



Membership
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- discussing the
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Planning for the future

critical for family businesses



Lynsey Mallon,
Head of Corporate
and Commercial,
Arthur Cox

With family businesses forming the backbone of Northern

Ireland's economy, Lynsey Mallon, Head of Corporate and Commercial at Arthur Cox, spoke to Director NI about their unique contribution and individual planning requirements:

Northern Ireland is home to some incredible businesses, with a quality of product or service provision that has gained them recognition not just here but across the globe.

Many of our best-known brands are also family or owner-managed, with those enterprises now contributing more than half of all private sector employment.

It's fair to say therefore that family businesses form a critical part of our economy. That brings with it tremendous responsibility on the part of owners and means adequate future planning, whether that be for succession or the sale of the organisation, is a paramount concern in corporate strategy.

We all know the old adage that the first generation builds it, the second generation spends it, and the third generation blows it.

The statistics would appear to bear that out with only 12% of family businesses making it to the third generation, and only 4% beyond that, according to the Institute for Family Business (IFB).

Of course, there are a myriad of reasons for corporate failure, and it isn't just family enterprises that face the challenge of achieving longevity.

However, it does highlight the requirement of planning and 'getting your house in order' to ensure it is in the best health for whatever the future may hold.

Structure

Among the most important factors is getting the organisational structure and constitution right and formalising it – a step easily overlooked, especially in the early days of a new family business.

“ Only 12% of family businesses making it to the third generation, and only 4% beyond that... ”

In all likelihood, the business will have been formed over many informal conversations within the family, perhaps even around the dinner table.

This informality does have its advantages. It allows flexibility, it enables entrepreneurship to flourish, and decisions can be made quickly.

The drawbacks however are numerous. Certain family members may be dominant, cutting others out of decision making. Others may be included in senior management simply because they are related, regardless of qualifications of suitability.

Having a clear definition of everyone's roles and responsibilities is imperative and this becomes yet more important as the business grows and non-family members are appointed to senior positions.

Failing to set this out clearly can lead to confusion, and potentially annoyance, should people operate outside their remit (or perceived remit) for example.

Similarly, if family members are involved in the business to varying degrees, this must be clearly understood and formalised including defining whether they are owners or employees.

Corporate governance

When it comes to corporate governance, this is as important for family businesses as it is for any other organisation.

For a board to be effective, the skills and attributes of family members must be fully leveraged with any gaps compensated for through the recruitment of non-family directors.

Working with many of Northern Ireland's most significant family businesses, we have a clear understanding of the incredible level of work and dedication required to make them successful.

With experience advising the sale and transfer of family businesses, both the seller's and the buyer's side, we have seen first hand the difference a well-structured organisation with a strong future outlook can have on its value.

For example, we advised long-term client Hastings Hotels Group on the sale of its flagship five-star Slieve Donard Resort & Spa, Adventurous Journeys (AJ) Capital Partners, a real estate developer and hotel operator headquartered in Nashville, with a portfolio of more than 40 hotels within the US and the UK.

We also worked with meat processor Dunbia as it established a strategic partnership with Dawn Meats to establish a joint venture comprising a dozen sites across the UK.

No matter the stage of a family business' life cycle, seeking specialist legal advice is the first step in ensuring it is in the best shape for the future.

The Corporate and Commercial team at Arthur Cox provides advice on wide range of legal matters. For further information, contact Lynsey, Alan Taylor or Richard Armstrong by calling 028 9023 0007.



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What is a Strategic Operations Partner?



Derek McCracken,
Change and
Transformation
Specialist

For over 20 years now I've worked successfully as a senior Interim Manager with sector experience in Aerospace and Defence, Engineering, Safety Products, Bespoke Manufacturing, Construction, Food and drink and paper based industries. This vocation has served me well for many years, being one of the few 'career' Interim Managers based out of Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately, in recent times the term 'interim' in my view has been devalued and misrepresented by those who insist on using it to describe temporary, or contract roles.

Of course, both temporary and contract roles exist and have a place in business for sure, but the professional interim manager brings so much more to a company for the period they're involved.

According to the Interim Management Association, 'Interim Management is the rapid provision of a senior executive to manage change or transition'. In simpler terms, an Interim Manager is a highly experienced and specialised executive who can be employed for a short time to solve a specific business problem.

More recently however, I've realised this term no longer describes what I do in any case.

Although I've now completed over 30 senior management assignments specialising in change and transformation, the last few years have been different.

Today, I find myself joining a company in a strategic capacity, and I partner with a senior team as they focus on improvements to their operations.

Surely that's what an interim manager does? Not quite.

“ Feedback has confirmed this to be a valuable resource and useful bouncing board for the companies I work with. ”

The Interim Manager's brief is usually very specific and concentrates on meeting a particular need. It may be a short term functional leadership role, or a unique project where the company needs a senior resource to take charge. These tend to be extremely time bound and very narrow in scope.

It's well known that the term 'strategic' relates to the identification of longer term

aims and more importantly, the means of achieving them.

Partnering with an organisation in my case refers to forming a collaborative working relationship with an existing senior team; over a longer period of time to achieve a range of quality outcomes.

Partnering in this context is also characterised by a greater degree of openness, communication and importantly, mutual trust and information sharing.

In practice, as a Strategic Operations Partner, I join a senior leadership team and become an extended member a few days per week.

Feedback has confirmed this to be a valuable resource and useful bouncing board for the companies I work with.

Being able to utilise my varied experience gained over a wide interim career is something I find very satisfying indeed.

I realise more and more that each of our experiences are uniquely different, therefore using this experience to coach and mentor on the job in real time has great benefit.

The term 'Strategic Operations Partner' has been borne out of this practical description.

This valuable concept and important professional service offers growing and changing companies the opportunity to avail of senior executive experience literally on a part time capacity.



2022 IoD Northern Ireland Director of the Year Award winners announced

Entrepreneur Dame Rotha Johnston, was awarded the highest accolade on Friday 9th December, at the Institute of Directors Northern Ireland (IoD NI) Director of the Year Awards, sponsored by AIB.

The current Chair of NIE Networks, Dame Rotha Johnston DBE, was the recipient of the Chair's Award for Excellence in recognition of her contribution to the Northern Ireland Economy and her exemplary demonstration of good governance throughout each stage of her career which has spanned large corporations, public and third sector, and family businesses.

As the director of Wildflower Property and non-executive Chair of the Board of NIE Networks, Dame Rotha becomes the first female to collect this high-profile accolade in Northern Ireland.

Making the announcement, IoD NI Chair Gordon Milligan, said, "Throughout all of her roles, Dame Rotha has demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities and this award is in recognition of her ability to drive investment, skills, and innovation."

Business leaders were honoured across 13 categories at the lunchtime awards ceremony at Belfast's Merchant Hotel, attended by over 130 people.

Seamus McGuckin, Head of Business Banking at title sponsor AIB, said:

"AIB is proud to work in partnership once again with the IoD NI to deliver the prestigious Director of the Year awards and recognise the exceptional achievements of business leaders here.

