

directorNI

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Our Committee



Northern Ireland



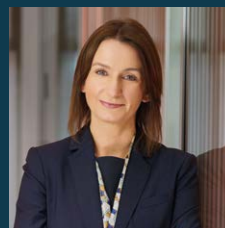
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Chair, IoD Northern
Ireland



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Barry Byrne,
Mount Charles Group



Catriona Gibson,
Arthur Cox Belfast



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Korkki Deemed 'Pitch Perfect'

At Women's Leadership Conference

Recent university graduate and sustainable entrepreneur, Gabrielle Feenan has been announced as the winner of the 4K Pitch at this 2022 IoD Women's Leadership Conference, securing £4,000 in funding for her business.

Gabrielle's business, Korkki, aims to combat furniture waste by substituting harmful medium-density fibreboard (MDF) pieces for biodegradable cork alternatives.

Four female business leaders shortlisted for this year's competition, with each delivering a pitch to delegates during the virtual conference event held to coincide with International Women's Day.

The sold-out conference, sponsored by Herbert Smith Freehills saw over 1,000 leading business figures from across Northern Ireland and further afield join together to celebrate female leadership.

Following her success, Gabrielle commented:

"I am so pleased to receive this funding which will give Korkki the resources and capability to bring our furniture designs to market and build on what we have achieved so far as a business.

"I'm very excited about the ideas we have for the future of Korkki and offering people the opportunity to make more sustainable choices."

Gabrielle, who recently graduated from Ulster University with a degree in Product Design, developed Korkki as part of a final year project,

creating functional furniture from cork and glass and offering a bespoke and stylish alternative to modern furniture.

“It was wonderful to hear from representatives of some of the Northern Ireland's most promising fledgling businesses.”

Gordon Milligan, Chairman, IoD NI said: "I would like to extend our sincere congratulations to Gabrielle, winner of this year's 4k Perfect Pitch competition.

"The 4k Pitch has become an integral element of the Women's Leadership Conference and it was wonderful to hear from representatives of some of the Northern Ireland's most promising fledgling businesses.

"It was also great to join with so many inspirational leaders to gain new insights and perspectives as to how best to implement best practice and encourage positive growth within our own organisations."

Other 4k Perfect Pitch competition finalists included Jo Warner (EQuinox Rising), Sinead Welsh (Informed Minds App) and Tina Calder (Merlin Arts CIC).

The 2022 conference theme took inspiration from the Eleanor



KORKKI.

Roosevelt quote "the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams" and heard from a variety of outstanding speakers including world renowned ethologist and activist Dr Jane Goodall DBE, Dame Inga Beale, Lloyds of London's first female CEO and Khalida Popal, former Afghanistan women's football captain.

Previous winners of the 4k Perfect Pitch competition include Rachael Coulter, CEO and founder of Stable Manager, a digital platform connecting horse owners with service providers offering the perfect technical solution for horse management, Glenda Burns of Breath NI, which provides support services to parents impacted by trauma and Sarah McAnallen the creator of Ezi-Sock, a device that makes putting on socks easier for people with reduced mobility

For further details about the IoD, included a full list of upcoming events, visit www.iod.com/ni.

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Director NI magazine reaches many of Northern Ireland's most influential business leaders.

A bi-monthly magazine, it is circulated to 1,000 local members of the Institute of Directors (IoD), and offers regular insights into current business and governance.

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ACADEMY

WHERE DIRECTORS ARE MADE

Catching Up With The Leaders

Accelerating Their Professional Development

We recently caught up with some of the directors who took part in our 5-day Accelerated

Certificate in Company Direction last November to hear more about their experience of the programme and the benefits it has provided to them and their organisations.

When we speak with our members about their professional development, we often hear about how busy schedules and the demanding nature of their role can prevent leaders from engaging with professional development programmes and courses.

This was certainly true for some of the leading directors who took part in our most recent Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction programme.

By opting to enrol on this intensive residential course, these leaders seized the opportunity to learn, network and work towards Certified Director status, all whilst minimising time spent away from their business.

Lisa Hand, Business Development Director at Food for Thought highlighted how the structure of this programme benefitted her:

"It's a very intensive course which works really well for me because you're not getting interrupted by your day job. It's an awful lot easier for me to schedule time outside of work."

The programme provides directors with fresh insights into the areas of strategy, leadership, governance

and finance, combining online and face-to-face learning and offering the same expert training and knowledge available through some of the IoD's more traditional courses.

"Every one of them was excellent in terms of their level of knowledge and their ability to deliver and keep us all engaged."

Participants spend time together during tutor sessions as well as recreationally and at mealtimes, affording them the opportunity to share their own knowledge and experience whilst developing and building their existing business network.

Ian Campbell, Director of Operations at Translink observed the quality of the learning provided by programme tutors:

"The course leaders are absolutely superb in terms of how they deliver but also share experience."

The Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction is delivered by leading industry professionals whose talent and ability has been proven in the marketplace. These directors engage with programme participants to encourage a deeper understanding of best practice and what it truly means to be a director.

This high standard of tutelage was also noted by Kerry Anthony MBE, Group CEO at Inspire Wellbeing describing it as "second to none" and stating that "every one of them was excellent in terms of their level of knowledge and their ability to deliver and keep us all engaged."

The Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction is open to individual directors as well as groups of directors from the same organisation and combines case studies, practical examples and scenarios along with contributions from leading experts to develop specific leadership competencies and encourage a deeper understanding of leadership and governance best practice.

Ian added: "I have benefitted from being on a course with other directors from quite diverse organisations and companies, it's the shared learning that we have had, where people share their experiences, their challenges and the solutions in a very open way. This is a great place to learn."

The next Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction course is scheduled to take place from 15th-20th May at the Culloden Estate and Spa, Belfast.

Those who complete the course and wish to gain further qualifications will be eligible to progress to the Diploma in Company Direction and to Chartered Director status.

For more information on becoming a Chartered Director and the wider programme of professional development offered by the IoD Academy visit www.iod.com/chartered-director/ or www.iod.com/training/academy-ni

Understanding incoming changes to Parental Bereavement Rights



Chris Fullerton.
Partner,
Arthur Cox

With new legislation due to come into effect from April, Employment Law specialist Chris Fullerton, a Partner at Arthur Cox, examines what employers need to know about incoming changes to parental bereavement pay and leave entitlement.

It is a scenario that none of us ever wish to deal with but sadly for many parents, bereavement is a reality they face, and it of course comes with a need to take time away from work to grieve.

Notwithstanding the collapse of the Executive, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill on 7 February 2022 which is expected to come into effect in April. It brings with it new statutory rights for the region which local organisations need to be aware of, including proposals for new miscarriage employment rights, making Northern Ireland the first jurisdiction in Europe to pass such legislation.

The legislation relates only to employees so if your business engages other personnel such as workers, self-employed contractors or agency workers, they will not be eligible for parental bereavement leave from you.

In terms of leave, there is no qualifying period as this is a “day one” employment right for all employees (there is, however, a qualifying period for statutory parental bereavement pay).

The key requirement for eligibility to bereavement leave will be whether the employee qualifies as a “bereaved parent”. The forthcoming

regulations will specify the conditions required to establish an employee’s relationship to the child in question but, by way of indication, the equivalent provisions applicable in Great Britain are drafted widely to cover most types of parental relationship.

The period of parental bereavement leave will be one or two weeks, taken at any time within 56 weeks of the passing of a child.

Employees on parental bereavement leave may also be entitled to statutory parental bereavement pay if they can satisfy certain statutory eligibility criteria such as a requirement for them to have been in continuous employment with you for at least 26 weeks up to the child’s passing.

The forthcoming regulations will set out the applicable rate of pay but, by way of indication, the corresponding pay entitlement in Great Britain is the same as other statutory payments, such as paternity pay. This position is expected to be the same in Northern Ireland, which would mean a weekly rate of £151.97 or 90 per cent of average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

The new legislation on parental bereavement leave and pay will largely align Northern Ireland with the corresponding regime in Great Britain, which was introduced in 2020.

It is not a simple cut and paste however. While the regulations in Great Britain deal with stillbirths occurring from the 24th week of pregnancy, proposals in Northern Ireland go further by extending statutory support to employees who suffer a miscarriage.

The Department for the Economy has indicated that provision for miscarriage will follow “at a later date” after a public consultation. However, it is understood that Northern Ireland will be the first jurisdiction in Europe to have legislated for miscarriage employment rights in this manner.

Many employers will already have an existing policy on compassionate leave, which may already cover leave in circumstances of parental bereavement.

However, these policies will now need to be reviewed in light of the incoming rules to ensure they cover the new statutory requirements. Employers without any relevant policy at present should consider putting a written policy in place and seek professional advice as they familiarise themselves with the new legislation before it is introduced in April.

