



Membership
magazine of the IoD
in Northern Ireland



DirectorNI

April / May 2023

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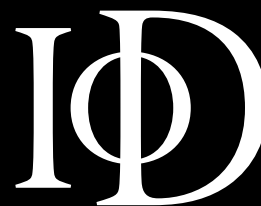
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10 MARCH 2023
CROWNE PLAZA, BELFAST



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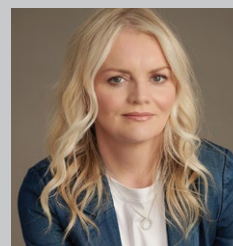
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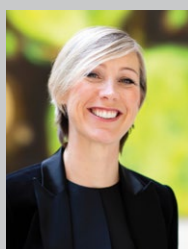
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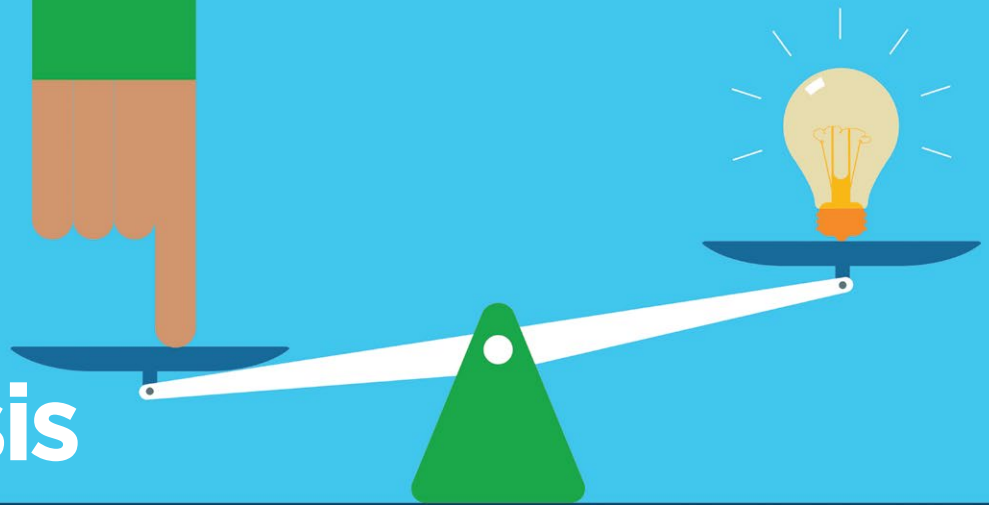


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Emer Hinphey,
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Tackling the energy price crisis



Peter McClenaghan,
Director of
Infrastructure and
Sustainability at the
Consumer Council

In August 2021, the Consumer Council's market intelligence signalled the need to plan for a winter of high energy prices.

In response, we encouraged our local energy companies to financially support our proposal to establish Northern Ireland's first region wide energy hardship fund. Once we had commitments in place, we succeeded in encouraging the Department for Communities to match fund energy company donations ten-fold, resulting in a scheme that supported 20,000 households in its first winter.

Prices were rising due to a sudden increase in energy demand as the global economy emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with a shortage of energy supplies. By early 2022, Consumer Council research found that half of local consumers were struggling to cope with higher energy bills.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, the resultant impact on global energy prices was immense. By summer 2022, wholesale gas prices were trading at well over ten times the norm.

The subsequent level of Government intervention is unprecedented and the teams in our local energy

suppliers, NIE Networks, and the Utility Regulator deserve great credit for the hard work they have undertaken to implement the subsequent support schemes.

Between November 2022 and March 2023, the average Northern Ireland household with natural gas heating will have received at least £1,200 of Government energy subsidies. By next year, the UK Government expects to have spent over £50 billion to support UK domestic consumers alone. Such unparalleled spending averted an economic crisis, but significant challenges remain.

“ By next year the UK Government expect to have spent over £50 billion to support UK domestic consumers alone ”

The Chancellor has indicated that energy bill support could be reduced in April. This news comes with heating oil prices well above the five-year average and wholesale natural gas prices more than three times the pre-pandemic norm for the coming winter.

Persistent high prices will restrict overall consumer spending, damage

consumer confidence, and cause continued hardship for the most vulnerable in our community. The Consumer Council Northern Ireland Household Expenditure Tracker found the discretionary income of the lowest quartile of earners fell for the sixth consecutive quarter during July – September 2022. Meanwhile, businesses are contending with the same high prices.