"Each and every one of the winners honoured have been hugely successful and rightly deserve to be congratulated on their accomplishments.

From resilience and agility to good governance and innovation, we are proud to shine a light on the skills and attributes that contribute to the success of local businesses.

"On behalf of AIB, we offer our congratulation to this year's winners and thank our partners at the IoD NI, and the team of judges for making the awards a success."

Gordon Milligan, Chair of the IoD NI said: "I'd like to congratulate each of the winners on their highly deserved awards, including Dame Rotha Johnston for her Chair's Award and Nick Whelan, the winner of the Large Business Director of the Year award.

“ Dame Rotha becomes the first female to collect this high-profile accolade in Northern Ireland. ”

"Congratulations to all those who were shortlisted and a big thank you to everyone who took the time to enter. The awards ceremony could not have taken place without the support of our headline sponsor AIB and each of our category sponsors whose contributions we are extremely grateful for.



"Today has been a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the exceptional leaders we have working across the private, public and third sectors here and a welcome return to a full event after two years of socially-distanced presentations."

Other winners on the night included Patrick Woods of Linwoods, who topped the Family Business of the Year category and Caroline Van Der Feltz of Danske Bank who was recognised for her achievements within Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Young Director of the Year was awarded to David Smith of Kilwaughter Minerals Ltd.

Highly commended awards were also awarded in three highly contested categories with Ian Wilson, Seopa Ltd in the Young category, Lesley Millar, Allstate NI awarded it in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Category and Buta Atwal, Wrightbus in the Large Business category.



Full list of award winners:

- Director of the Year – Family Business – Sponsored by BDO Northern Ireland: Patrick Woods – Linwoods
- Director of the Year – Innovation – Sponsored by KPMG NI: David Maxwell – Further Space
- Director of the Year – International – Sponsored by Invest Northern Ireland: Keith Farley – Aflac NI
- Director of the Year – Non-Executive – Sponsored by Deloitte: Alex Lee – FSCom
- Director of the Year – Public Sector – Sponsored by Capita Technology Solutions: Dan West – Department of Health Northern Ireland
- Director of the Year – Third Sector – Sponsored by Capita Technology Solutions: Carol McTaggart – Clanmil Housing Group
- Director of the Year – Small – Medium Business – Sponsored by Ulster University Business School: Eamonn Bunting DiploD – Outsource Group
- Director of the Year – Agility and Resilience- Sponsored by Schroders Personal Wealth: Peter Minnis – TODD Architects
- Director of the Year – Large Business – Sponsored by ABL Group: Nick Whelan – Dale Farm
- Director of the Year – Young – Sponsored by Carson McDowell: David Smith – Kilwaughter Minerals Ltd
- Chair's Award for Excellence in Director and Board Practice – Sponsored by AIB: Dame Rotha Johnston DBE
- Philanthropist of the Year, Community Foundation Northern Ireland – Sponsored by the Community Foundation Northern Ireland: Angela Moore
- Director of the Year – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Sponsored by Tughans: Caroline van der Feltz, Danske Bank



About Dame Rotha Johnston DBE:

A Queen's University Belfast graduate and post-graduate, she has had a career in textiles, economic development, and food sectors.

She is currently a director of Wildflower Property, non-executive Chair of the Board of Northern Ireland Electricity Networks and an Independent member of the Advertising Standards Authority. She is also a Director of Qubis and the charity Ulster Garden Villages.

She recently stepped down as Chair of Northern Ireland Screen, the lead agency for the screen industry in Northern Ireland and as a member of KPMG's NI Advisory Board.

Previously she was a shareholder and director of Variety Foods Ltd, a food service company supplying the Irish market; Head of Marketing in Moygashel Textiles, part of Lamont Holdings and Business Development Director, LEDU. She was also a BBC Trustee, Pro Chancellor and Chair of Senate at Queen's University Belfast, Vice Chair of Invest Northern Ireland, a Belfast Harbour Commissioner, and director of AIB UK.

In 2006 she was awarded the CBE in recognition of her contribution to industry in Northern Ireland. In 2016 she was awarded Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to the Northern Ireland economy and public service.



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

Drew Davis **Training Solutions NI**

Drew Davis is the Operations Director of Training Solutions NI based in Antrim, the largest privately-owned training company in Northern Ireland. Training Solutions currently provide training services to over 40 of the top 100 companies in Northern Ireland and to the majority of public sector organisations. Training Solutions are entering their eighteenth year in business. They have continued to grow year on year and strive to provide the highest quality of training. This is done by ensuring that they have the highest level of learner experience possible through having top quality tutors, facilities and administrative support.



Training Solutions NI specialises in health and safety and electrical training but also provides a range of bespoke training services such as leadership and operator training. The company currently holds eight different accreditations including NEBOSH, City and Guilds and CSR. It is the largest NEBOSH and City and Guilds Electrical centre in Northern Ireland.

Drew graduated from Queen's University Belfast with a degree in Business Management and is looking forward to joining the Institute of Directors. He is keen to learn from other members in strategic leadership and to grow his network.

MEMBER PROFILE

Rachelle Gaskell**Citi**

Rachelle Gaskell is a Global Program Director for Training Transformation within Citi's Chief Administrators Office.

She's a highly experienced senior business leader across financial services, with a focus on business transformation. Initially starting out in front office sales driving significant revenues, Rachelle moved into back office transformation, reducing operating expenses across Operations, Customer Service and Call Centre. Moving into Citi's Institutional Client Group for

Technology, she created a global learning and development program for 1,500 employees to increase technical and leadership skill and competency.

Now based in Northern Ireland, she has lived and worked in London, the USA and has worked across Asia with multi-nationals including Citi, Allianz, GE Capital and Barclays in a head office, global and country capacity.

Rachelle has an Executive MBA with Merit from Henley Business School UK and has guest lectured on Leadership to Henley MSc Students.

Regarded as Top Talent, she participated in General Electric's Premier Sales and Marketing Experienced Commercial Leadership



Program, in a global class of 120 from over 300,000 global employees.

Passionate about helping others, Rachelle also has 20 years of fundraising experience and has served for the last ten years in various director positions on UK and international charity boards.

MEMBER PROFILE

John Morgan**BT Enterprise**

John is an experienced Chartered Accountant operating at Finance Director level in multi-billion pound complex business units within BT plc.

A proven track record of 'world class' finance business partnering, commercial thinking and stakeholder management, John is a determined individual with a genuine passion for building and developing brilliant teams.

Appointed to Head of Finance in BT Ireland in 2010, he became Finance Director of South, Wales and Northern Ireland, BT Enterprise, in March 2020. John has been with BT since 2003, undertaking various finance business partnering and controller roles. John was elected to the CBI Northern Ireland Council in 2019.

Before joining BT, John trained as a Chartered Accountant with Ernst & Young in Belfast before spending two years working within the London Private Equity Corporate Finance Team.