The Corporate and Commercial team at Arthur Cox provides advice on wide range of legal matters. Please call +44 28 9023 0007 for further information from Chris or your regular Arthur Cox contact.



ABC Borough

Launches bid for UK City of Culture 2025

Winning the title UK City of Culture 2025 would be transformative for the society and economy of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (ABC), and Northern Ireland, creating the right conditions for the arts and culture sector to flourish.

That was the message from a meeting of key stakeholders backing ABC25 – the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon bid for the title in 2025 – at a Showcase Event held both in Parliament Buildings, Stormont and at the House of Commons in Westminster.

They heard that the unique characteristics of the borough have given it a strong cultural identity and how the title would act as a catalyst to reconnect with its communities, keep historical traditions alive and reassert ABC's influence across the globe.

ABC's bid, known as ABC25, focuses on enhancing existing cultural provision as well as developing new arts, economic and digital infrastructure to engage and excite more people. It has identified a need to attract more public and private sector investment to develop hotel and accommodation provision in the region, and centres on bringing in a Green Manifesto to make ABC25 the most sustainable UK City of Culture yet.

It will also create spaces for the next generation to flourish in a nurturing environment through a programme which celebrates the diversity of culture, languages and communities, while also looking beyond 2025

to put in place partnerships that demonstrate how smaller cities can have a forward-looking approach to culture and heritage.

The event showed how the distinctive mix of Armagh City, an ancient capital steeped in heritage and traditions; Banbridge, a bustling market town borne out of the linen industry; Craigavon, a manufacturing hub built around a 1960s new town; and a rural hinterland make for a powerful combination for UK City of Culture 2025. The uniqueness of the people and the location have been integral in the shaping of the proposed programme of events.

Designed by artists, cultural practitioners, communities and even creative bureaucrats, the programme has been developed following extensive creative and community consultation and is built around the themes of Nurture and Nature, Traditions for the Future, and Provoking Thought.

Lord Mayor of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Alderman Glenn Barr, said: "Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon has all the ingredients to make UK City of Culture 2025 the best yet. We are exceptionally lucky to have a cultural heritage that is the envy of the world, and talented and creative people who have the passion and drive to bring this bid alive for future generations. Our programme of events plays to the strengths of our three distinct urban areas and unlocks the potential of the artists, creatives and entrepreneurs who call this place home.

"ABC25 is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to show the world what we can achieve working together. It is hard to over-estimate how transformational it would be

for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon to be named UK City of Culture 2025. We can make a major impact on the world stage due to our historic foundations, cultural aspirations, and intriguingly diverse traditions. All we need is the opportunity which winning this title would bring, to allow us to reach our true potential.

“Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon has all the ingredients to make UK City of Culture 2025 the best yet.”

"Whether it is the deep rooted heritage, architecture and traditions of Armagh City, the bustling market town of Banbridge or the industrious new town of Craigavon, we have a diverse spread of conurbation and rural settings which will reap the benefits of ABC25. We can't wait to show the judges just what we have planned, not just for 2025 but for the generations which follow."

The successful entrant will benefit significantly from millions of pounds of investment in social, economic and culture-led regeneration initiatives and events that will be extensively promoted across the UK and internationally. The shortlist announcement is anticipated the week commencing 21st March.

Look to culture to create The Great Attraction



Brendan McGurgan,
Co-Founder,
Simple Scaling

Ten years ago, I embarked on a learning and development journey with the aim of forming a high performing board. The company I was leading was scaling fast and to support that effort, the shareholders identified a need to strengthen our leadership team, become more strategic, enhance governance and encourage diverse thinking.

Subscribing to the 'Who not how' philosophy, my research led me to the IoD. Who better to help guide my thinking on board development than an institute established to do just that?

During the first class, I was handed a book with a rather crude title: The Fish Rots from the Head by Bob Garratt. The premise was simple. If an organisation fails, it's the fault of the leadership.

The book stressed the importance of culture. How things are done in an organisation, how they are aligned to values and principles will ultimately determine the company's fortune. And the leader stands at the head of the organisation as the behavioural conductor.

This chimes strongly with the ethos of Garry Ridge, CEO and chairman of the highly successful WD-40 company (yes, these are the people who make that little yellow and blue can with the red top underneath your kitchen sink!).

I had the privilege of interviewing Garry for the ScaleX™ Insider podcast (Ep 30) recently.

He spoke about 'The Great Resignation', or what he bluntly terms 'The Great Escape'. A straight-talking Aussie, he says that people everywhere are choosing to walk away from toxic cultures. The research reinforces this. 4.53m Americans voluntarily left their jobs last November alone and, in the UK, this figure topped almost 1m for the last 3 months in 2021.

The pandemic has given people an unprecedented period to reflect, to consider what is truly important to them and to question why they do what they do. People are looking for purpose, and if they can't find it where they are, they walk.

Garry has put purpose at the centre of everything WD-40 does. Their job, he says, is not to remove squeaks but to solve problems and create positive, lasting memories. He uses the term 'tribe' instead of team as a way to engender a greater sense of belonging. He calls his managers 'coaches'. Their role is not to mark anyone's homework, but to help their people get an 'A'. To reinforce that tribal togetherness, the office is referred to as the 'teepee'. They don't call out mistakes or failures. Instead, they have 'learning moments'.

Garry upholds a culture where leadership is characterised by empathy over ego. He describes himself as a servant to those in his tribe. His philosophy is to do good every day, and if you can't do good, then at least do no harm.

This positivity might seem a little manufactured, a bit too American for us more reserved Norn Iron leaders. But when you examine WD-40's results, it's very clear that Garry's approach to leadership is delivering for all stakeholders.

He joined the business in 1987, becoming CEO – which he describes as a privilege – ten years later.



Since then, he has overseen a 10X increase in the company's market capitalisation, from \$300m to over \$3bn. Revenues have grown from \$100m – largely derived from the US – to more than \$500m across 176 countries.

The company now has six hundred tribe members across the globe. WD-40 enjoys a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15% per year and a return on invested capital of 35%.

Garry believes a purpose-driven culture is a significant competitive advantage, and with a staff engagement rate of 93% versus a global average of 20% (Gallup, State of the Global Workplace report 2021), the numbers don't lie.

Garry's experience has parallels with that of another incredibly successful leader, Satya Nadella (only the third ever Microsoft CEO). When he came to the position in February 2014, he decided that his tenure required a 'renewal of Microsoft'. Nadella may not have been addressing the challenge of a global pandemic, but he did recognise the importance of putting a 'soul' back into his company. In *Hit Refresh*, he wrote: 'This [renewal] could only happen if we prioritised the organisation's

culture and build confidence both inside and outside the company.'

“ Accepting that we can't control the fallout from the pandemic, nor roll back its impact is a good start. ”

So where does all of this leave us?

First, we need to understand that it is a waste of valuable leadership energy to blame COVID, the gig economy or the company up the road offering £1 more per hour. Accepting that we can't control the fallout from the pandemic, nor roll back its impact is a good start. We can however control our response and that starts with a renewed focus on culture. This means as leaders, ensuring that our behaviours are aligned to our values, and directed by our purpose each and every day.

We need to understand that everything we do as a leader either draws people closer, encouraging them to become motivated followers, or drives them away, often to the competition. As hope returns for a 'normal' existence again, now is a great time to focus on renewal. Now is a great time to focus on creating positive growth cultures within our organisations and turn 'The Great Resignation' into 'The Great Attraction!'

Brendan McGurgan BA Hons, FCA, CDIR is co-founder of Simple Scaling, an organisation dedicated to inspiring, connecting and enabling ambitious leaders of SMEs to scale with purpose. He is co-author of SIMPLE Scaling: 10 Proven Principles to 10x Your Business and host of The ScaleX™ Insider Podcast.



DfE focus on Women in Science & Technology proves a winning formula

A 2018 study provides the catalyst for a range of interventions to encourage women and girls into STEM careers. Paul Gillen (one of our Diversity and Inclusion Ambassadors), asks Kathryn McKenna from DfE to set the scene.

Northern Ireland has faced a skills shortage in science and technology sectors for many years, while at the same time the numbers of girls choosing to study science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects at post-16 and beyond has remained stubbornly low. Could encouraging more women and girls into these interesting and well paid jobs solve the skills shortage and grow the economy?

In 2016 Matrix, the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel, published its Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering report. This study noted the very low proportion of women working in engineering – just 15% of the total workforce.

The panel decided that a cross cutting report on women's participation in STEM roles was needed and understand why girls were less likely to study STEM subjects at A level and beyond and identify barriers to women entering STEM.

The Women in STEM report was published in 2018. It identified a range of issues and recommended that by 2030, 33% of young people moving into STEM careers in NI should be girls, arguing that encouraging more women into STEM and supporting them to remain in this area could potentially solve persistent skills shortages.

