service. Relationships turn collaborative too because there’s a “realisation that to get the best arrangement you must work together.” Regardless of size, Jocelyn added, every supplier is important because they’re “part of the bigger picture.”

A strong and valued procurement function, Jocelyn argues, can be a key differentiator for business. Remarking how the emphasis is usually placed on the roles of sale as the driver of growth, however, she argued that evidence

points towards procurement savings as being far more impactful. “The value of procurement is always overlooked; if there were more focus and investment in procurement, sales targets could be reduced.” One recent study shows that for every 5% reduction in costs achieved by procurement sales must increase by 6.75% to match them.

Returning to the discussion of the professionalisation of the procurement discipline, Jocelyn said she is enthused by the greater importance given to CIPS (Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply) qualifications



today. In the late 90s, when Jocelyn qualified, employers didn't consider it compulsory when hiring in purchasing. That's changed now, with more businesses specifying it on applications. Though, she admitted, it's still not as widely acknowledged as other more established accreditations such as CIPD, CIM etc.

While CIPS is pushing for more recognition - raising the profile of procurement as a profession through initiatives such as publishing success stories - e.g. CIPS qualified people getting board level positions - more needs to happen, in Jocelyn's opinion, to convince businesses that procurement is a skilled profession that deserves investment in training and talent acquisition. "In terms of budgets, companies still seem less willing to invest in high calibre people. In today's competitive global marketplace there is more pressure to manage costs, so the need for higher calibre people working in the procurement function is greater than ever."



"One recent study shows that for every 5% reduction in costs achieved by procurement sales must increase by 6.75% to match them"



North East Accountancy Awards 2017

Nigel Wright has been the main sponsor of the North East Accountancy Awards for many years and the 2017 awards were another great success. The Awards recognise some of the finest finance professionals and their companies in the region.

The eleventh annual North East Accountancy Awards in 2017 saw hundreds of accountants, other finance professionals and their colleagues gather at the NewcastleGateshead Hilton hotel to celebrate the achievements of the region's top financial businesses and individuals. The event was hosted by ex-Olympian, TV presenter, Steve Cram.

Among the winners was Christopher Vaulks from KPMG who picked up the title of Accountant of the Year and Performance Horizon's Chris Blaxall who was named Finance Director of the Year.

The winners:

Accounting Technician of the Year
Ashlee Richardson, Welwyn Components

Rising Star Accountant of the Year
Katharine Lowdon, EY

Rising Star Tax Adviser of the Year
Mo Malhotra, Deloitte

Accountant of the Year
Christopher Vaulks, KPMG

Finance Director of the Year
Chris Blaxall, Performance Horizon

Business Finance Team of the Year
Mayborn Group

Public Services Finance Team of the Year
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

Tax Team of the Year
KPMG, Innovation reliefs & incentives team

Corporate Finance Deal of the Year
KPMG – Investment in Zyro by LDC and simultaneous acquisition of Fisher Outdoor Leisure

New Firm of the Year
BW Medical Accountants

Independent Accountancy Firm of the Year
Blu Sky Tax

National Accountancy Firm of the Year
KPMG

Outstanding Achievement
Iain Wright

John Wall Award for Outstanding Achievement:
Paul Woods

Non-Executive Director of the Year:
Christopher Fleetwood, NCFE

Nigel Wright's Richard Morgan said: "This was another great Accountancy Awards event showcasing the very best in the region's finance, accounting and tax professionals, working across a variety of organisations and sectors. Judging was tough due to the high standard of nominations in all categories, and we expect it to be equally as competitive next year."





Extending the sphere of digital influence and collaboration



“Sphere wants its problem-solving groups to replace endless postulating with action orientated discussions.”

Influence, lead, transform – the rallying call of Sphere Network, a digital network launched in Newcastle in 2017 which seeks to accelerate collaboration and the adoption of technologies within organisations.

By connecting cross-sector experts and bringing them together to explore how existing and emerging technologies can address social and industrial challenges, they hope to unlock untapped potential in the region and help the North East become a centre for excellence across a variety of burgeoning innovative markets.

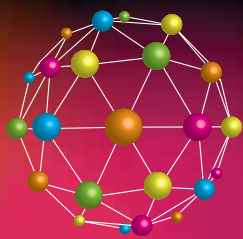
But do initiatives like this not already exist? Apparently not according to Sphere's founders, a group of seven leaders from across industry and academia, who established the network to spark action rather than words. Much like the science fiction writer, Ray Bradbury, who believed thinking was wasteful – instead “You simply must do things” – Sphere wants its problem-solving groups to replace endless postulating with action orientated discussions about the application of evolving technologies and how to adopt them.

Emerging technologies have applications across all sectors but Sphere argues there is little cross-sector collaboration. It wants those who attend its monthly forums – be they workshops, presentations or roundtable discussions – to ‘expand their sphere of influence’ by mixing with like-minded professionals including influential people from universities, public sector organisations, charities and businesses to

debate and digest a host of ‘hot’ topics and share knowledge, experiences and best practices.