John graduated from Queen's University Belfast in 1996 with



a First Class Honours Degree in Accounting. Married to Pamela, and father of two boys, John enjoys coaching soccer at Rosario football club and has completed the Dublin and Chicago marathons.

MEMBER PROFILE

Michelle Tyson**Tyson Wilson NI**

Michelle is Managing Director of Tyson Wilson - NI's only dedicated Call Centre and Business Support Recruitment Agency which was established in 2015.

Having worked within the recruitment sector for over 10 years, Michelle has had the pleasure of partnering with Northern Ireland's leading Call Centre businesses to support their growth and organisational objectives.

The Tyson Wilson talent bank is full of exceptional talent from amazing thinkers, adaptive learners, and enthusiastic collaborators. If you have the ambition to grow your business, Tyson Wilson has the candidates to help you get there faster.

Tyson Wilson has been serving NI's Businesses since 2015. It is Belfast's first paperless Recruitment and Talent agency as we believe in saving our planet and looking after our city. Tyson Wilson was awarded Gold Innovators by Innovate NI 2022. Michelle is delighted to become a member of IoD and looks forward



to engaging more with members and supporting them with any recruitment challenges they may be facing in this current market.

Investing to prevent a Cybersecurity breach can save you millions



Eamonn Bunting
DiploD, Managing
Director of
Outsource Group

Information security and cyber security have long been seen as related but not identical subjects – information security being about protecting information in all its forms and cyber security being about protecting electronic data, with a focus on computers, networks, servers, mobile devices and so on.

But such has been the rapid rate of digital transformation in recent times, that information security has effectively now been absorbed into cyber security. And the instances of cyber security attacks have risen rapidly and are set to increase further in the years ahead.

By 2025, according to Gartner Inc, 30 percent of critical infrastructure organisations will experience a security breach that will result in the halting of an operations or mission-critical system. Organisations have become far more vulnerable to cyber threats because digital information and technology are now so heavily integrated into day-to-day work. The attacks themselves, which target both information and critical infrastructure, are also becoming far more sophisticated.

The fact that the European Commission recently proposed a cyber defence policy in response to Europe's "deteriorating security environment" since Russia illegally invaded Ukraine earlier this year, shows how high up the agenda cyber security is. The Commission - citing recent cyber-attacks on energy networks, transportation infrastructure and space assets - called on member states to "significantly increase" investments in cyber security capabilities.

But cyber security can be managed, and the threat lowered. And this could potentially save your organisation millions of pounds.

“ IBM Security research suggests that the average total cost of a data breach is almost \$4million. ”

Technology solutions are just a small part of the picture, and an audit is critical to an effective risk management strategy. It's something we have significant expertise in through ANSEC AI, which became part of Outsource Group this year, and the highly specialised ANSEC team.

Our approach to cyber in the audit requires us to look at security from two different perspectives. Firstly, as a standards and regulatory driven approach where the baseline is pre-defined, and secondly as an event and risk-driven approach where risks are constantly changing and the means of attack evolving.

In the aftermath of a cyber or data related incident, we very often see things that could have been identified and predicted by strong governance and audit programmes. It is therefore important to integrate cyber into any risk management and audit programme. It is also important to align organisational and technical risk.

Following a data related incident, the first question we ask is around the sensitivity of the data processed and stored on the IT applications and network used to deliver services.

According to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), a key principle of the UK GDPR is that you process personal data securely by means of 'appropriate technical and organisational measures' - this is known as the 'security principle.'

Meeting the security principle requires organisations to consider things like risk analysis, organisational policies, and physical and technical measures. They must also consider additional requirements about the security of processing activities.



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The ICO states that, “you can consider the state of the art and costs of implementation when deciding what measures to take – but they must be appropriate both to your circumstances and the risk your processing poses.”

The measures must also enable an organisation ‘to restore access and availability to personal data in a timely manner in the event of a physical or technical incident.’ To provide confidence in the ability to do this, ‘organisations also need to ensure that they have appropriate processes in place to test the effectiveness of the measures and undertake any required improvements.’

Identifying what is required involves understanding the link between ‘organisational and technical measures.’ Technology risks should be recorded and aligned with managing the organisational view of risk. This organisational view of control can then be independently reviewed by audit, providing an independent opinion on their operational effectiveness before an adverse event occurs.

And preventing an adverse event is key. The cost of suffering a cyber security breach can be extremely high. IBM Security research suggests that the average total cost of a data breach is almost \$4million. But the effects aren’t just direct monetary costs. The impact on reputation, confidence and credibility can also be very costly. Well-managed organisations will invest to stop breaches from happening in the first place and ensure they have a recovery plan to prevent data loss.

Outsource Group is one of NI’s fastest growing IT businesses. It currently employs around 70 people headquartered in Antrim and expects to grow that to over 100 this year.



MEMBER PROFILE

David White Arthur Cox

David is a Partner at Arthur Cox Northern Ireland, specialising in corporate and commercial matters. His practice focuses on mergers and acquisitions, investments, corporate reorganisations and restructurings for a wide range of industries.

In particular, David has a strong reputation for his knowledge of the energy sector both locally and further afield and has significant experience advising clients on high value and complex energy transactions and regulatory matters.

David advises market participants on a broad range of energy matters, including the acquisition, development and financing of renewable projects (large and small scale onshore wind, solar, anaerobic digestion and other renewable technologies) and conventional generation projects, the development and management of energy infrastructure, grid connection and regulatory issues and all types of commercial contracts.



MEMBER PROFILE

Iain Wilson International Business Centre Ltd

International Business Centre Ltd is a Belfast-based company, specialising in the manufacture, sales and marketing of musical instruments for brands across the world. We are a catalyst in matching brands with the correct manufacturing and distribution partners in Europe, the USA and Asia.

Iain Wilson, the Managing Director, has 30 years’ experience in musical instruments, working locally for companies like Lowden Guitars, G7th capos and internationally, with Fishman, Breedlove, Larrivee and many other brands. Iain’s combined experience in international sales consultancy and sourcing, puts IBC at the forefront of the music industry.

IBC specialises in the manufacture of OEM and ODM guitars, ukuleles, amplifiers and all guitar-related accessories. Our core focus is in our company title. We are truly ‘International’ and 95% of our business is outside the UK. Our main customers are in the USA, Canada, Germany, Italy and Australia. We are currently working on new projects in the USA, Austria, Scandinavia and Paraguay.

As well as MD of IBC, Iain sits on the Board of G7th Capos and two charities – Hollywood Family Trust and Youth for Christ.



Opening Opportunities

discussing the direction of skills in Northern Ireland



Jackie Henry

Marie-Thérèse McGivern

Carol Fitzsimons

Dr. Lynsey Quinn

Mary Meehan

Kirsty McManus

The latest event in the ongoing partnership between the IoD NI and The Open University in Ireland, saw the two organisations gather together some of Northern Ireland's leading female voices to hold a panel discussion on the future of skills.

Held in Belfast's Merchant Hotel on Thursday 24th November 2022, 'Opening Opportunities – discussing the direction of skills in Northern Ireland' was a chance for female leaders across business, manufacturing, and further and higher education, to come together and share ideas about what each of the sectors represented can do to further support the development of skills in Northern Ireland.