To address this challenge will necessitate prompt implementation of the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy that sets out the blueprint for a future under which we no longer depend on imported fossil fuels with prices we can't control. It will also necessitate continuation of the energy demand reduction our data suggests occurred this winter, the adoption of wholesale market changes to tackle the undue profits being made by some energy generators, and tariff reform to address affordability challenges.

In the short term, domestic and business consumers can avail of Consumer Council resources to ensure they are on the lowest possible energy tariffs and to continue to improve their energy efficiency. For further information please visit www.consumercouncil.org.uk

Contact IoD

**National Director:**

Kirsty McManus
kirsty.mcmanus@iod.com

Nations Manager:

Heather White
heather.white@iod.com

Senior Branch Manager:

Chelsea Brennan
chelsea.brennan@iod.com

Branch Manager:

Aoife McCreesh
aoife.mccreesh@iod.com



Tel: 44 (0)28 9694 6740
Email: iod.northernireland@iod.com
Web: www.iod.com/ni

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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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How accessing funding can help to **scale your business**



Robert McConnell,
Director, Pinnacle
Growth Group

You may have a great business idea, or have established an organisation with sound growth potential, but securing funding to scale your business can present a major challenge.

As a regular advisor to business owners across Northern Ireland, I find that those who wish to scale up are often unsure of where to locate funding and how to use it effectively.

At Pinnacle Growth Group, we always advocate beginning with a strategic approach to finance for growth. Does your business have a vision and roadmap for where it wants to get to, along with a strategy and an action plan? Potential funders will want to hear about your vision and strategy to gain an overview of what your business is about, where it's going and what its market potential is. This is as relevant to large organisations as it is to small businesses or start-ups.

Once you've defined your strategy and vision, and how funding might support that, I firmly believe that you should focus on awareness and filtering. This is the area where most businesses come unstuck. They have a good plan and fundable ideas but just can't find the funding.

It is important to remain aware of funding schemes and when they open for applications. Businesses should also prepare draft applications in anticipation of the schemes opening. We work with clients on a continuous basis to prepare these applications, to facilitate a quick response to time sensitive calls and to ensure that multiple case studies are to hand when schemes open.

When it comes to scaling, this type of preparation can also help to maintain focus on business growth

goals, and to maximise the potential for securing funding from various bodies for numerous projects. This can realise a multiplying effect on your business growth.

Of course, grant funding isn't the only way to scale and accelerate business growth. Grants are indeed a popular option, because they do not need to be repaid and are, in essence, an endorsement for a good idea. However, complementary funding sources, such as loans, equity investment, R&D tax credits and other lending types, also provide a great opportunity for businesses to realise cash to enable investment for growth.

It is also incredibly important to ensure that you understand the full impact that these funding sources can have on your business. For example, if you have received a grant for a project, there may be an associated effect on your R&D tax claim. A good business plan, with a clear and detailed finance model, can help you to make sound decisions on which types and rates of funding and finance might be the best fit for your business.

When advising our clients on funding applications, we always model the impact of various sources, to identify the best route for them. For example, if a business is in a start-up or accelerated growth phase, then tax credits and lending can be critical to growth, especially where cash must be expended before a grant can be reclaimed.

In my opinion, it is critically important for scaling businesses to avoid chasing grant funding. A common mistake that I have seen businesses make time and again is altering their goals, strategy, and even their vision, and essentially diverting onto a different path to suit available funding.

Rather, grants should complement your direction of travel, and should be used for de-risking and accelerating development. Grant



funding is only an attractive option for scaling your business if it can get you to where you are hoping to go quicker and at a lower cost. To avoid becoming over reliant on grant funding, businesses should bear in mind that it is one amongst many sources of available finance.

“Those who wish to scale up are often unsure of where to locate funding and how to use it effectively.”

Finally, and most simply, make sure to draw down your grant and move on. Always remember that cash is king! You will have invested a lot of time and effort into securing the grant award, spending the money, maintaining records and growing your business, so ensure that you don't forget to claim the money from the funder.