“ It is truly encouraging to see actions already being taken forward so quickly and with such commitment by the department to deliver on the Women in STEM Action Plan. ”

As a direct result of this study, the Department for the Economy appointed a Women in STEM Steering Group in 2020 to further develop the report's recommendations. Co-chaired by Dr Bryan Keating and Professor Eileen

Harkin Jones and composed of key stakeholders from industry, education and the public sector, the steering group has developed an Action Plan for Women in STEM in Northern Ireland, underpinning DfE's Vision for a 10X Economy and other complementary strategies.

The action plan:

- highlights the urgent need for government to enhance support to young people making informed future choices;
- presents solutions to better support women in STEM careers; and
- challenges government to strike out on an ambitious footing, which matches the ambition throughout the Northern Ireland STEM ecosystem.

DfE is already taking forward some of the 'must do' actions contained in the plan, including creating a detailed map of the Northern Ireland women in STEM ecosystem, developing a deeper understanding of the influences on girls from 0-5 and through the transition into primary school and undertaking further research into the known challenges faced by other economies seeking to increase the number of women in STEM.

There's also a significant amount of communication and outreach work going on, including sponsorship of eight Northern Ireland female



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founders on the Awakenhub Shegenerate programme and “21st Century Girls”, a virtual work experience project run by Speakers for Schools with local companies including Almac, Kainos, Greiner and Allstate. There’s also a website, pulsar.live, named in honour of Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, the Northern Ireland Astrophysicist who discovered pulsar stars, signposting all the latest Northern Ireland news, events and opportunities for women in STEM.

In June 2021, the steering group endorsed projects to go forward in a Departmental bid for funding through the Economic Recovery Action Plan (ERAP). This bid was successful and projects focussed on delivering the recommendations of the action plan are now being taken forward with the aim of raising the confidence and aspirations of young people in STEM education and careers.

Recognised at a national level, the DfE team was awarded runners up in the WISE Unsung Covid Heroes Diversity & Inclusion award and shortlisted for the Women in Business NI Diversity & Inclusion Award.

Reflecting on the work produced by the steering group over the last year, Dr Bryan Keating says, “In just twelve short months we have co-designed an action plan to support women in STEM as part of the 10x economic vision, provided evidence to identify and endorse programmes which will support students and teachers in STEM activities, and seen the Department for the Economy and the Royal Academy of Engineering formally undertaking to work together to deliver projects which will help achieve our shared goals.

“Over the years, Eileen and I have had the privilege to help shape the skills policy landscape in Northern Ireland through various panels and groups, and it is truly encouraging to see actions already being taken forward so quickly and with such commitment by the department to deliver on the Women in STEM Action Plan.”

*For further information contact
pulsar@economy-ni.gov.uk*





Our Members

As a member of the UK's leading business network, our members have access to a wide range of support and services.

In every edition we introduce you to some of our members through these profiles and encourage you to network and join in with our IoD Northern Ireland Community.

To have your profile featured contact: chelsea.brennan@iod.com

MEMBER PROFILE

Dr Antony Murphy Causeway Sensors

Dr Antony Murphy is the new CEO of Causeway Sensors, a Belfast-based biotechnology firm developing revolutionary protein sensors, aimed at drastically speeding up the discovery of new drugs and vaccines. A graduate of Queen's University Belfast, Antony obtained his PhD while developing the nanotechnology sensor platform that forms the basis of Causeway's technology. Antony has worked closely with Bob Pollard, the company's founder and executive chairman, to raise over £3.3M in venture capital investment. His short term goal for the company is to develop an advanced prototype of its first product and to raise Series A investment to fully commercialise the disruptive technology.

Antony believes firmly in a management style that fosters



collaboration with his senior team, giving them space to rapidly iterate on the innovations Causeway generates, while he concentrates on delivering the company's high-growth trajectory. Antony is seen as a key figure in Northern Ireland's photonics sector and contributed heavily to the recent success in the region securing £63.9m total funding under the UKRI Strength in Places Fund's Smart Nano NI project.



MEMBER PROFILE

Don Leeson

Labour Relations Agency

Don Leeson took up post as the Labour Relations Agency's Chief Executive on 1 December 2020, having been its Director of Corporate Services since March 2017. He earlier worked as a senior manager at the Agency between 2011 and 2013, managing the Agency's arbitration services and facilitating collective conciliations and mediations.

Outside of the Agency, Don has had a varied career. He was the Consumer Council's Director of Operations (2013-17); Head of Corporate Services for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2004-11); and the Equality Commission's Head of Disability

Policy (2002-04). He has also been a management consultant.

Prior to moving to Belfast in 2000, Don was Investors in People UK's Quality Manager, with responsibility for quality assurance and development of the IIP standard. It was while in this role he developed a passion for organisational development and good employment practice.

Don has also been a Civil Servant working in Westminster on employment-related issues.

He has an MSc in Managing Change and is a Chartered Fellow of CIPD.

Don is the Chair of the boards of two charities: ESC Films, an award winning film therapy organisation working with highly marginalised people; and the Imagine Festival of Ideas and Politics.

MEMBER PROFILE

Cormac Freehill

Bennett Freehill

Cormac Freehill is Managing Director of Bennett Freehill (formerly Bennett Robertson Design) which has established itself as one of the UK and Ireland's leading Building Services and Sustainability Engineering Consultancies working on pioneering projects.

A Chartered Engineer and highly experienced Building Services Engineer specialising in Passivhaus and Nearly Zero-Energy Building (NZEB) construction, Cormac has over 15 years' experience working with some of the UK's foremost engineering companies.

Since 2020 Cormac has led the talented Bennett Freehill team and created a vibrant, innovative and

energetic engineering hub that focuses on the advancements in digital engineering and sustainability.

The company's comprehensive portfolio of landmark projects includes the new South West College Erne Campus in Enniskillen - the world's first educational and currently the largest - Passivhaus Premium (PHP) rated building which has been recognised as one of 26 UN Centres of Excellence for High Performance Buildings; the award-winning DAERA Headquarters at Ballykelly; Colin Connect Transport Hub, Belfast; University of Surrey 5G Innovation Centre; 123 York Street Student Accommodation, Belfast; and CDE's Global Headquarters in Cookstown.

Cormac has a BEng Hons Building Services Engineering and MSc in Renewable Energy and Energy Management from Ulster University. He is a member of the



Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers, the Institution of Engineering and Technology and a member of the NI Building Regulations Advisory Committee (NIBRAC).

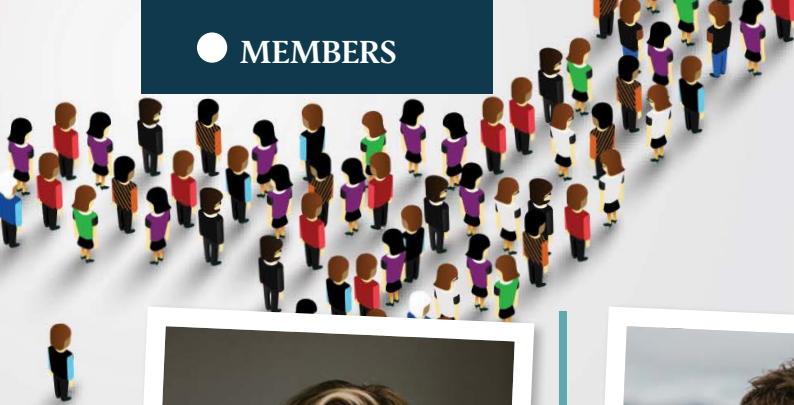


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MEMBER PROFILE

Lou Gray

Ernst & Young LLP

A qualified and trusted professional leader who has developed an extensive knowledge in payroll and pensions legislation and compliance over many years through her roles in the public and private sectors which have required a high level of skill and expertise.

She is renowned by her clients, colleagues and peers for her ability to communicate; her diplomacy and knowing how, what and when to communicate; also for her ability to empower individuals to collaborate, sharing knowledge and coaching, developing and mentoring team members to resolving complex issues. Louise has built up and maintained good relationships with government bodies, suppliers and also many of her clients across the globe which has given her the capability of learning and understanding of the different cultures and ways of working and how best to adapt to communicating well with all individuals.

Louise is passionate about payroll and takes pride in maintaining her legislative knowledge; utilising and sharing her knowledge and experience by speaking publicly at conferences, in interviews and webinars, writing articles for industry press and delivering training courses on a variety of topical subjects.

Louise has been successfully nominated to the Chartered Institute Payroll Professional (CIPP) Board of Directors in March 2021 and maintaining CIPP Individual Chartered Status.