The pace of technological advancement increasingly relies on organic change, and therefore innovations achieved in isolation will only leave organisations behind. With all sectors facing similar challenges, there is an urgent need, Sphere highlights, for collaboration and the sharing of innovative solutions. Starting with Blockchain, Sphere Network events are tackling Advanced Analytics & AI, the Ageing Society, the Internet of Things, and Industry 4.0, successfully joining dots between experts and organisations, and influencing and accelerating adoption of relevant technology where it’s needed most.

Sphere co-Founder, Steve Blanks, says the network is powerful because it is inclusive, a-political, not for profit and run by volunteers. Any income generated is reinvested back into the network and the operation is truly regional because it covers the whole of the North East, from Teesside to Berwick, Haltwhistle to Whitley Bay. Steve explains: “The principle of remaining neutral enables the unlocking of amazing research pockets within university networks, and the forming of eclectic connections that would not happen through KTP processes, Growth Hubs and other forums.”



SPHERE NETWORK

Digital Influence, Leadership & Transformation

Following Sphere Network's inaugural event in September, focusing on the implication of Blockchain technology, attendees immediately began sharing research and development activities and building new relationships. For example, Sphere co-founder Kate Baucherel, a digital strategist and emerging technology consultant, has been working closely with attendees including Accenture to develop Blockchain collaboration opportunities across multiple industry sectors.

Steve commented: "It's all about fostering collaboration through generosity to aid wider business growth in our region; making connections, raising awareness, improving understanding and accelerating digital transformation."

Those interested in getting involved in Sphere Network should visit sphenetwork.co.uk and register their interest. Sphere's 'Digital Heatmap,' featuring past and future themes is being added to all the time. The founders encourage those who sign up to scrutinise the details and offer suggestions of any topic they'd like to see discussed, debated and pulled apart during a forthcoming event, in order to identify societal and organisational problems that can be solved by intelligent application of technology.



"It's all about fostering collaboration ... raising awareness, improving understanding and accelerating digital transformation."

Case Study: Thirteen Group

Nigel Wright hires two Finance Directors for North East's largest landlord

About the client

- Thirteen is the largest landlord in the North East, owning and managing almost 34,000 homes from an area spanning North Tyneside to York, with the majority in the Tees Valley area.
- Its 1,500 colleagues provide homes and services for more than 70,000 customers, offering a vast range of properties for rent and sale, including affordable options to get onto the property ladder.
- By 2022, Thirteen has plans to build at least 2,000 new homes and invest over £100m to improve its current properties.
- It also offers a range of housing support services including money advice, supported housing, adaptations to homes and help to boost skills, training and employment opportunities.



Background

- Until July 2017, Thirteen was the Thirteen Group, made up of a parent company, four individual landlords and a care and support arm, which retained their own identities until they were consolidated to become one landlord as Thirteen.
- Thirteen's Executive Director of Resources, a role that includes responsibility for ICT, people and governance, is one of four leadership team members tasked with leading cultural change and introducing commercial thinking at Thirteen.
- In revisiting the operating model of the resources directorate during the restructure, she identified an opportunity to improve service delivery by splitting finance between transactions and planning and treasury and investment.
- Two Finance Director roles were created in the new structure, each with specific strengths that would complement each other and lead to faster, more collaborative, high performing and efficient service delivery.

The challenge

- Funding caps in the social housing sector have proved challenging for organisations like Thirteen.
- To continue delivering great customer service while growing amid an uncertain environment, Thirteen requires people with commercial skills who can lead cultural change, while bringing their colleagues along on the journey.
- Although experience of working in the housing sector wasn't compulsory, getting the culture fit right was essential.
- Ideal candidates had to demonstrate the ability to drive the right behaviours in their teams and ultimately improve delivery of financial services.

thirteen



Nigel Wright solution

- Two experienced consultants were selected to deliver assignments within the expected timeframes – an Associate Director and Managing Consultant with a combined 21 years' experience recruiting finance positions for third sector organisations in the North East.
- They met with Thirteen's Executive Director of Resources and took the time to understand the objectives of this appointment; the skills required and the personal qualities needed to fit into Thirteen's culture, while offering their thoughts around the growth of the business.
- They conducted a full search and assessment of the North East and wider UK housing sector, as well as within other relevant organisations such as those with large asset bases and treasury functions.
- They provided regular communication and ensured openness and transparency by giving clear and pertinent updates to Thirteen, as well as the candidates, throughout the process.
- Searches were supported with tailored candidate packs and branded advertising campaigns, which helped educate the market outside the region about opportunities at Thirteen, as well as its transformation and culture.
- The consultants delivered a long list of individuals, including a written assessment of who could be the best fit for each role.
- Further conversations took place with Thirteen, during which a shortlist of candidates that would be brought into the interview process was collectively agreed.

The outcome

- Shortlists were achieved three weeks after the initial briefing and two successful appointments were made — one from the housing sector and one with a background in investment banking.
- The recruitment was completed within six weeks, which included Thirteen's internal interview and assessment process.