This step is important for you and especially for the funder, who will have budgeted for the claim. Injecting the cash back into your business is critical to maintaining growth momentum on your scaling journey. It is also pivotal to building a good relationship with your funder, which could result in further funding in the future.

At Pinnacle Growth Group, we enable business growth for clients from right across the UK and Ireland, and from every sector. We know from experience that funding can facilitate considerable growth for businesses of any size, at any stage, and in any sector. We have also seen funding create hundreds of jobs for our clients in Northern Ireland, Ireland and the GB mainland.

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

IoD NI Women's Leadership Conference returns to Belfast

Stellar line up to celebrate International Women's Day

“Connecting with people, with unlike allies, is how we unlock real change.”

That's the message from health and education advocate, Sarah Brown, as she delivered the keynote address at Friday's (10th March) Institute of Directors Women in Leadership Conference.

The British podcast host and author of 'Behind the Black Door', a personal memoir of her life at 10 Downing Street, was speaking at the annual conference, which was attended by more than 500 delegates, eager to mark the return of the first face-to-face conference since 2020.

Throughout her address, Sarah spoke about childcare, the need to invest in youth skills, and how education could be used to tackle many global problems including child and forced marriage and the climate crisis.

She told the Belfast audience at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, that throughout all of the global and grassroots campaigns her team had been involved with, the three key ingredients needed to bring about effective and meaningful change were patience, organisation and teamwork.

The theme for the conference, which has been principally sponsored by legal firm Herbert Smith Freehills for five years, was 'you cannot be

what you cannot see' and each of the speakers who took to the stage gave an in depth account of how this mantra had encouraged and inspired them throughout their varied careers.

This included Dr. Sinéad Kane, a double PhD Doctorate and double Guinness World Record holder; Baroness Floella Benjamin, DBE; Gráinne McNamara, Managing Director Accenture and Dame Kelly Holmes, Olympic, Commonwealth & European champion.

Other highlights involved a £4k pitch competition, during which three fledgling entrepreneurs vied for a significant funding prize to boost their business.



“ The calibre of our speakers was truly exceptional and I am sure their words will resonate with our audience long after the conference has come to a close and help them introduce new ideas and opportunities within their own organisations. ”

After a live audience vote, this was won by Catrin Kincaid, founder of Cubefun, an educational game for children, who intends to use the prize fund to develop an updated version of her product specifically for use in healthcare settings.

During her opening remarks, National Director, IoD NI, Kirsty McManus told the conference it was an honour to be celebrating International Women's Day with so many accomplished women.

“After a challenging time for many in our local economy, being able to come together and celebrate the successes of our speakers, sponsors, and delegates is a timely reminder of the importance of making time

to reflect on our own achievements and leadership ambitions.

“The calibre of our speakers was truly exceptional and I am sure their words will resonate with our audience long after the conference has come to a close and help them introduce new ideas and opportunities within their own organisations.”

Lisa McLaughlin, Partner at Herbert Smith Freehills, added:

“Once again, it has been a pleasure to support the IoD Women's Leadership Conference and I'm proud of how our organisations have worked together to grow this event and broaden its reach.



“ It has become a standout event and one our Belfast team looks forward to participating in every year. ”

“This partnership has also delivered a great many benefits to our own colleagues, who have learned so much from attending over the years. It has become a standout event and one our Belfast team looks forward to participating in every year.”

Other sponsors of the event included The Open University, Translink, NIE Networks, Danske Bank and KPMG, NIE Networks, Civica, Lexus Belfast and SONI, along with The Irish News who came on board as the official media partner in 2022.

The Women’s Leadership Conference returns to Belfast on Friday 8th March 2024.





Visible leadership is the key to success for iconic Belfast venues

In November 2022 Belfast City Council appointed Steve Daniels as new Chair of the Board for ICC Belfast, Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall – iconic venues that have shaped Belfast’s live entertainment scene for many years, and more recently have put Northern Ireland on the map for world-class business events. DirectorNI had the opportunity to catch up with Steve to talk about his new role, the importance of visible leadership, and his desire to promote Belfast to a global audience.

“I’m delighted to be taking up the role of Chair at such a pivotal time” said Steve. He explained: “Our venues accommodate the entertainment industry and they’re crucial to supporting the night-time economy. They are a vital part of our tourism infrastructure. Our growing reputation for delivering world class business events and conferences is equally important. These events generate crucial mid-week, year-round demand for our hotels with attending delegates enjoying the city’s cafés, restaurants, and lively pub scene.”