MEMBER PROFILE

Stephen Henderson

Ruach Music

At 16, Stephen Henderson built a cajon drum out of scrap wood in his garage as he couldn't afford one. Stephen then began attracting interest in his custom cajons... Spotting an opportunity, he developed unique design concepts to deal with the problems addressed and before long his garage project turned into a full-fledged business: Ruach Music.

Ten years on - with a brand continuing to grow, a distinct catalogue now consisting of Guitars, Basses, Pedalboards, Effects Pedals, Cajons and Accessories, Stephen Henderson - CEO says "We exist to provide quality instruments for artists to enjoy, a platform for new music to be found and distinguished opportunity for emerging artists".

In 2016, Stephen was asked by a growing business to warehouse, pick, pack and fulfil their products - as they were running out of space. Stephen had spare warehousing space and his e-commerce business was also expanding; with this, he accepted, and was able to negotiate strong rates from freight couriers to fulfil both businesses products.

From here, the passion for e-commerce, warehousing and fulfilment grew so Stephen began offering this service to others as he sought to utilise bespoke software for order fulfilment, expand his warehousing and gain even better shipping rates to pass onto other businesses.



MEMBER PROFILE

William Taylor

KPMG Global Strategy Group

William joined KPMG from McKinsey and Company where he was designing, leading, and delivering projects around the globe. He has served clients across advanced manufacturing industries such as aerospace and defence, while also improving operational effectiveness and cost control in the capital projects and infrastructure space.

In addition, he has experience in the execution of company turnarounds, primarily in cost control and the delivery of top-quartile performance in operations and maintenance.

William's primary areas of focus at KPMG are corporate strategy, enterprise value creation and sustainability. In addition to his position within KPMG's Global Strategy Group, he also serves clients with KPMG's Sustainable Futures division through the development of corporate strategies with sustainability at the core, covering operations, commercialisation and business planning.

Prior to his consulting career, William spent a number of years working as a Chartered Engineer for an oil and gas supermajor in a variety of upstream technical, business and offshore operations-focused roles

5

R&D Tax Credit Claims

The Top 5 Errors



Jeff Drennan,
Managing
Director,
Amplifi Solutions

As we return to some sort of business normality, many companies will use this phase to seek out new opportunities or to steal a march on the competition. For some, this might mean entering new markets, while others use it to improve their service or introduce innovative products.

HMRC incentivises businesses along this innovation process through the R&D Tax Credit scheme. This rewards companies that invest in research and development by providing a cash injection or tax bill reduction. Recently, the incentive has been under increased scrutiny due to abuse of the scheme by some advisors and businesses. HMRC have responded to this damaging trend by appointing an additional 100 staff to their R&D compliance team, ensuring greater capacity to review claims.

At Amplifi Solutions, companies often ask us to carry out a review of submitted claims to ensure they have made legitimate submissions in previous years. In some cases, there are no clear errors that may trigger an HMRC investigation. However, several of the reviews we conducted have identified some clear risks to the business.

Here are the top five errors we see in R&D Tax Credit claims.

1) Misunderstanding Grants-

Grants are a great way for SMEs to finance their projects. We're always quick to point out to our clients any funds to which they may have an entitlement. However, grants complicate R&D claims. Certain grants mean that businesses must

make a lower value claim and are also prevented from including certain costs, such as subcontractors. Unfortunately, we see many advisors making errors in this area, as they either haven't understood the treatment of a grant, or they haven't amended the submission accordingly.

2) Claiming for All Software and Data Costs -

When the legislation was originally written for the scheme, both cloud and data hosting costs would not have featured for businesses. But as technology has evolved, this now tends to be a major cost for claimants. However, HMRC does not recognise this as a qualifying area. Thankfully, a reform to the scheme is expected to take effect from April 2023, after which these costs will become claimable. Frustratingly, at present, we still see many businesses submitting claims with these costs included.

3) Poor Detail in Technical Narrative -

Perhaps the most critical area of the entire claim and the section which is most misinterpreted is the technical section. HMRC are clear in how they define qualifying R&D and expect to see a comprehensive report on how advancements were achieved. If HMRC either don't understand the report, or fails to recognise the qualification, they have grounds to question, and potentially dismiss, the submission.

4) Overclaiming Employee Time -

Many claims suggest a high proportion of an employee's time was spent on R&D. We would appeal to businesses to avoid falling into the trap of apportioning 100% of anyone's time to R&D. It is simply not

possible for someone to spend all day, every day, on R&D, given their other task and project commitments. Similarly, overclaiming for staff who are in finance, procurement, or administration roles is also a red flag to HMRC investigators.

5) Misunderstanding Business Ownership -

This comes down to the need for proper diligence on behalf of the claimant company. It's a similar issue to the wrongful treatment of grants. The share ownership of a business can create a wealth of issues when understanding its treatment for R&D Tax Credits. For example, if a 'large' business owns over 25% of the shares, then the business could be given a different treatment. Similarly, ownership by an equity funder of over 50% will also trigger an alternative approach.

While there is no quick fix when it comes to making an R&D claim, it pays significant dividends to engage with advisors who have the breadth of experience and resources to provide expert guidance to the management team of your business.



Business IT systems a help or a hindrance?



Ryan Price,
Managing Partner,
Business Advisory
Solutions

IT systems have been an essential element of every business for very many years. As the capabilities of technology have developed (at a dizzying pace), and as the trends in delivery of software have evolved (“mainframe” > “on-premise servers” > “cloud”), businesses have found themselves continuously making significant investments in IT systems

This has been especially so over the past number of years as governments force more and more compliance activities onto digital platforms, and businesses have had to adapt or even implement new IT systems to be able to meet government’s compliance requirements. Initiatives such as “Making Tax Digital for VAT” and “Real Time Information” are two of the more recent examples, and the next wave (“Making Tax Digital for Income Tax”) is fast approaching.

The costs of business IT systems have also reduced over time. 50 years ago, only the largest corporations could afford “mainframe” computing, but today even the smallest business can access world-class IT functionality via the Internet – often for a comparatively modest per-user monthly fee (although this can escalate rapidly as the number of users increase).

However the question posed in the heading has been consistent right across the ages of business computing.

Do the IT systems in your business really deliver the value you need from them, or are they a source of some (or even significant) frustration to management and/or users?

To put it another way:

- 1) are your IT systems crucial elements of your team – always delivering the information you need on demand; or
- 2) do you and your staff find your IT systems to be recalcitrant, awkward, difficult and requiring numerous “work arounds” – especially by using spreadsheets?; or
- 3) perhaps your view of your IT systems is somewhere between these extremes – your systems do a reasonable and consistent job, but you suspect you could get more value from them?

In my experience, the success or failure of IT systems most often lies with the design and execution of the underlying business processes.

Your IT systems, together with your staff, deliver the processes which your business needs to perform in order to carry out its day-to-day activities, from sales, operations and purchasing to communications, payroll and compliance.

If your business processes are clearly defined, well organised and integrated as far as possible, then it is likely that your combined people and IT system resources will deliver them smoothly and seamlessly.

“ In my experience, the success or failure of IT systems most often lies with the design and execution of the underlying business processes. ”

For example, if your business process(es) concerning employee applications, HR on-boarding, IT provisioning and payroll are holistically designed, then it should be possible to put in place an IT system which supports a smooth pathway right from the start of an employee application process all the way through to ongoing payroll and HR record processing. Your recruitment team, your HR team, your payroll team and your IT team should be able to co-operate and co-ordinate the entire journey from application to regular employee, seamlessly supported by one (or multiple integrated) IT system(s).

The secret of Service



Paul Rothwell,
Group CEO,
Sliderobes

Conversely, if your business process is not properly designed and if your recruitment, HR, payroll and IT teams do not co-operate – or are not willing to compromise in order to collaborate – no IT system can resolve these problems.

It is easy to purchase an IT system – and there is no shortage of system developers queuing up to sell businesses IT systems for every conceivable business need. But if you have not:

- clearly defined your business process; and
- decided what IT functionality you require to support that process; and
- made sure that the system you are buying delivers the required functionality; and
- made sure that your staff are “bought in” to using the new system and collaborating and, if necessary, compromising in order to better collaborate;

then project failure is highly likely.

Time and again I see difficult business process problems being addressed simply by buying another IT system, without properly thinking through the underlying business process. Inevitably a couple of months later, the IT system which had previously been the “solution” is now “a significant problem” and the recriminations are well under way, with the IT system always the primary recipient of the blame.

In conclusion, think business processes first; think IT systems second.

Ryan Price is Managing Partner at Business Advisory Solutions, a boutique consultancy focussed on helping mid-market and SME organisations to gain maximum value from their IT systems.

Locally owned Sliderobes have sites across the UK and Ireland, with the head office in Belfast and have recently won a Platinum Award for Service for the third year running. We asked Group CEO Paul Rothwell if he'd share the secret of how they achieve this standard, and so consistently..