Regional Director at the IoD NI chaired the discussion, which included contributions from Jackie Henry, Partner, Deloitte; Mary Meehan, Deputy Chief Executive, Manufacturing NI; Marie-Thérèse McGivern, former Chief Executive at Belfast Met; Carol Fitzsimons, CEO, Young Enterprise Northern Ireland and from The Open University, Dr. Lynsey Quinn, Senior Skills and Partnerships Manager.

A unique environment

From the outset, all contributors were keen to stress how unique the landscape is in Northern Ireland. To explain the relevance of this, Maire-Thérèse McGivern suggested that it's important to look at a number of stats before you can fully understand the complexities of the skills debate here.

“ Part of our legacy means that we are a gritty, resilient, curious people and such attributions translate exceptionally well into driven and ambitious team members... ”

“Think of the context of what we are looking at. For too long, Northern Ireland has been at the bottom of so many lists ranking things like productivity, economic output, the number of those who are economically inactive, the lowest number of people with disabilities

in employment for example. Add to this the fact that we have a historical skills literacy problem. Some fail to comprehend the true meaning and value of skills and will instead cling on to more traditional ideas around learning and employment. We need to see a shift away from viewing a vocational route into the workforce as the 'second best option' and if this isn't grasped, then the whole skills issue becomes much more urgent.”

As the discussion got underway, it was clear that all contributors recognised this same sense of urgency and were keen to play their part in terms of tackling some of the bigger issues. But it was also evident how passionate they each were to champion the talents and abilities of the local workforce here.

“One thing that has always impressed me and other senior partners at Deloitte, is the high standard of young people coming into the business,” explained Jackie Henry. “This will always be a standout quality we have here. Part of our legacy means that we are a gritty, resilient, curious people and such attributions translate exceptionally well into driven and ambitious team members who can go on to develop expert client solutions across the globe.



We hear this time and time again from FDI teams who are ready to snap up investment opportunities here but in spite of this, ongoing structural problems are turning them away.”

“It’s also important not to neglect that our current skills approach is leaving too high a proportion of young people outside of the net”, continued Jackie. “We’re not doing justice to this cohort, and it can no longer be acceptable that so many are being left behind.”

Evolution of the Skills System

It’s clear there is a genuine willingness amongst business leaders to develop skills in employees and young people but it’s not a problem they can tackle on their own.

For Dr. Lynsey Quinn the approach is to always try and build on the positives and in her view, you don’t have to look too far to find many of these in Northern Ireland.

“Look at the existing pockets of expertise here. We are world leaders when it comes to pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and creative industries for example. But continuing low standards of digital and management capabilities coupled with low investment in adult education threatens the confidence these thriving sectors can have in

the future. It always comes back to a lack of workforce planning, and we would argue that unless the direction of skills is agreed upon and enacted across the board, then it’s neither possible nor viable to have adequate workforce planning in place.”

Few business leaders will be closer to a world class system in terms of companies here than Mary Meehan, of Manufacturing NI. During the discussion, she pointed out that one factory alone in Co. Down produces 25% of world aircraft seats. “The level of innovative capabilities and the heritage of family businesses here are exceptional, but how do you nurture this? From our own engagement with schools and further and higher education organisations, we know that there is a willingness with providers to branch out and adapt their offering, but they need support and funding to make this happen.

“A key issue is that some students are staying too long in education and not enough are opting to come through the vocational system which then has a knock-on impact on the labour pool available. There will always be a place for degrees but the continuous emphasis on this path doesn’t support our members who are struggling to staff their factory floors. We believe that if young people had the opportunity to interact with the workplace at an earlier stage, and in a more meaningful way,

then they would see more of the opportunities available to them.

“Another challenge is the STEM issue, especially for females. Not enough is being done to attract young women into these roles and this would go some way to plugging the gaps many firms are currently experiencing. The evolution of the current skills system has the power and potential to address this and must also be designed to confront the lack of digital skills. A company cannot grow unless the skill set of its workforce is moving at pace with its ambitions. We need to see more on-the-job training, more work with academies – such as that of the IoD’s – and the development of shorter 6-8 week placement programmes to fill some of the immediate gaps.”

The Role of the Work Place

Each of the participants wholeheartedly agreed that a working environment where people are encouraged to be creative and support developing their own skillset would go a long way to opening up further opportunities. Employers have a responsibility to commit to upskilling and ensuring that they are preparing teams for the future of work. But this is only one piece of the puzzle.

Employers can't act in a vacuum, and they are relying on a number of additional factors to also bring their ideas and investment to the table. Politicians and policy makers may not always want to take the lead but if they see shoots of progress, then they are more likely to take action.

"We see examples of this all the time in the third sector and across civic society where quite often it's the people on the ground who are driving change", explained Carol Fitzsimons. "Politicians will see you do the right thing, but rather than be bold to make the first move, will wait until such activity has been de-risked and follow behind with their support."

"But they do have a significant role to play, especially when it comes to enacting the skills strategy" explains Jackie.

"The 10x strategy is ambitious and we welcome many of its recommendations but where is the progress and where is the funding. Delivery on these much-heralded outcomes appears to be blocked with some bits of the system approaching a code red failure.



"We need to see a universal careers service, and more credence given to apprenticeship schemes as a matter of urgency. The business community will actively support both of these initiatives and we are pushing for these to be implemented but there appear to be challenges that aren't yet being overcome."

What do we need to do next?

As the conversation drew to a close, each participant was asked for one recommendation they wish to see implemented in order to make immediate improvements. Below is a summation of the responses.

Jackie Henry:

"A flexible skills fund which both business and governments contribute to and work in partnership to decide where best to target this support in a way that's also generous to smaller businesses."



Marie-Thérèse McGivern:

"An independent careers service established. This would begin to address some of the issues we've talked about today and give young people the practical advice they need to make important decisions with."



Carol Fitzsimons:

"Percentage of classroom time given to enrichment activity. This could include the pursuit and development of soft skills or something more structured like a work placement."



Dr. Lynsey Quinn:

"A genuine learn and live ethos. This should be applied right across the age spectrum and myth-bust the idea that learning is a youthful activity. Education and skills drive economic development, so we need to see high quality education. There should be a mix of academic and vocational pathways with a real emphasis on employability."



Mary Meehan:

"I'd opt for the Skills Net model which has been rolled out in Rol. Companies make a contribution and then go out in search of their own education providers which can be delivered on either a regional or cluster basis. I'd like to see companies take ownership of the apprenticeship levy with built in commitments that they will then have the flexibility to choose their own training model."



Kirsty McManus:

"We need a childcare strategy. So many issues are negatively impacted by this void. Also, more respect and compassion for young people. So much of their education and or employment journey has been disrupted by the pandemic and we are still seeing the knock-on impact of this. Employers need to be cognizant of how much they have gone through and be sensitive to this."