The new Chair, who took over from Ellvena Graham, continued: “Having been a Non-Executive Director on the Board since 2018, I’m delighted to enhance my commitment to the organisation, and look forward to continuing to support the ambition and energy that the full team demonstrate every day in making great things happen in our fantastic venues.”

Steve who hails from South London – and is an unapologetic Millwall FC fan – has lived in Northern Ireland for over 25 years with his wife Lesley and their daughter Katie. He brings a wealth of leadership to the role having earned his reputation for exceptional commercial and business delivery in senior leadership roles across the international financial sector.

He adds: “It’s been thoroughly enjoyable getting to know our teams at ICC Belfast a little bit better. Each and every person I meet has outstanding passion for the industry. Collectively the entire team works incredibly hard to provide meaningful opportunities for our patrons to share in together - gigs at the Ulster Hall and conferences within the state-of-the-art ICC Belfast. As Chairman, I very much want to be visible and accessible – and I fully intend to support the team to maximise their potential.”

In his role as the new Chair, Steve works closely with his Non-Executive Board colleagues and Julia Corkey, Chief Executive of ICC Belfast, Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall, to assist her and the Executive Leadership Team in delivering the organisation’s vision.

“Delegates often leave Belfast planning a return trip with family and friends to explore more of the place because their initial experience has been so positively shaped by the people they met.”

Steve explained: “I believe interaction, engagement, and visibility are crucial to the success of any leadership team. And visible leadership is much more than being seen. It’s rather a commitment to the role to lead in a way that embodies the organisation’s values and mission, whilst also recognising how crucial every colleague is in that process. Our vision is powerful - continue to ‘create a world class stage where people make great things

happen’. It empowers everyone to recognise our venues as the key assets they are to Northern Ireland.”

Steve continues: “I firmly believe from my experience that engaged staff create better organisations, and asking employees for feedback is an integral part of effective management. Not only does it ensure people are acknowledged for their work, it also means we benefit from their ideas that very often bring valuable insight and effect necessary change. Our Executive Leadership Team have created and successfully maintain a platform for feedback by being open, transparent and inviting honest feedback.

“The live events industry is fast-paced, and everyone is keen to continue learning and improving how we deliver events. I want the culture within the organisation to keep initiating a spirit of innovation to encourage world class delivery. And as a leader I recognise that I must support where I can to ensure that all opportunities to empower and motivate staff are met.”

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. recently reported that more than 370,000 patrons revelled in the resumption of a normal year’s programming in 2022, with 320 live events being held across a range of live music, sport, comedy and theatre. Along with contributing to the arts, ICC Belfast’s business events are a major contributor socially, culturally and economically, attracting acclaimed organisations and thousands of delegates to Belfast each year as they participate in international conferences and events.

In 2019, business events generated £37 million of spend into the economy, and last year, Northern Ireland’s first Business Events Strategy was introduced, with plans laid to generate an additional £209 million in direct economic impact and up to 2000 new jobs by 2030.

Steve concluded: “We play a vital role in delivering the Business Events Strategy. Together with my Board colleagues, I am already

supporting Julia and the team as we liaise with our partners Belfast City Council, Tourism NI and Visit Belfast to enhance our contribution to the economy. We know that when people visit our venues, they leave with incredible memories of our team's hospitality and this is a crucial point of difference. Visitors get what we call the 'Belfast welcome'. Not just any hello- it's an enthusiastic greeting, often accompanied by banter and

recommendations on how to enjoy the city like a local. Delegates often leave Belfast planning a return trip with family and friends to explore more of the place because their initial experience has been so positively shaped by the people they met. That's something to be proud of. And something we will be sure remains as I lean into my new role."

One suspects Steve's clear enthusiasm and optimism, no doubt as a result of his relentless passion

for Millwall FC since childhood, might be infectious. With Steve at the helm, ICC Belfast, Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall look set to continue to bring impressive artists and events to the city, powering our local economy, delivering for our communities, and supporting Northern Ireland's reputation for the future.



“First impressions last”

The first 100 days of new ownership



Michael Scott,
Michael Scott
Consulting

Q uite recently, I did a piece for IOD regarding points to remember when undertaking a business sale. However, once a business is purchased, there are a number of critical considerations that the Executive Team should be cognisant of once new owners “arrive”.