“Firstly, I should explain that you can't apply for a Feefo award. It's given by Feefo unprompted, purely based on feedback from our customers directly to Feefo over 12 months. The highest standard in an individual year is Gold. If you have three successive years at Gold you get a Platinum Award. Therefore, three successive Platinum awards means we've been Gold standard for five consecutive years.

We use Feefo as a key measure of customer satisfaction because it's external, independent and objective. We encourage customers to leave reviews but don't reward them for being positive, because we'd learn nothing that way. So, the first point I would make is that listening to your customers is critical. It's easy to become so engaged in making improvements internally that you forget to lift your head and listen to who matters most. That's been a core input to a major elevation programme we've been engaged in throughout our business over recent years.

The starting point has to be our values, which prominently feature a customer focus along with respect and support for each other. In turn, our values drive a positive culture. This award recognises that you don't have to be a family to have family values. We have built a fantastic team who genuinely care about their work, colleagues, and customers.

However, you can't just dream up a list of values, stick them on the office wall on a nice poster, and expect the right culture to somehow manifest itself throughout the organisation.

There are many aspects to achieving outstanding customer service, including the right KPIs and management processes. But management is only one arm of this. Embedding the right values and culture is a leadership issue. If leadership behaviour doesn't resonate with your stated values, that's the one sure way of undermining everything else you do by destroying positive culture. Or enabling a toxic one.

If you aren't authentic, you're a fraud, and your team will see that (if they can't, I'd question if you have the right team). In which case don't be surprised if they're confused about how important your values really are.

“You can't delegate values and culture. It has to come from the top.”

There are many definitions of the difference between management and leadership. For me, management is more about processes, structures and systems – the mechanics of running an organisation if you like. Leadership is more about attitude and behaviour.

Your team's attitude will mirror those of the leadership. Values need to be established at the top and you have to mean it. You have to live it. You have to demonstrate it personally and consistently. If it isn't authentic, you have a proverbial lipstick on a pig scenario.

You can't delegate values and culture. It has to come from the top.

Let's bring the world to Belfast and Northern Ireland



Rachael McGuickin,
Director of Business
Development,
Sustainability and
Transformation, Visit
Belfast

We're home to over 1,100 international investors, pioneering start-ups, ambitious indigenous companies and truly world-class universities. We're global leaders in cyber security, fintech, advanced manufacturing and life and health sciences. Innovative products and services from Northern Ireland are exported to over 100 countries and we have one of the fastest growing knowledge economies in the UK. But still we remain one of the world's best kept secrets.

The most effective way to showcase Northern Ireland's talent and the region as a place to do business, work, study, live and invest - is to invite global industry to the region so that they can experience first-hand what we have to offer.

Business events are an incredibly powerful way to do that because they bring the global eco-system and leaders of an industry together in one place. Our job is to make place that Northern Ireland.

Business events mean business

At Visit Belfast, we have a dedicated business team who are responsible for attracting international and national conferences and business events to Belfast and Northern Ireland. On average each business event brings £1m to the local economy and we have secured nearly £400m in business events to

the region to date. We work in partnership with Invest NI, Belfast City Council, Tourism NI, Visit Derry, our Universities and over 1,200 academic and business leaders known as 'ambassadors' to attract those events that not only deliver for our tourism economy - but that benefit companies, organisations and industries based here.

“ Our mission is to work with sector leaders to attract events to Belfast and Northern Ireland that not only boost the visitor economy but that deliver real benefits for the sector and the organisations within it. ”

If you think about it, attracting a business event to Northern Ireland is simply a vehicle to bring global customers here, creating sales and export opportunities for local firms. Award-winning production company Sixteen South is a great example. They secured a contract worth nearly £1m with Nick Jnr after we brought the Cartoon Finance Conference to Belfast a number of years ago.

Business events create opportunities for scaling companies to access investment and showcase the world-class research taking place in

Northern Ireland. Ambassador Prof. Tara Moore from Ulster University secured £400k research funding from US and Korean based precision medicine firm Avellino after speaking at a conference. They have since invested over £1m with the University.

Global staff conferences and corporate events are also important as they attract global leadership teams to Northern Ireland and support FDI investment. Baker Tilley Mooney Moore, Deloitte, Terex and Pinsent Masons have all hosted events with their global colleagues in Northern Ireland to promote the local operation.

10X Vision

The Department for Economy's 10X Vision and the Tourism Recovery Action Plan set out bold ambitions for the economic recovery and future growth of Northern Ireland. To support that ambition, we partnered with Invest NI to establish five sector advisory panels aligned to 10X clusters in life and health sciences, financial and professional services, technology, advanced manufacturing and food & drink. Our mission is to work with sector leaders to attract events to Belfast and Northern Ireland that not only boost the visitor economy but that deliver real benefits for the sector and the organisations within it.

Investment in an aligned business events strategy is now required to deliver long-term growth and realise the significant economic development, research and tourism benefits for Northern Ireland.

We would love to hear from IOD members about the business events linked to your organisation or sector that we could attract to Northern Ireland. To find out more and become an Ambassador, visit meetbelfast.com/ambassadorcircle or contact conference@visitbelfast.com today.

Sustainability, disputes & greenwashing

Getting ESG right



Matthew Howse,
Partner - Dispute
Resolution
and Litigation,
Eversheds
Sutherland

Over the past few years, particularly during the pandemic era, we've seen the terms 'ESG' and 'sustainability' rocket in popularity and use among large corporations

The current climate crisis, as well as high-profile international events like COP26, means it's no longer an option for large businesses to ignore or avoid their own climate obligations. As companies become more ecologically conscious and try and prove their green credentials to their consumers, clients, and partners, it's important, however, that the 'G' in ESG does not simply stand for greenwashing.

Greenwashing - branding something as eco-friendly, green, or sustainable when this is not the case - misleads consumers into thinking they are helping the planet by choosing those products. And businesses are beginning to be held to account on this in the way they advertise. Incidences of companies being taken to task by authorities and watchdogs across the globe are beginning to come to the fore, which should come as a shot across the bows to companies who are boasting of their record on the climate and sustainability.

One such case to follow in 2022 is Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility v Santos Limited NSD858/202 in which the ACCR is challenging statements Santos made in its 2020 annual report as greenwashing. In particular, the ACCR

claims as misleading and deceptive the statements in the annual report relating to (1) Santos' plan to achieve net zero emissions by 2040; and (2) clean energy production by Santos. In common with many climate actions, the claimant is seeking a change of corporate behaviour rather than a monetary award.

The Santos case demonstrates how quickly things have progressed in relation to climate change. Until recently, the focus of activists and investors has been on trying to get companies to make disclosures around their emission targets and strategy to meet those targets.

“ Ensuring your green commitments are deeper than what they appear on the surface is key, both to avoiding costly legal action... ”

As this case demonstrates, as companies respond to this demand, they can expect the targets they set and the measures they intend to adopt to meet them to be carefully scrutinised and challenged if they are not perceived to be credible, consistent with business operations, or lacking in detail or substance. While this case is still at an early stage, it demonstrates the importance of ensuring what goes in public facing documents is not susceptible to claims of greenwashing.

This case is significant because it is the first case in the world to challenge the veracity of a company's net zero emissions target as well as the first case in Australia to challenge the oil and gas industry on claims of greenwashing. When a precedent such as this is set, it's likely that it will embolden regulators, watchdogs, and activists in other jurisdictions to take similar action.

The Santos case, therefore, should serve as a warning to corporations closer to home. Ensuring your green commitments are deeper than what they appear on the surface is key, both to avoiding costly legal action (financially and reputationally) and properly demonstrating your commitment to sustainability and your green obligations.



Start your Journey to Becoming an IoD Chartered Director!

Modular Approach to IoD Certificate in Company Direction

Whether you're a newly appointed director, aspiring to a seat on the board, or want to improve performance with fresh insight, the IoD Certificate in Company Direction, Level 9 (SCQF) qualification will equip you with the core knowledge and awareness needed to function effectively as a director.

Taking place at The Merchant Hotel Belfast, modules and dates are:

Role of the Director and Board
12 - 13 September 2022 (2 days)

Finance for Non-Finance Directors
19 - 21 October 2022 (3 days)

Strategy for Directors
9 - 11 November 2022 (3 days)

Leadership for Directors
28 - 29 November 2022 (2 days)

The programme covers the key areas of governance, finance, strategy and leadership providing you with a foundation in effective directorship:

- An in-depth view of the role, responsibilities and legal duties of a director
- An understanding of the characteristics of an effective board
- Sound knowledge of financial terms and concepts
- The issues and processes associated with formulating strategic business plans and achieving strategic leadership
- Enriched peer learning with directors across the globe
- A qualification that is respected world-wide and sits as an equivalent to degree level

Take advantage of a range of flexible routes to qualification available across the UK, featuring a blend of digital and interactive virtual learning tailored to your level of experience, prior qualifications, career aspirations and learning style

The Certificate in Company Direction is available a modular per month basis or alternatively a 5 Day Fast-Track.

Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction | 5 Day Fast-Track

15-20 May 2022 (Northern Ireland)

Business pressures can make it difficult for directors and senior leaders to take time out to focus on personal and professional development and keep up-to-date with industry updates.

Take control of your development, become a certified director in under a month* with this intensive fast track residential designed specifically for the time-poor leader.

Practical just-in-time learning enhanced by real-life scenarios and peer collaboration will provide you with the vital knowledge and skills for immediate application and maximum impact at board level.

In addition, the Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction provides an effective solution for teams and groups of leaders who wish to develop a common approach to governance, strategy and leadership that may be applied at organisational level.

For further information on our Certificate in Company Direction please email heather.white@iod.com



“The quality of the programme was really exceptional, so I learned really valuable information that's actually really tangible in my day to day life. I absolutely would recommend it.”

Gillian McAuley CDir,
Group HR Director, Devenish Nutrition



ACADEMY

WHERE DIRECTORS ARE MADE

“For any business leader operating at a board level and the complex and formal governance that exists around the board or aspiring to be at that level, I think that the Chartered Director Programme would be very beneficial.”

Paul Stapleton CDir,
Managing Director, NIE
Networks



Developing Board Performance

This three-day module of the Diploma in Company Direction provides a unique opportunity to put your skills to the test as you act as a board member to tackle a real-life board-room scenario, mirroring in many ways the operation of a board.

Who should attend?

Experienced directors and senior leaders who have completed the IoD Certificate in Company Direction and wish to further their development with practical application and understanding of the knowledge and skills required at board level.

Course objectives

Participation on this course will enable you to:

- Understand your board's role, its dynamic, power, influence and conflicts

- Gain knowledge of important topics: risk and crisis management, decision-making, mergers and acquisitions, and board performance
- Understand relevant techniques and tools to improve personal skills and that of the board
- Evaluate and improve the performance of your board, its committees and individual directors

When you have passed the examination you will be awarded the Diploma in Company Direction. This is also an essential step for achieving Chartered Director status, the professional qualification that recognises the professionalism and experience of directors.

For further information on our Diploma in Company Direction please email heather.white@iod.com



Marketing your brand and products to IoD members

Director NI magazine reaches many of Northern Ireland's most influential business leaders.

A bi-monthly magazine, it is circulated to 1,000 local members of the Institute of Directors (IoD), and offers regular insights into current business and governance issues.

To advertise in Director NI magazine and to find out more about advertorials, sponsored features and other commercial opportunities, please email

Chelsea.Brennan@iod.com





**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Transitioning business practice through the use of new green technology

Northern Ireland has a heritage of innovation. From linen making to the fintech and cybersecurity revolution, this country has been at the forefront of new and emerging advances.

We stand now on the cusp of the Net Zero revolution, where we will continue to innovate whilst better understanding how the world and its resources can be preserved.

A key question in this journey is, what would happen if we could turn waste into precious commodities? Or more specifically, make heat and power, essential to our modern way of life more sustainable and independent of swings in the global energy market.

We know are facing a Climate Emergency and without urgent action, we face an uncertain future. It is not a question of waiting but of acting now to try and transition our economy towards a Net Zero future. We need to drastically reduce emissions whilst also investing in technologies that will help to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

So, how can we transition business practice through the use of new green technology in a just and economically sustainable way, as we look towards implementing a Net-Zero Carbon emission target by 2050?

Queen's University Belfast has been funded by the Department of

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities through a Community Renewal Fund grant to research these issues. Headed by the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, a team of academics are working towards bringing communities together towards this goal. We believe the solution lies in the strength of businesses and communities working together.

The University is looking at how to harness the power of cooperatives, where stakeholders come together to innovate, share and grow. Like all simple slogans, Net Zero is easy to say and more complicated to achieve. The reality of meeting Net Zero targets relies on convincing the world, and especially businesses, to adopt new practices and ways of thinking. This is where cooperatives can provide strategic value.

Cooperatives have been successful in bringing together businesses and adding value through the supply chain and this project provides the opportunity to explore innovative ways to leverage human and natural capital to decrease carbon emissions while building economic opportunities.

New energy and green growth strategies and a Climate bill are laying out an ambitious pathway for our future. Major challenges lie ahead for agriculture, industry, and society. These can be overcome using science and innovation to support opportunity within the economy by adapting emerging and existing green technologies. By committing to early adoption of new technologies and innovation,

Northern Ireland's economy will evolve into one that builds its success on net zero principles. Ensuring that the future of this country is both a more thriving and sustainable place to live and work in.

The transition towards a 'green economy' as the CBI reminds us in 'Skills and training for the green economy', is going to require a range of different skills and technologies as well as a commitment to change. Northern Ireland's 10X Economy

“ Headed by the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, a team of academics are working towards bringing communities together towards this goal. ”

Strategy also focuses on core skills necessary for the growth of the economy. Not only technical skills are required but also those of innovation and collaboration. The opportunities created by green technologies as well as new innovations will only succeed with a high-skilled workforce. Skills and innovation training are therefore essential to support businesses and communities through the net-zero transition.

Restoration of political stability should be paramount concern



Gordon Milligan,
Chair, IoD NI

Restoring political stability should be a “paramount concern” to enable a litany of urgent issues, to be addressed, the Northern Ireland Business Alliance has said.

The Alliance is a partnership between the Confederation of British Industry Northern Ireland (CBI NI), the Centre for Competitiveness, the Institute of Directors Northern Ireland (IoD NI) and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In a joint statement, the leaders of the business bodies said:

“With just weeks until voters go to the polls, we are once again being bombarded by politicking and grandstanding that is filling the vacuum left by the collapse of the Executive.

“The restoration of local government should be the paramount concern, and we quite simply must see it back up and running and delivering for all our citizens following the election.

“With key political decisions now on hold, businesses here are being put at a competitive disadvantage in comparison to our neighbours in the rest of the UK and Ireland.

“The worst of the health crisis is now behind us and yet the guidance regarding working from home has not been changed in line with the easing of other restrictions. This must be updated immediately to bring Northern Ireland in to line with other regions. “It’s not about forcing people back into the workplace – it’s about supporting those businesses in our towns and city centres, from coffee shops to independent retailers who rely on the custom of workers, much of which disappeared overnight.

“In a world where the labour market is narrowing, we also continue to deal with ongoing skills shortages across all sectors and at every level. This must be addressed urgently with a focus on reinvigorating the economically inactive and removing the cap on funding for higher and further education.

“As an Alliance, we will be requesting meetings with each of the party leaders as we seek to deliver a strong voice from the business community for the good of the entire society.”

The leaders of the organisations that form the Business Alliance include: Stephen Kingon, Chair, Centre for Competitiveness; Adrian Doran, Chair, CBI NI; Gordon Milligan, Chair, IoD NI; Paul Murnaghan, President, NI Chamber of Commerce.

These challenges were the topic for a recent breakfast discussion in Fermanagh, where the University, in partnership with Fermanagh and District Council, brought together a mixture of educators, government and local business to open up the conversation on cooperatives and what can be done through harnessing a new collaborative way of working. Undoubtedly, there will be challenges, not least in the commercial sensitivities, however, the University wants to be there to support, through skills provision and access to research.

This hugely positive event is a first step in shaping the future landscape in the district area, meeting industrial needs and council objectives. This becomes possible by working together and innovating the way we do it. The challenges may be new, but the approach of working together is something we have excelled at in the past.

So, what next? The University is seeking to understand more about the impact on business and council areas right across Northern Ireland and should you wish to be involved or even to find out more about the project, please email Andrew Norton via a.norton@qub.ac.uk.



Member News

Henry Brothers Sets The Bar For Sustainability In Construction Sector

Henry Brothers, one of the UK's leading construction companies and Northern Ireland's Responsible Business of the Year, has announced its strategy to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The organisation, which is already building a new net carbon zero Nursery and Forest School for Staffordshire University and a £9m sustainable development at Loughborough University, aims to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions by 2% each year for the next nine years and to halve CO2e emissions by 2030.

The Journey to Net Zero strategy will be achieved through a number of initiatives such as implementing 100% hybrid/electric cars by 2025, utilising 100% eco cabins on sites by 2025, and enhancing its biodiversity by 2% a year.

Ian Henry, CSR Director at Henry Brothers, said: "Sustainability has been at the heart of our operations for over two decades with eco-friendly practices adopted since the 1990s and progress recorded since 2014.