Contact details: Dr. Lynsey Quinn,
Senior Skills and Partnerships Manager,
The Open University,
lynsey.quinn@open.ac.uk
www.open.ac.uk/northern-ireland

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Effecting lasting change:

how to deliver real innovation in challenging times



Robert McConnell,
Director, Pinnacle
Growth Group

Northern Ireland's businesses are navigating a tough economic landscape as inflationary pressures continue to hit hard.

The National Minimum Wage and the corporation tax rate are set to increase, interest rates on new borrowing remain uncertain, and in 2022, we saw our third fiscal intervention by the Chancellor in as many months. Though it may seem counterintuitive, I believe that it is important right now for businesses to focus on delivering real innovation to effect change.

We all know that implementing change is difficult. It is even more so in large, well-established organisations where processes are deeply embedded. However, it is not impossible. Through my work over the past 20 years, helping businesses across Northern Ireland to grow, I know that any organisation can create lasting change by embracing innovation.

Change, improvement, and innovation are not typically viewed as a priority by businesses when operating in a difficult environment, and our local business owners will no doubt wonder whether exploring transformation is worth it as they face elevated costs, higher taxes, and reduced opportunities for reward.

However, if we cast our minds back to previous periods of economic uncertainty, there is much evidence

that businesses that focus on learning, innovating, and creating lasting change, can thrive during challenging times, and I have indeed seen this occur first-hand time and time again.

I would advise any business facing hurdles right now to consider how it could innovate its product or service. If you haven't already, then try exploring Research and Development (R&D,) a set of innovative activities undertaken specifically to develop new services or products, and improve existing ones. By doing so, you could improve your market position and ensure that you are well placed to take advantage of any opportunities that arise as the economy develops over the coming months and years.

“ I would advise any business facing hurdles right now to consider how it could innovate its product or service. ”

At Pinnacle Growth Group, we actively support organisations with business improvement, including the creation and implementation of ideation and change processes. I have seen many of our clients create lasting change by exploring the A.C.T.I.O.N approach which involves Asking, Collaborating, Trusting, Implementing, Overcoming challenges and taking action Now.

Asking:

This begins with asking your customer. Engaging in customer research can help you to identify customer segments, needs, and behaviours. To drive innovation, you could ask your customer directly what they want or need. Very often these conversations are the catalyst for a tailored, value-adding solution that creates a win-win scenario both of you.

Collaborating:

You should explore collaboration. This is a powerful tool that allows you to partner, rather than compete with other providers, which ultimately benefits you both. Why not try going for that big tender together, pooling your purchasing power, or entering a new and difficult market as partners. In my view, putting effort into collaboration rather than competition is a good use of limited resources and energy when times are hard.

Trusting:

I firmly believe that you should also place trust in your team. Always ensure that you surround yourself with smart people and remember to invite dialogue, challenge, suggestions, questions, and ideas from your staff, contractors, and suppliers. Fantastic ideas can come from anywhere and change that originates from within your team will have a much better chance of being applied successfully.



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Enabling business growth

Implementing:

Try implementing an ideas process. Perhaps you've never considered a structured approach to ideation, or maybe you thought that it was just for R&D or Engineering businesses. In my opinion, this system is appropriate for everyone. Most organisations don't lack ideas, rather, they lack a process for evaluation and selecting the best ones. I would suggest that businesses consider creating a process that encourages ideas generation, evaluation, selection, improvement, and implementation.

Overcoming:

The ability to overcome challenges is also incredibly important and I know, both as a business owner and as a consultant, that finding the balance between accepting constructive

criticism and becoming overly pessimistic can be hard. However, I have seen over the years that challenges can provide an opportunity to improve an idea, refine a change and ensure that it has lasting appeal and credibility. Remember that anything that doesn't kill your idea can only make it stronger.

Now: Finally, businesses should be primed to take action now. We often waste time polishing our ideas to perfection before we act. However, by doing so, you run the risk of missing an opportunity altogether by waiting too long.

As Winston Churchill famously said, "Perfection is the enemy of progress." If you have a strong process in place, and a resilient idea that has

been stress tested with staff and customers, then you can assume that it is ready to implement. So, act now and perfect later.

At Pinnacle Growth Group, we work to support the growth of businesses right across the UK and Ireland. Through our work with businesses locally here in Northern Ireland, we know that, with expert support, they can thrive and stay ahead of the curve, even in tough economic times.

For more expert business advice, email: info@pinnaclegrowth.group or visit www.pinnaclegrowth.group





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🕒 **10 MARCH 2023**
📍 **CROWNE PLAZA, BELFAST**

*"You can't
be what
you can't
see."*

Marian Wright Edelman

Taking place in the **Crowne Plaza Hotel on Friday 10th March 2023, this will be the first return to a physical conference since 2020.**

Around 500 delegates are expected to attend the full-day conference, which is delivered in partnership with international law firm, Herbert Smith Freehills.

Host, Susan Hayes Culleton, will oversee proceedings once again, bringing her unique style of presenting and sense of fun to the event, which has been a firm

fixture in the calendar of local business leaders for 14 years.

Dame Kelly Holmes, who has had a 12-year International Athletic career, setting numerous records and still holds British records in the 600m, 800, and 1000m will join us as headline speaker.

As well as Dame Kelly, Baroness Floella Benjamin, DBE DL, best known for the iconic children's programmes Playschool and Play Away and a loved national treasure and adored by generations will also headline the conference. Gráinne McNamara, Managing

Director at Accenture has also been confirmed as a speaker. Based in New York, the Donegal native has over 25 years of experience in the financial services industry and using technology to drive positive change for large corporations. That is to name but a few!

Other sponsors of the event include NIE Networks, KPMG, Danske Bank, The Open University, Civica, SONI, The Irish News and Translink.

To secure a spot at the conference and to keep up to date with the full list of speakers as they are announced, visit www.iod.com/ni or follow the IoD's social media channels



Dame Kelly Holmes

Olympic, Commonwealth and European champion



Baroness Floella Benjamin DBE DL

Former children's tv presenter and social activist



Gráinne McNamara

Managing Director, Technology Strategy Team, Accenture



Dr. Sinead Kane

International Keynote Speaker, Visually Impaired Athlete and Qualified Lawyer



Sarah Brown

Chair of the global children's charity Theirworld and Executive Chair of the Global Business Coalition for Education



Claudine Heron

Chief Executive, Commodity Trading Division, W&R Barnett Ltd



Kerry Anthony MBE

Group Chief Executive, Inspire



Sian Farrell

Chief Scientific Officer, StimOxyGen



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CIVICA



THE IRISH NEWS

Danske Bank

Positive Life launches new workplace Education programme

Positive Life, Northern Ireland's only dedicated HIV charity, has announced it will offer a new workplace education programme - Positive About HIV - and is calling on employers across the province to take part. fonaCAB which employs 100 people across its office sites will be the first organisation in Northern Ireland to complete it.