Purchasing a business can take numerous forms. Once we have gone through the sale, the champagne bottles have been popped, the pleasantries gone through, then begins the first 100 days... an important period for everyone to make a good impression!

The first 100 days is critical in this new relationship between Owners and the Executive Team. It is a time to forge new relationships, to have a clean sweep, get our “house in order” and calibrate the business on a path of new, continued, or indeed embryonic opportunities.

There are several points to remember in any new business relationship. This is the time when the Executive Team have an opportunity to shine, even though we recognise that everything cannot be perfect. Nobody, especially new owners, do not wish to see the team entrusted with running their assets and controlling their investment, as being in any way deluded.

Don't forget, new owners have their own stakeholders, sometimes shareholders in the form of banks,

pension funds and investment houses who, in turn, have financial commitments, relationships with government officials and pension fund obligations to honour.

“ This is the time when the Executive Team have an opportunity to shine, even though we recognise that everything cannot be perfect. ”

So, steps that can help everyone with first impressions include;

1) Culture: Cultural differences can be difficult to keep a grip on. Different organisations have alternative views on the varying levels of formality, the amount of analysis undertaken to substantiate the figures and indeed the owner's “openness” to a new Executive Team.

Whilst the first 100 days can be seen as a “honeymoon period”, it is important to fully understand each other to determine what is considered important and what is considered less so.

The formality of board meetings, business titles and how we address each other can be quite important. Sharing facts about our backgrounds, education, interests and homelife can all help to define a culture of openness and determine where the interest of the new owners lies and where they feel they could help in supporting the future success of the business.

2) No Surprises:

Keep surprises for Christmas Day. For a culture of openness, trust and collaboration to prevail, then it is important to be “up front”, especially about any potentially contentious legacy issues. Provide clarification if the Executive Team do not feel some issues (during the due-diligence process) have not been honed-in on.

Use the first 100 days to revisit the data room, the questions that were asked, the number of questions asked to gauge interest and the number of times a topic was revisited, during due- diligence. If the Executive Team do not feel this is the case, then call it out by way of “just to be clear, could we just ensure everyone is aware...” type clarification comments.

3) Board:

Quickly try to understand the wishes of the new owners around the board, its structure, board configuration, whether owners feel there are any gaps and whether a new Chairman, Non-Executive Directors or Executive Directors are required. Also, ensure new owners are aware of any regulatory endorsement and whether regulatory / statutory consents are required.

4) Risk-Register:

Ensure the risks identified as part of due-diligence have been fully appreciated by the new owners. Owners are likely to be experienced, but the Executive Team need to ensure that nothing has been lost in translation. What may not have been seen as a major risk for an outgoing owner, may well be for some new owners, for instance, revised financial parameters the business is expected to work within.



Specific expertise may need to be “bought in”, say where a refinancing of the business is required which will necessitate dedicated focus and expertise as well as an appreciation of how financial covenants align with the new owner’s other portfolio assets / businesses.

5) IT: Resilience & “Fitness for Purpose”:

Ensuring that technical support is in place for both hardware and software is critical. Please see Contracts & Service Level Agreements section later.

When owners sell their business, it is important that support arrangements do not evaporate. Having the appropriate expertise is crucial. These arrangements can be contracted or brought in-house. Beware of simply planning to transition to the new owner’s IT software and hardware.

This will inevitably require “expert” opinion and analysis before being actioned. Properly costed technical reports by IT specialists are strongly recommended. A business can run into severe difficulties if IT accountabilities and responsibilities are not clearly discussed, defined and documented in a suitable commercial agreement.

6) Brand:

Having disclosed all relevant facts and correspondence around statutory, customer or competitor complaints, it is an excellent use of the first 100 days to review any potential brand damage issues. The good news is that this

shouldn’t be a serious issue if there has been full disclosure as part of the due-diligence process.

Equally, new owners should be aware of the clarification points to ask, having maybe experienced issues from other companies under their custodianship. Be fully open around ongoing or legacy complaints and invite shareholder and internal discussions around potentially contentious brand issues.

This is also true of any financial, legal, statutory or regulatory compliance anomalies. The first 100 days is a perfect time to iron out any wrinkles in everyone’s understanding of potential issues.