"The outcomes of our sustainability initiatives to date – which include developing the Henry Brothers Nature Reserve, creating the Sustainability Professionals Forum, and involvement with tree planting schemes – have been excellent, but the launch of our Net Zero



Strategy is certainly our most significant commitment to date.

"It comes at a time where businesses and individuals have more of a responsibility than ever before to change our behaviour and protect our environment.

"Our Journey to Net Zero outlines exactly how we will achieve this ambitious goal by working with our employees, clients and partners to achieve a sustainable future that builds upon the extensive foundations already in place."

Henry Brother's Journey to Net Zero Strategy identifies how the company will review and implement new practices around fuel, gas, car mileage, electricity use, waste transport, air mileage and delivery mileage carbon.

The reduction in each of these areas will be achieved through seven key ventures – reducing the operational impact, a Sustainability Professionals Forum, carbon literacy training, reduction in the reliance of fuel, the ongoing Research and Development programme with Queen's University, tree planting schemes, and honest and transparent reporting and disclosure.

Ian continued: "This journey comes with significant investments of time and money which will be used in part to deliver carbon literacy training for all of our employees, maintain our environmental learning programme,

and research new methods of introducing renewable electric into our projects and working. "The buildings we are currently constructing will be in place in 50 years so sustainable construction is required now to ensure these structures are suitable long into the future. Our work has always been of the highest calibre, and we are delighted when local communities directly benefit from it, but to now deliver construction projects that also benefit the environment is inspiring." Henry Brothers, which has sites in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and the Midlands, has recently started work on Staffordshire University's first net zero carbon building, which will incorporate a forest school facility, air source heat pump heating, roof mounted solar panels, and earth tube passive cooling systems. Ian concluded. "For construction to have a real impact, sustainability needs to be a vital element at all levels of the supply chain. Our partnerships with our subcontractors and suppliers are crucial to ensuring the success of our Journey to Net Zero and we look forward to working together to ensure responsible construction."

For more information and to view the full Journey to Net Zero Strategy please visit henrybrothers.co.uk

Sponsors join Elmer's herd as millions set for the Big Belfast Trail

Around one million people will take part in Elmer's Big Belfast Trail this summer – and local businesses are being offered a number of remaining sponsor places for this mass participation event in Belfast.

The free, family-friendly trails – which is being organised by the Northern Ireland Hospice in partnership with Wild in Art and Andersen Press – will host a herd of uniquely decorated sculptures of Elmer the Patchwork Elephant, inspired by the best-selling books by David McKee.

The sculptures will make a colourful splash and will pop up around Belfast at key landmarks, streets, and open spaces this June 2022. Each elephant will be designed by a local artist and

will create an “elephant-astic” art trail across Belfast for 10 weeks.

In addition to the main ‘herd’, a number of ‘young’ Elmers, each one designed by a local school, will be displayed in special venues across the city. Approximately 1 million visitors and residents are set to follow on the trail, which will deliver an estimated boost of £10m to the local economy.

Businesses are now signing up to join the celebrations and sponsoring their own Elmer elephants. Among the high profile names who have been announced as official sponsors of the ‘mammoth’ event are: Belfast City Council; Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council; media partner U105; Belfast One; Irish News; PwC; O’Neills Irish International Sports Company Ltd; University of Ulster; Lost City Adventure Golf; CastleCourt shopping centre; Victoria Square Shopping Centre, Neueda Training; Tesco; Dennisons Commercials and Aircon Panasonic.

Northern Ireland Hospice, Director of Brand and Commercial Development, Mary McCall, said: “Excitement is building for the Elmer’s Big Belfast Trail! We are delighted that such

amazing organisations have seen the advantages of this 10 week sponsorship deal and are joining in on the celebration of the summer.

“We’re delighted that Belfast City Council signed up immediately as our Presenting Partner and now many other organisations are now coming on board too: they see the business benefits for their brand and the exposure that this high profile mass participation event will bring.

“It’s not too late for other businesses to sign-up to be a key part of a summer event that will delight the whole city by bringing communities and businesses together. We’d love for other businesses to get involved and join our herd! There are lots of exciting marketing opportunities for sponsors. It’s an amazing opportunity to build awareness of your business’ brand, boosting your organisation’s reputation amongst customers, stakeholders and supporters, through association with the Big Belfast Trail and the NI Hospice brand.”

You can sign-up to get involved in Elmer’s Big Belfast Trail or to find out more about sponsorship opportunities via elmerbelfast.co.uk/ sponsors or call 028 9077 7123.



Greater Access To Natural Gas Network Warmly Welcomed

North Down MLA, Stephen Dunne has welcomed the provision of greater access to the Phoenix Natural Gas network for local residents who can already feel the benefits of a major investment programme by Phoenix Natural Gas to extend availability to 10,600 properties across its licence area.

Mr Dunne was at Dunkeld in Bangor where work has recently been completed to provide access to the Phoenix Natural Gas network for its 165 residents.

Speaking about the investment in the area, Stephen said: "We have been working with Phoenix Natural Gas and local residents to expediate access to the natural gas network and we are delighted that its now available to residents in Dunkeld. "Now more than ever it's important that households have access to fuel choice not just for convenience and lifestyle reasons, but also in ensuring they have access to a cleaner and more efficient form of home heating."

Neil McCracken, General Sales Manager at Phoenix Natural Gas said: "We've been warmly welcomed by residents across Dunkeld since our works began and are seeing strong interest from households seeking to switch to natural gas

already which is really encouraging. "Alongside the convenience of natural gas, we are seeing an increasing number of households moving due to its efficiency and environmental properties, with householders able to reduce their home heating carbon emissions by around 48% through the installation of a highly efficient system and the less carbon emitting properties of natural gas compared to oil. "We are keen to help unconnected households to make the move and offer all connecting consumers an appointment with a Phoenix Energy Advisor who in addition to detailing the four steps to connecting will also identify additional measures that households can take to improve their home energy efficiency."

To find out more about the benefits of natural gas or to book a Phoenix Energy Advisor appointment, visit www.phoenixnaturalgas.com.





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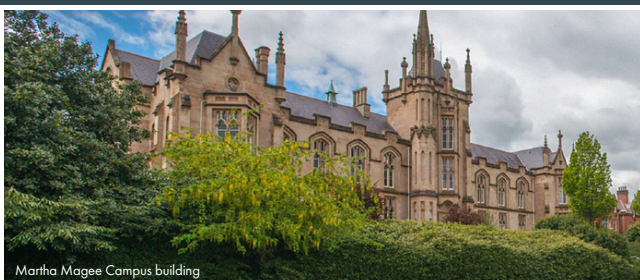
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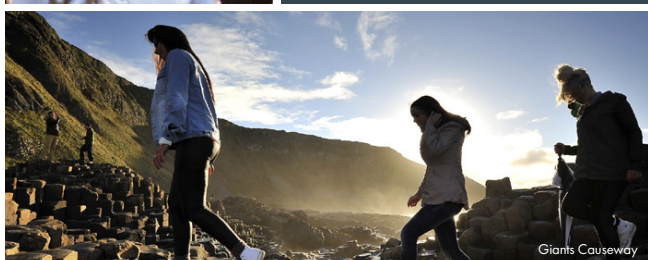
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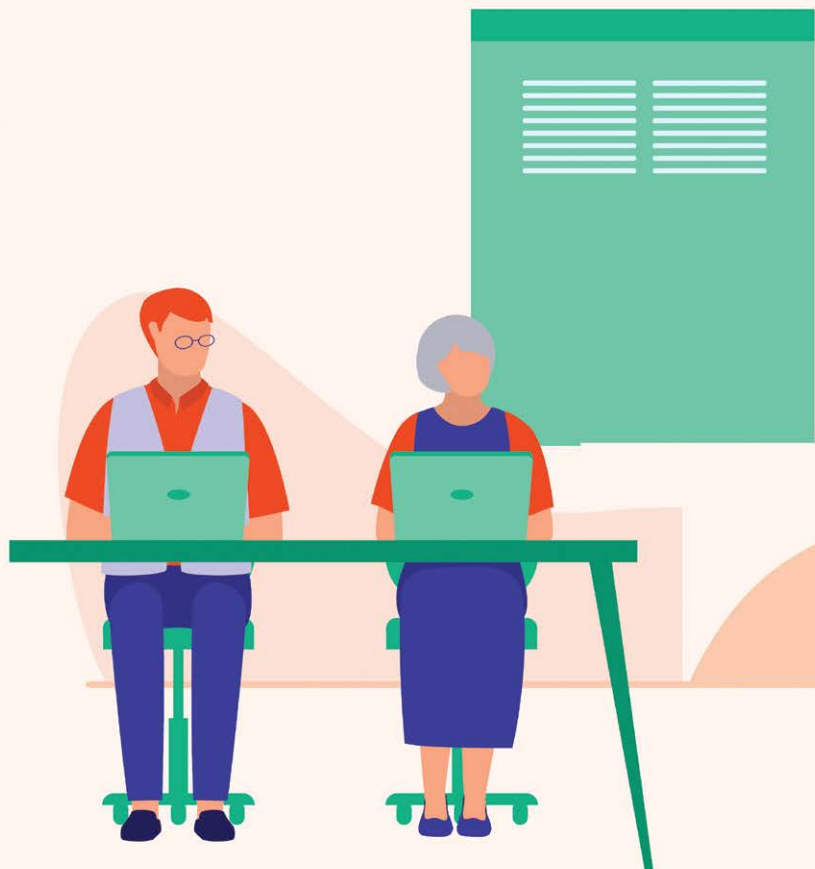
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Even for Experienced Directors ...