The concept behind the programme is to provide businesses and organisations of any size with the tools to challenge the ongoing myths associated with HIV, and better understand how they can be supportive of employees living with and affected by the condition. The offering is significant as HIV remains misunderstood in Northern Ireland, and continues to impact people, with 1325 people currently living with a positive status, and 76 new diagnoses made in 2021 - the highest number of annual diagnoses for the last five years.

Whilst many people still believe HIV is exclusive to gay men and men who have sex with men, Positive Life's education programme will also highlight that it can affect anyone. Transmission between heterosexual partners accounts for almost one third of the new diagnoses made in Northern Ireland in 2021, with 12 being female.

CEO of Positive Life, Jacquie Richardson, believes this highlights the urgent need for education.

She said: "We're extremely proud of our decision to invest in this new education programme and excited to work with any new partners who come forward to complete it. It has the potential to deliver significant progress in challenging negative stereotypes and bring about better outcomes for our service users who often feel powerless against the unfounded and dangerous myths left behind since the 1980s. As treatments have progressed,

many people don't understand that onward transmission is virtually impossible where someone is living with an undetectable viral load in their blood. HIV is a very manageable condition.

"By signing up to complete our programme businesses and organisations can show that they are truly committed to creating inclusive and diverse workplaces where everyone feels supported, including any employees living with or affected by HIV. Positive Life would like to see workplaces across Northern Ireland have defined policies in place to protect and support their staff and ensure potential employees living with HIV feel welcome to apply for new roles.



“ The Northern Ireland Buyers Club aims to mobilise its members behind Positive Life’s campaign to defeat the stigma crippling the lives of people affected by HIV in NI today. ”

Positive Life has been making a difference to the quality of people's lives for over 35 years. Jacquie believes that more can be done in Northern Ireland, starting with creating a sex-positive culture that allows and encourages people to embrace a safer and well-informed approach towards sex.

She explains: "At present, the attitude in Northern Ireland is that sex is taboo. We should not be embarrassed about our sexual health and wellbeing, instead we should be encouraged and empowered to own it. Looking after your sexual health should be as routine as looking after your dental health, and should be openly discussed. Until there is a shift in attitudes people will continue to be diagnosed with STIs and HIV transmission will continue. And that to me is simply not good enough. I hear first hand from our service users that they experience feelings of shame and often feel forced into isolation due to their HIV status. In 2023 this isn't acceptable.

"We're actively campaigning alongside other organisations for a sexual health strategy that includes a standardised and mandatory Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum. As it stands, schools have a level of autonomy around RSE that leads to an ad hoc and inconsistent approach. Every young person has the right to an education that provides them with the tools to look after their sexual health and wellbeing, and to make informed decisions about the things that will affect their lives - that includes issues therein like puberty, consent, contraception and sexual health screening."

Alongside its active campaigning and education offer, Positive Life is also disrupting the fundraising space. Earlier this year, it launched the Northern Ireland Buyers Club

- a new corporate partnership aiming to generate £500,000 in the next five of years.

Inspired by the Dallas Buyers Club of the 1980s, which brought together people impacted by HIV and AIDS to buy the life-saving medication they needed, The Northern Ireland Buyers Club aims to mobilise its members behind Positive Life's campaign to defeat the stigma crippling the lives of people affected by HIV in NI today.

With ten founder members already recruited, and momentum building fast, The Northern Ireland Buyers Club is a group of enlightened, Northern Ireland based organisations working with Positive Life, and together, to change the conversation around HIV.

Jacquie concludes: "The funding landscape for the charity sector has never been more challenging and it has continued to restrict our ambitions. The NI Buyers Club represents out-of-the-box thinking. We've gone beyond traditional funding sources so we can give ourselves the best chance of scaling up our operations and our reach, to ultimately offer more support to those who need us and further commit to our goal of ending HIV in Northern Ireland. Partnership and collaboration have always been at the heart of what we do, so shifting the focus towards corporate giving is a natural next step."

Some members of the NI Buyers Club include IoD Northern

Ireland, Zenith IT, Kingsbridge Private Hospital and Sandown Dental Care. fonaCAB, the first organisation to complete Positive Life's workplace education programme has also committed to the unique fundraising club.

Managing Director William McCausland said: "The work Jacquie and her team do is crucial to the future landscape of Northern Ireland, hence our support. Discrimination of any kind has no place in our offices, our cabs or our communities and we recognise the impact we can have in changing this by ensuring that our drivers and staff better understand the condition."

For more information visit positivelifeni.com





Spotlight on events

**Celebrating IoD NI
Professional Development
Course Graduates 2022 ^ v >**

Gordon Milligan OBE & Kirsty McManus DipIoD, National Director, IoD NI



*Gordon Milligan OBE & Eileen Montgomery
CertIoD, Global Vice President of
Engineering, Crane ChemPharma & Energy*

*Gordon Milligan OBE & Chris Gray CertIoD, Director,
Gray's Marketing and Comms Specialists*





Gordon Milligan OBE & Professor Karise Hutchinson DiploD, Professor of Leadership at Ulster University & Provost of the Coleraine campus



Gordon Milligan OBE & Gail Clarke CertloD, CEO, Girls Brigade NI



Gordon Milligan OBE & Gordon Parkes DiploD, Executive Director, People and Culture, NIE Networks



Gordon Milligan OBE & Clare McAllister DiploD, Head of Business Sales & Service, Electric Ireland



Gordon Milligan OBE & Antoinette Bradley DiploD, Leader of Operations, Aflac NI

Gordon Milligan OBE & Gary Coleman CertloD, Managing Director, William Coates



Gordon Milligan OBE & Cathy Gormley Heenan CDir





Gordon Milligan OBE & Glenn Speer CDir,
Business Development Director, Fane Valley



Gordon Milligan OBE & Niamh Lamond CDir, COO, Swansea University

Celebrating IoD NI Professional Development Course Graduates 2022 ^ v >



Gordon Milligan OBE & Mark
Huddleston CDir, Managing Director,
jheSOLUTIONS Ltd



Gordon Milligan OBE & Mark Hutchinson
DiploD, Managing Director, Hutchinson
Engineering



Gordon Milligan OBE & Denis McMahon CertIoD, Permanent Secretary, Executive Office



Gordon Milligan OBE & Derek Russell
DiploD, Director of Trading, Energia



Gordon Milligan OBE & Clare Guinness CDir, Innovation
District Director, Innovation City Belfast



Gordon Milligan OBE & Stephen Clarke DiploD, Head of
Sales, PROFAST Group

Gordon Milligan OBE & Eamonn Bunting DiploD,
Managing Director, Outsource Group



Gordon Milligan OBE & Cathal Geoghegan DiploD, Managing Director, Henderson Group



Congratulations!!



Congratulations to IoD NI Chair, Gordon Milligan FloD, who was awarded an OBE in the King's New Year's Honour's list for services to business and human resource management.



Congratulations also to IoD NI Member, Michael Bell, Executive Director of the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association (NIFDA), who was awarded an OBE for services to the food and drink industry and to the region's economy.