7) Asset Manager:

Typically, this is the first point of contact for the business. Be open to the Asset Manager and their team who may be lobbying support for grants or government incentives, helping with financial restructuring/refinancing of the business and understanding innovative opportunities that exist with other portfolio companies. Offering a collaborative hand of friendship to other portfolio companies, “people-marking” and developing long-term relationships is invaluable, especially in the early days of any new relationship.

It is important to remember, the Asset Manager and indeed the Asset Management Team are likely not to be the same people who were involved in the due-diligence process as part of the sale. The Asset Manager may well not have

been exposed to the management presentations, due-diligence sessions, or site visits that occurred pre-sale.

8) Contracts and Service Level Agreements:

These agreements with either new service providers or legacy providers must be agreed, financial terms settled and importantly they must be signed by appropriately authorised parties.

A dedicated and experienced resource will need to ensure operational arrangements are in place and legally contracted. This will help with business-as-usual activity and the ongoing day-to-day running of the business in a seamless manner.

As a synopsis, new ownership is an excellent opportunity to, not necessarily re-invent ourselves, but for the Executive Team and the wider business to recalibrate. Time is not free in a business context, but an excellent use of this time is to use the first 100 days to make sure relationships are forged, anomalies are ironed out and any potential for future misunderstanding is alleviated.

But remember, first impressions last, so work to address the points outlined above, which will pay dividends in the future, for everyone involved, not least owners, the Executive Team and key stakeholders.

Importantly, keep surprises for Christmas!

scottmpg1969@hotmail.com
07973 896787



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

Aaron Quinn Cooneen Group

Aaron became Director of Business Transformation and IT at Cooneen Group in September 2020. Prior to this, he was Head of IT Program Delivery at Norbrook and he held senior positions with Sanderson PLC (Aptean) where he was Principal Consultant UK and Ireland and previously ERP Program Manager UK and North America. Starting his career as a developer at Datos, Aaron progressed into increasingly customer/ business centric roles, specialising in business partnering and analysis.

He has acquired 16 years of multi-industry business solution experience in Food, FMCG, Manufacturing, Pharmaceutical and Apparel sectors. Equipped with a broad IT and business knowledge and track



record, Aaron was well placed to develop and lead organisational change and continuous improvement IT/IS strategies. His favourite part of the job is enabling lean processes overlaid with core technology, delivering business insights with data driven decision making.

Aaron holds a BSc (Hons) Computer Science. He's also a Chartered IT Professional (CITP), PMP trained, with ITIL4, Convergence Essentials (BRM) and he's Lean Six Sigma Green Belt certified. He's a member of the British (BCS) and Irish Computer Societies (ICS), (DPO), (SMF), (IASA) and (BAAI). He was awarded the Belfast Telegraph IT Professional of the Year and IT Project of the year (Highly Commended).

MEMBER PROFILE**Alastair Luke****ATTNx**

Alastair Luke is Director of creative agency ATTNx. ATTNx works with corporates, SMEs, charities and agencies to help them achieve their business goals through creative visual communications – video, design, photography and animation.

Previously, Alastair worked in corporate public relations and marketing for over a decade, specialising in visual communications through video production, graphic design and social media content.

He has worked with some of Northern Ireland's top companies, producing creative content from billboards and magazines to social media videos and animated content.

Alastair launched creative agency ATTNx in October 2021 with a vision to help businesses get the attention of their audiences, be that a newspaper reader, social media scroller or a driver at traffic lights.

Alastair is a graduate of Ulster University. He lives in Lisburn with his wife, ATTNx's photographer Joy Luke, and their two children. Alastair volunteers with Young Enterprise Northern Ireland and gives his time to develop the growing sport of



softball in the Lisburn area with Lisburn Softball Club.

Alastair is keen to grow his business through the IoD network and to contribute his time and skills to the community.

MEMBER PROFILE**Brenda Henderson****Department for Communities**

After graduating from Queen's University Belfast, Brenda worked in BT before starting her career in the NI Civil Service in 1990. After working in a range of grades and roles, Brenda led the Laganside Corporation de-designation project before moving to work on the Minister's New Housing Agenda, delivering high quality social and affordable housing for those in need.