You're Never Too Old to Learn!



Joy Allen CDir,
Managing
Director, Leading
Governance Ltd

You're never too old to learn', as my mum said when she started skiing at 65!

Even experienced directors need to be open to learning, of both the formal and informal kind, if they want to build a learning organisation than can weather adversity and succeed where others struggle. I strongly encourage all the directors I meet to continue their learning journey, both individually and also collectively with their boardroom colleagues. There are many routes you can take on that journey.

The ultimate learning experience for directors has to be the IoD Chartered Director programme, with a powerful blend of theory, reflection and practice. I remember enjoying the 'Role of the Director and the Board' module so much that I went through it 3 times! Each time, I picked up more really useful tips, and hearing the reflections of different colleagues each time added to the depth of learning too. Little did I

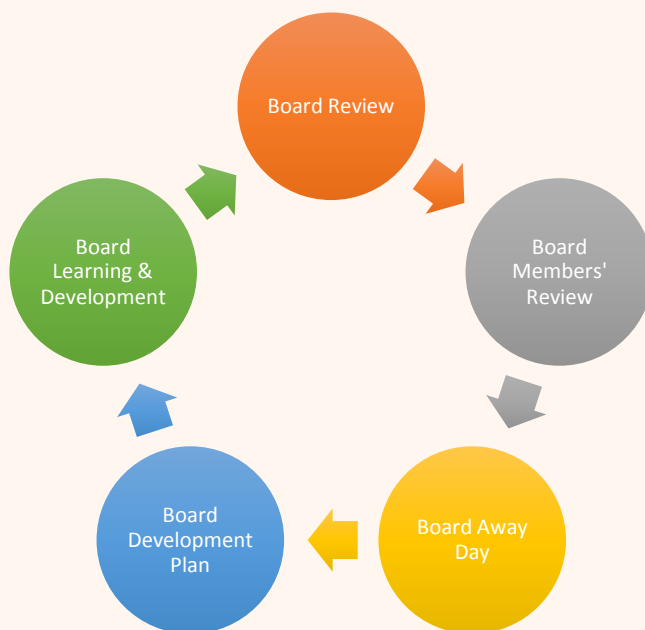
know that I would end up delivering that module (and the Leadership for Directors module) for 7 years in London and around the UK! All part of my exhilarating learning journey!

Learning is best when it's enjoyable. Another course of study I particularly enjoyed was a psychology module (through Open University), which led me to read extensively on neuroscience. That has helped me to understand some of the reasons why board members stay quiet in meetings, even though they may have a rich depth of knowledge and understanding of the topics under discussion.

A Certificate in Executive Coaching was helpful to me in enabling the use of a coaching style in a wide range of boardroom conversations. Coaching is a skill I believe every director needs – not just for formal coaching, but to enable them to use coaching in a

whole range of business interactions. My Certificate in Mediation Studies has been helpful when I've found myself supporting directors in conflict. Maybe I'm more of a learning junkie than most, which would come as a great surprise to the teachers with whom I failed many A levels, but I feel everyone should follow their passion, and seek to learn whatever will take them forward on their particular chosen journey.

The best boards I've met over the past 20 years of governance work





are made up of people who are totally open to learning, even though they may have been 'round the block' several times in business.

They demonstrate real humility, rather than arrogance or hubris.

When I watch those boards in action, as I often do during governance review processes, it seems to me like an intricate dance, with each board member contributing different thinking from different angles.

Fragile boards can find themselves in unhelpful conflict, as individual directors seek to push their viewpoint and 'win' arguments with others who see things differently.

The strongest boards I see use differences of opinion as opportunities for further learning, listening to each other with real fascination, and challenging each other with positive intent, rather than to score points.

Really effective boards get into an annual flow of planning, doing and reflecting. In addition to their clear vision for the business, they also have an inspiring vision of how the board needs to develop, to really add value to the business and lead it through the maze of business decisions needed. Their board calendar has dates set for the year, to enable everyone to prioritise meetings and give full attendance and engagement. The board's self review happens at least annually, using the

UK Corporate Governance Code or other appropriate framework to consider what the board does well, what could be improved, and what the priorities are for moving forward towards the vision of the ideal board.

“ Boards that fully embrace learning, as an integral part of the role, set an example to everyone else in the business. ”

Board members' individual review conversations with the Chair ensure that everyone has access to the specific learning and development opportunities most appropriate for them. For any boards that don't yet have 'away days' at least annually, it's hard to explain the benefit of them. Ask anyone who has experienced well run board away days and they are fully convinced! They enable a different kind of thinking – more relaxed and less structured than the usual board meetings. Bringing in

an external facilitator enables the Chair of the board to participate fully, and the resulting reflection process can be used to develop a specific Board Development Plan, including consideration of the learning and development plans, for the board as a whole and for each of its members.

The leadership of a committed and capable Chair is a vital ingredient in the success of the learning board. When the board's leader has the right mindset – openness to learning, willingness to coach colleagues on their learning journey, capability to carry out reviews that motivate everyone to keep learning and developing – their input leads to an effective culture of continual improvement, in the boardroom and beyond.

Boards that fully embrace learning, as an integral part of the role, set an example to everyone else in the business. By modelling the way, they clearly show 'you're never too old to learn'!

Joy Allen is a Chartered Director and is Managing Director of Leading Governance Ltd, providing board training, coaching and review services.

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National Insurance Increase

a 'Significant Challenge' for Business Owners in NI



Ross Boyd,
Founder &
Director, RB+

It's clear that Northern Ireland's middle-income earners will be hit hardest by the upcoming rise of 1.25 per cent to National Insurance. More business owners in Northern Ireland fall into this £30,000 to £50,000 bracket than in any other region in the UK, and in my opinion, this presents a significant challenge.

Already dealing with the economic insecurity created by Brexit, the pandemic and soaring inflation, April's increase will force businesses to examine how they can cut back to sustain revenue and profits. Given the current climate, taking a lower salary as an employer, or indeed, increasing prices for customers, may not be the most sensible solution for small businesses in the long term.

I've been advising owner managed businesses in Northern Ireland since 1999, so I know just how resilient they are. These business owners have often undertaken a wide range of roles in challenging conditions and have had to make difficult decisions. Whilst the circumstances may be different – it is their ability to remain agile that will stand them in good stead.

These businesses must accommodate the national insurance increase and, providing they act sooner rather than later, they can mitigate its impact. In the immediate

future, owners can examine cash flow forecasts to chart how the increase is going to affect their expenses, and by identifying the break-even points, businesses can understand if they need to make necessary cuts and have the bandwidth to invest where required.

As April approaches, monitoring staffing costs will be the number one priority for many businesses. Numerous organisations are considering lowering salary costs and, therefore, National Insurance contributions, by offering employees non-financial benefits instead. These could include health insurance and perk plans that reward and remunerate in alternative ways.

“These businesses must accommodate the national insurance increase and, providing they act sooner rather than later, they can mitigate its impact.”

Salary sacrifice schemes, such as childcare, cycle to work schemes, ultra-low emission company cars, gym memberships, training courses and additional annual leave, shouldn't be overlooked as alternative



benefits either. The appetite for flexible working arrangements and employee requests for reduced hours are options employers can explore as the labour force continues to prioritise work-life balance.

When introduced for HMRC approved reasons these schemes are free from tax and national insurance contribution for employers. Instead, they can pay the difference directly into their employee's pension.

At RB+ we understand that a challenging economic climate, like the one that we're currently experiencing, can put businesses under pressure, forcing them to make tough choices. However, solutions exist, and the situation can be successfully navigated by seeking the right expert support as soon as possible.

Having access to trusted advice is crucial – according to a recent survey by Sage 91% of owner managed businesses rate their accountants as an 'important part of their business operation' and 49% utilise their accountants for strategic business guidance.

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To find out more contact the RB+ team on: info@rossboyd.co.uk

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