Gordon Milligan OBE & Tanya Anderson DipIoD, Head of International and Business Support, NI Chamber



Gordon Milligan OBE & Oonagh O'Reilly CertIoD, Sales & Marketing Director, ICC Belfast



Member news

Teens come together to tackle climate action

Local teens are being invited to take part in climate action workshops through a new partnership between Phoenix Natural Gas and Farming Carbon, a local organisation that is driving environmental and social impact through the development of sustainable farming practices.

With recent research showing that 84% of young people are 'quite concerned' about climate change and 59% are 'extremely worried', the interactive workshop has been designed to help them see the actions being taken now to help address climate concerns while empowering them to see how they can take action to have their voice heard.

Stephanie McEvoy, founder of Farming Carbon said: "Climate change is one of, if not the biggest challenge for our future, and yet many of our young people feel powerless to get involved and make a difference which can lead to increased anxiety for the future.

"Through our Carbon Action workshops, we are working to help young people feel empowered to take action, by understanding that organisations big and small are taking steps to make a positive difference for the future. It's about giving young people hope that change is possible and helping them to see that as our future business, economic and societal leaders that they have a crucial part to play in shaping the world that they will inherit."

The Carbon Action Seminars have been supported by Phoenix Natural Gas, who are focussed on



the development of renewable gas solutions to deliver a carbon net-zero heating network.

Phoenix Natural Gas Communications Manager, Rebecca Dalzell explained: "We're delighted to be supporting Farming Carbon in the delivery of the Carbon Action Teen Seminar series and hope to reach as many young people as possible throughout the course of our partnership.

"Fuelling a sustainable future is particularly relevant to us in the energy industry and while we are very proud that over the last 25 years, we have helped 235,000 households reduce their home heating emissions by around 50% through making the move to natural gas from oil and coal, we know there is more to do. We are already working on the delivery of renewable gas solutions, such as biomethane and hydrogen, to deliver a carbon net-zero network and ensure that we continue to fuel the needs of our customers today and for the future."

St Patrick's Grammar School in Downpatrick was the first school

to receive a Carbon Action Teen Seminar. Speaking about the impact of the seminar on the young people who attended Mr. Gibson, Year 11 Head of Year said: "So many of our students get their information about climate change from social media and news reports so it was great for students to have the opportunity to hear about the actions being taken here by local organisations to make a positive difference and to show the opportunities that exist for young people to get involved, take action and look at how they want to define their own futures.

"We've had great feedback from the students involved and I would encourage other local schools take the opportunity to get involved with the workshops."

For more information on the Carbon Action workshops in partnership with Phoenix Natural Gas contact rebecca.dalzell@phoenixnaturalgas.com

Strategic power projects 'delighted and encouraged' by planning grant for €140 million Dunnstown renewable development

Strategic Power Projects has welcomed the decision by An Bord Pleanála to grant planning permission to the company's proposed battery storage facility at Dunnstown, County Kildare. The new €140 Million proposed facility is the single largest battery application in Ireland, and is over 200 MW in capacity.

Speaking after permission was granted, Strategic Power Projects' Managing Director Paul Carson said:

"We are delighted and encouraged by the positive outcome to the planning process which will offer the people of Ireland much needed renewable energy storage as the country works hard to reach the 80% renewable energy target by the end of the decade. This is a national significant development. Security of supply and electricity blackouts have sadly become predictable headlines in Irish news titles, north and south. Battery-based energy storage is part of the solution. It can be quickly developed, is very cost effective and is the backbone of modern, resilient, and decarbonised energy systems."



He added, "This decision is a clear indication that the Climate Action Plan is now having a direct impact on planning policy and practical decision making. Ireland has made enormous strides over recent years in the development of wind and solar energy, but there needs to be similar action taken to ensure that we have enough energy storage capacity to make efficient use of the renewable energy we produce, and to balance the grid as it takes on more and more renewable energy."

The Dunnstown facility won't solve Ireland's storage problems on its own, but if the positive decision is a sign of things to come, then that is very positive news for the people of Ireland."

Gresham House is the single largest battery operator in the UK. Last year they announced their partnership with Strategic Power Projects to develop a solar and storage pipeline with a combined capacity of over 1GW. Building work will begin

as soon as connection to the grid has been achieved.

Welcoming the announcement, Bobby Smith of Energy Storage Ireland said:

"Energy storage helps ensure a safe, secure, supply of electricity for homes, businesses and farms across Ireland and Northern Ireland. We cannot fully decarbonise our energy supply until we stop using fossil fuels to back up our electricity system and rely instead on projects like Dunnstown."

"The invasion of Ukraine and our dependency on imported fossil fuels means electricity consumers have seen dizzying increases in their bills and the worst may yet be to come. Energy storage allows us to fully harness our renewable energy resources and replace expensive, polluting fossil fuels."

Pictured: Paul Carson, Managing Director, Strategic Power Projects

RSPB NI scoops gold at CIPR PRide Awards 2022

The RSPB NI Communications team has scooped two gold awards at the prestigious Chartered Institute of Public Relations PRide awards, held on 12 October 2022 at The Merchant Hotel in Belfast, for its “Revive our World” campaign.

Combining a range of activities, including birdsong installation and a Wild Wall Mural, media relations and a demonstration, the campaign showed that the public was behind the need for better nature and biodiversity in Northern Ireland.

Speaking after the awards ceremony, Sara McCracken, Head of Communications and Fundraising for RSPB NI said, “I am really happy for my team.

Their hard work on the RSPB’s Revive our World campaign has been recognised by industry experts. To win two gold awards in the ‘Low Budget Campaign’ and ‘Not-for-Profit Campaign’ categories at the CIPR PRide awards is tremendous recognition of the work we do.”

“Revive our World was a collaborative campaign, that combined mobilisation, policy and advocacy, and public relations... all putting nature at its heart. Most important of all, it culminated in the Northern Ireland Assembly passing stronger climate change laws.”

“These awards will spur us on to continue to secure better outcomes for nature, given that Northern Ireland ranks 12th worst performing for biodiversity loss out of 240 countries.

“Nature is in crisis. Together we can save it”.

Feedback from the judges, comprising public relations professionals from across the

UK, concluded that the Revive our World campaign “was a truly inspiring campaign, because of the amazing creative tactics that were deployed to create impact and maximise results on a budget, not just because the subject was for the greater good”. The judges also highlighted the use of creative birdsong in radio campaigns, linking into partnerships with venues and the creation of a visual Wild Wall Mural for all to see and inspire media opportunities.

Engaging with the public was a priority for the campaign, and this was recognised by the judging panel as a way to generate further impact, engaging with public and stakeholder support, and they concluded that the Revive our World campaign was a “great, evidence-based campaign, with clearly defined goals. It was a very creative idea with ‘birdsong’.”





Dedicated Youth Space in the heart of Belfast

IoD member **Peter McClenaghan**, Chairperson of Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), was recently joined by Economy Minister **Gordon Lyons** MLA, Health Minister **Robin Swann** MLA

and Communities Minister **Deirdre Hargey** MLA for a special preview of the future headquarters of **Include Youth**, **Viable Corporate Services**, and **VOYPIC**.