In 2012 Brenda became Head of Branch in the Child Maintenance

Service (CMS), delivering services on behalf of DWP. A move to a policy role in 2016 saw Brenda assume responsibility for Gender Equality and Sexual Orientation policy and she represented NI Departments at the UN hearing on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Geneva in 2017. Brenda returned to CMS as Director of CMS & Make the Call Services in 2019 where Brenda led on the NI Compliance & Arrears Strategy, secured additional work and investment from DWP and successfully led both organisations through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Brenda is currently Acting Deputy Secretary for Supporting People Group within the Department



for Communities and is the Departmental lead on Mission 3: Improving Life Opportunities, a cross-sectoral initiative to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of NI citizens.

MEMBER PROFILE**Emma Weaver****Mental Wealth International**

Emma Weaver is the CEO of Mental Wealth International, founder of Limitless in Leadership and TEDxEnniskillen Curator.

Emma graduated on 11th September 2001. Having always worked in the mental health sector, she is also an international best-selling author of her debut novel, "The Blue Line" and two times TEDx speaker ("IVF What's love got to do with it?" and "To find riches invest in your mental wealth").

She is an ambassador for Evolve Women and the book "The colours of me" (an anthology supporting women to share their stories to help others) an important part of Emma's mission.

Emma has worked for two decades in mental health recovery, mostly as a manager of multiple services. She's developed and delivered several services throughout those years, implementing strategies to create change based on the changing needs of the people availing of them. She has the ability to recognise the gaps and what is essentially a missing piece of the support given - and the fact that support can be unattainable for many. She believes there are several reasons and that one size does not fit all.



In November 2019 Emma established Mental Wealth International, to support and create well-being cultures in the workplace and community environments.

How restrictive covenants can protect your business in the war for talent



Matthew Howse & Laura McManus, Eversheds Sutherland

Over the last number of years, the labour market has grown much more competitive for employers, thanks in large part to the pandemic and wider changing trends in the world of work.

While focus has often been on what employers can do to attract talent and make their organisation stand out in a crowded market, serious consideration should also be given to how you can protect your business and its operations when employees move elsewhere.

In today's war on talent, restrictive covenants can be a vital tool in protecting your business's information, technology, and even client and customer base. For competitors, poaching an employee with a wealth of insight, experience, and knowledge can be one of the best investments they make. By putting in place strong and enforceable restrictive covenants, employers can protect their

organisations and ensure they remain competitive in their sector.

Restrictive covenants can take a number of different forms, such as non-compete, non-solicitation, non-dealing, and non-poaching. The aim of a restrictive covenant is to protect your legitimate business interests and therefore should be drafted with care and consideration to ensure they are proportionate and effective.

It is important that companies do not impose, for example, a six-month restrictive period when two months would have sufficed, as they risk a court striking down the restrictive clause in its entirety as unreasonable.

“ Restrictive covenants can take a number of different forms, such as non-compete, non-solicitation, non-dealing, and non-poaching. ”

Restrictive covenants can give your organisation the breathing space to find new talent and ensure that the departing employee does not give their new employer an unfair competitive edge. However, there are a number of key factors to keep in mind when using these clauses. In order to ensure restrictive covenants are enforceable, there must be a

clear legitimate interest which the business is seeking to protect. Organisations should actively consider why they are using restrictive covenants. Does the employee work in sales and there is a risk of them moving to a direct competitor? Will the employee have access to sensitive business information which could cause damage to the business if shared with competitors?

Companies must be able to articulate what it is they are trying to protect and why. If they are not able to do this, then they will not be able to enforce the covenants against the departing employee, leaving your interests potentially at risk.

Once you have established there is a legitimate interest to protect, the steps you take to protect that interest must only go as far as is reasonable to protect that interest. This is a careful balancing exercise between protecting a company's legitimate interests and curtailing an individual's ability to work. If a business-critical person resigns, or there is an indication they may resign and they perform a role where legitimate business interests may be at risk, an employer should take steps in readiness. You can do this by placing the employee on garden leave for the duration of their notice



period, for xample. If you need immediate relief however, you must move quickly and seek legal advice on the options available, whilst gathering evidence of the alleged breaches and any damages which may have been suffered.