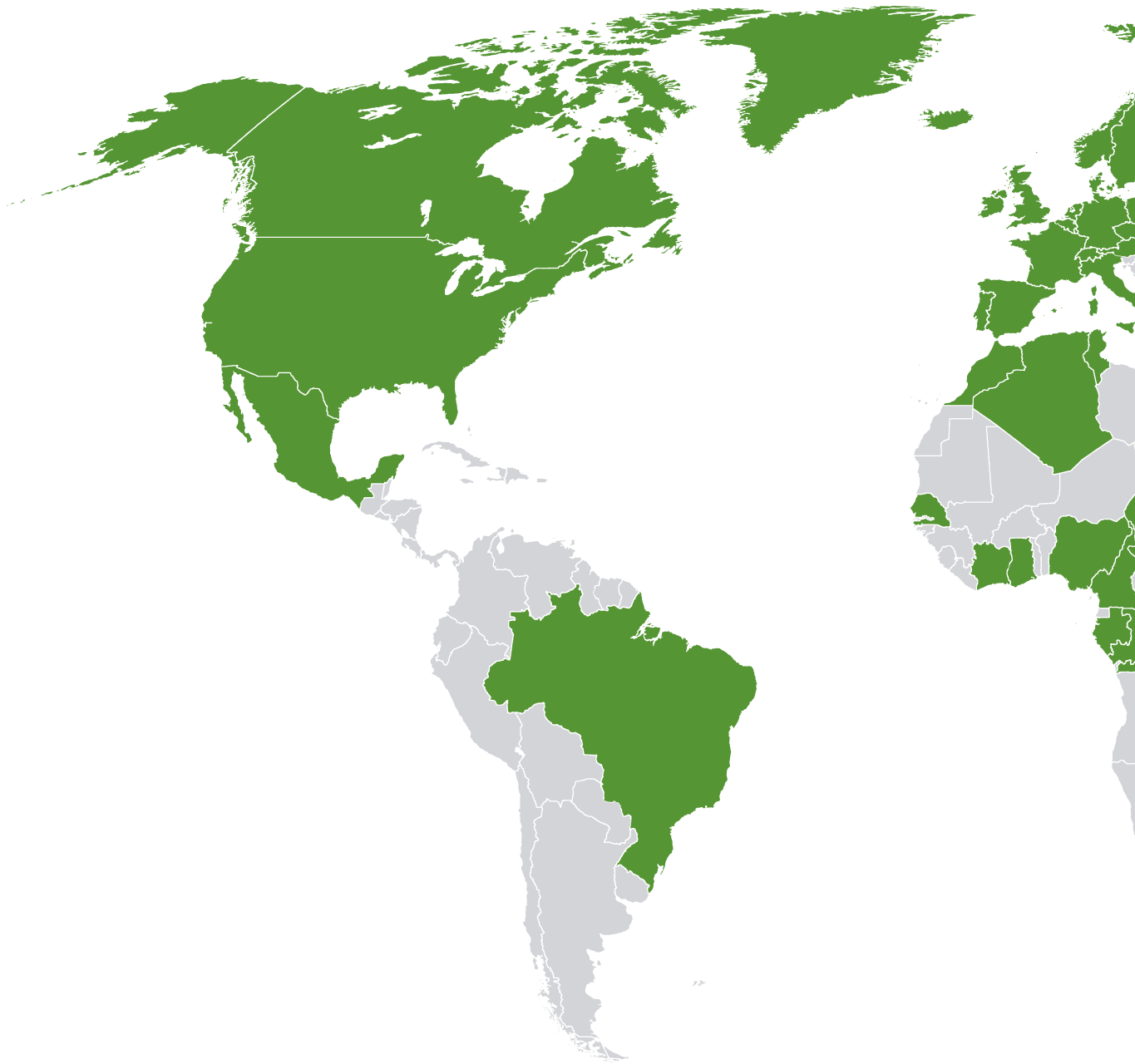
"Nigel Wright's consultants understood what I was looking for, not just in terms of the skills, but also personality and cultural fit. Translating that understanding into an effective national search, they matched my expectations by delivering the right candidates for the jobs.

They showed expertise by sharing market insight which tested my thinking on certain aspects of the assignment. Significantly they recognised that none of us has time to waste these days and, as promised, delivered two strong shortlists which made our final decision difficult.

Communication wasn't too much or too little. Weekly updates were complemented with additional calls, only when something needed confirming. Messages were always concise and clear. The result? We appointed two great people."

Heather Ashton, Executive Director of Resources at Thirteen Group

Global reach



Nigel Wright regularly fulfils recruitment assignments for clients around the world.

Our leading reputation has contributed to us being given recruitment assignments in all six continents, across 30+ international territories. Many of Nigel Wright's international clients are seeking to achieve long term growth in new and emerging markets. As a result Nigel Wright has been instrumental in assisting clients to build new business units in key strategic markets such as Europe, Asia, the Americas, Africa and the Middle East.