This £1.8m redevelopment of a former industrial warehouse received support from Department for Communities, Department of Health, Department for the Economy, Belfast City Council, Atlantic Philanthropies, The Tudor Trust, Groundwork Northern

Ireland, Garfield Weston Foundation, Community Finance Ireland, DFS, and PwC.

On its completion, 100 GPS will provide a dedicated youth space on Great Patrick Street in Belfast and will deepen the collaboration and partnership between VOYPIC and Include Youth while maintaining the organisations' individual identities.

Also pictured (L-R) are VOYPIC board member **Martha McCallin**, VOYPIC CEO **Alicia Toal**, Include Youth Chairperson **Donal Collins**, Include Youth service user **Heaven**, and Viable CEO **Annette Greer**.

EEF Northern Ireland rebrands to Employers Federation

Reflecting its diverse and growing client-base, **EEF Northern Ireland** has rebranded to **Employers Federation**.

The organisation has been in existence for over 150 years and provides businesses with employment law advice and legal representation. Historically, the Employers Federation mainly consisted of manufacturing and engineering businesses. However, in the last 20 years its client-base has widened considerably and spans across a broad range of sectors and industries.

Announcing the rebrand, **Peter Bloch**, Managing Director of Employers Federation said: "The rebrand better reflects who we are, the businesses that we support and the significant growth that we have seen over the past number of years. Manufacturing and engineering remain core to our work, but as the NI business environment diversifies we have found ourselves doing the same."



Employers Federation now supports businesses in a range of industries such as food, recruitment agency, technology, charities, Fintech and pharmaceutical.

Over the past year, Employers Federation has also extended its offer to support clients with operations in both NI and RoI. "We have pivoted our business in order to support our clients in the Republic of Ireland," added Peter. "So much so, our newly relaunched website has a dedicated section on RoI and we now have lawyers who have obtained qualifications to better serve our clients."

Michelle McGinley, Director of Legal and Policy said that the ethos of the organisation has not changed: "As a not-for-profit organisation, we pride ourselves

on being accessible, reliable and affordable. We have retained our vision to provide a first-class service to all businesses regardless of their size, and at a cost that is affordable to them."

"This is reflected in our straplines: 'Employment Law and HR' and 'Behind Better Businesses' - which recognise that the businesses we support are less likely to end up in an Industrial or Fair Employment Tribunal or, when faced with a legal claim, our clients are better placed to successfully defend legal claims."

Employers Federation sees the rebrand and refocus as a necessary step to meet the increasing demand for employment advice both North and South of the border.

The website can be accessed at www.employersfederation.org

Don't 'sale' so close to the win – be prepared!



Michael Scott,
Michael Scott
Consulting

The Executive team need to be “up to” the challenge. If they are not, this needs to be dealt with swiftly.

Sailing close to the wind is not an option when undertaking a business sale. My grandmother, Alice used to laugh and say “your health is your wealth” when she heard people boasting about exorbitant personal or professional gain. Ensuring our own mental and physical health is especially important when undertaking a business sale process.

A sale can be planned, come “out of the blue” or come about due to externalities. Therefore, it is imperative, no matter what, that the health of the Executive team is especially sound prior to any sale.

“...it is imperative, no matter what, that the health of the Executive team is especially sound prior to any sale.”

Nobody, no business or indeed culture is perfect, but there are several important steps that we should adopt before becoming embroiled in a sale. If a sale is announced or approach made out of the blue, at least the Executive team can say, with sincerity, that improvement steps are being taken.

If a sale approach doesn't happen for years, then at least the Executive team can say with honesty that they have an improvement plan ongoing.

Every business is unique. There are sole-traders, monopolies, duopolies, multi-nationals etc etc. Whichever, there are considerations we as business leaders should adopt to ensure our businesses are sale ready.

Considerations for the Executive team should include;

Full disclosure:

This is essential. All commercially sensitive information, either ongoing, legacy, or future potential should be disclosed to prospect owners/bidders. A “no surprises” approach needs to be the order of the day, so that all risks and opportunities are reflected in any bid/purchase price.

Timescales:

Get to grips with any planned sale deadlines, anticipated announcement dates (exact timings essential) as well as planned slippage/contingency. The potential for a sale being “on” and then “off” and then “back on” again is not an unrealistic situation, which if it does happen, will need to be well managed.

Invest in experience:

Few businesses can be expected to have the requisite sale expertise in-house. However, Technical Advisors, Financial Advisors, HR and Structural experts, Legal and Governance professionals, Modelling expertise as well as resource to craft any Information Memorandum (which will act as the sales brochure to “sell the sizzle” of the business) may all be required. A dedicated point of contact for all correspondence to and from bidders/potential owners must also be scrupulously observed.

Due diligence and data-room:

A process for questions and answers to be communicated with bidders/potential owners needs to be mandated. The Data-Room can hold company strategy documentation, financial data on how the business has/is performing, third party and customer contracts, strategic presentations, media and PR correspondence, organograms (and any planned changes at a senior level), correspondence with government, banking and regulatory officials especially around financing the



business, statutory determinations, approvals for capital and operational spend, salary review approvals via the Remuneration Committee (or what-ever salary approval mechanism is in place). Clearly, there is an extensive amount of information for management to prepare, cross reference and control.

Cultural differences:

Organisations have an ingrained culture as well as built-in professional norms. What can be a simple issue such as offering a business card to potential owners can in some cultures be dealt with by simply sliding a business card across the board-room table. Conversely, in other cultures, such as some Eastern cultures, it is expected that business-people will formally present their business card, do so with grace and indeed bow as the business card is presented.

Some may see this as a trivial point, but in some cultures to perform such gestures wrongly can be seen as disrespectful, and therefore to be avoided at all cost.

Site visits:

These should be offered to bidders/potential owners. These shouldn't be seen, in any way, as an inconvenience. Sharing Financial/Regulatory models will be essential, but face-to-face meetings with "coalface" staff does help to demonstrate an open and transparent culture.

Management presentations:

These are not the same as Board presentations or indeed annual updates to Banks or Financial Institutions. No matter how conversant the Executive is in presenting financial, technical or competitor analysis, it is critical to ensure this stage in the process is choreographed and so training by a presentation professional is strongly recommended.

More generally, communication with the Banks, Financial Institutions, Regulatory Authorities and Government (if appropriate) should be planned in detail. First impressions are key to any new relationship with bidders/potential new owners.

Regularly in business we hear the term "our staff are our key resource". However, during a sale process, staff, on occasion, can be somewhat overlooked. It is therefore vitally important to keep staff apprised of the process. Obviously, not regarding commercially sensitive information, however regular staff updates about where we are in any sale process will unquestionably pay dividends and mitigate any potential for staff churn - not something any new owner wishes to see!

Finally, it goes without saying be open, honest, and transparent in any communication with all those involved in a business sale. Enjoy the experience, it can be career enhancing, just be sure to leave nothing to chance.



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