As with any disputes, keeping all parties aware of their obligations is to be recommended at all times. Reminding departing employees of their obligations immediately and regularly throughout the process can help avoid many headaches. However, ensuring your contracts have strong and robust mechanisms like restrictive covenants can shield your organisation or company when there are staff changes.



MEMBER PROFILE

Neil Gamble

Lowe Rental

A qualified Chartered Accountant by profession, Neil has spent 10 years in the world of private equity and public companies. He is currently Chief Financial Officer for Lowe Rental Limited. Lowe Rental are a private equity-backed global organisation that specialises in the provision of refrigeration and catering equipment to a wide range of verticals such as sporting and music events, food and beverage exhibitions, and large-scale grocery retail.

Before joining Lowe Rental, Neil was UK Chief Financial Officer for IWG plc, the world's largest provider of flexible workspace and serviced office accommodation. Throughout his career, Neil has gained extensive experience across private equity-backed and public companies, expanding their international footprint whilst leading a wide range of initiatives in setting up back-office functions as part of first-time investment strategies in Northern Ireland.

Outside of work, Neil is proud to have served on the board of several local charities and has been actively involved in faith-based initiatives designed to address social inequality and community development.



MEMBER PROFILE

Michelle Lestas

Michelle Lestas & Associates

Michelle is an integral part of the SME ecosystem across the Island of Ireland. A business turnaround specialist, she brings over 25 years of qualifications, skills and experience to her work. Growing up in a family business, Michelle considers SME leadership as part of her DNA, and in 2000 she cofounded one of the first SME consultancy companies in NI to operate as an ILM-Accredited Training Centre for Small Business Owner Leadership. In 2021, she became a published author of *In Business With Yourself* (Orpen Press, Dublin) - which set out the Executive Identity Model® as an innovative approach to small business leadership. A renowned keynote speaker, she uses this model as the building blocks of effective small business leadership.

Michelle has held a variety of board positions across economic development, education and government lobbying. As an Entrepreneur in Residence with Catalyst Inc. (Formerly the NI Science Park) she advises high growth start-ups on preparing for investment. In 2021 Michelle became an Ambassador for Women in Business in Northern Ireland and is a strong advocate for supporting female entrepreneurs. Michelle is a regular business columnist with the Irish News and hosts a monthly business feature on Belfast 89FM radio.



The importance of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)



Paul Gillen, IoD Ambassador for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion, discusses the importance of DE&I with Nuala Murphy, Director at Diversity Mark and member of the IoD NI Committee.

Paul Gillen, IoD Ambassador for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion, discusses the importance of DE&I with Nuala Murphy, Director at Diversity Mark and member of the IoD NI committee.

Nuala:

For nearly three months now, I am relishing in the opportunity to work with a group of incredible leaders, bringing my knowledge and experience to help the business community in Northern Ireland navigate all areas of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I).

Paul:

What are the benefits of DE&I in the workplace?

Nuala:

The benefits of workplace D&I are far reaching and whether we choose to realise it or not, diversity and inclusion affects every single person in an organisation. In the past when people in Northern Ireland spoke of diversity and inclusion, they were generally speaking in terms of division in the workplace relating to religious belief – and at that, only

two communities:

protestant and catholic.

However, society has since moved on and we now embrace a much more multicultural outlook.

Diversity and Inclusion extends well beyond religion to include gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and social inclusion. And now that the majority of employees want to work for a company or organisation that values diversity, equity and inclusion, businesses really need to live those values in order to attract and retain the best talent in a highly competitive market. In short, D&I has become a business imperative.

“ Representing over 200,000 employees in 160 companies across NI, we have become the leading authority in diversity in the UK and Ireland with our accreditation now a sought after and trusted badge of honour. ”

Paul:

Tell us about the impact of Diversity Mark in Northern Ireland.

Nuala:

As a registered charity, we have been offering independent diversity and inclusion accreditation for businesses since 2017. Launched by the social

enterprise, Women in

Business, after years of grassroots development and backing from a panel of expert individuals across the UK and Ireland, Diversity Mark helps businesses and organisations of all sizes on their journey to bronze, silver and gold accreditation. Our goal is to make all jobs attainable for everyone no matter what gender, what commitments, what disability.

Representing over 200,000 employees in 160 companies across NI, we have become the leading authority in diversity in the UK and Ireland with our accreditation now a sought after and trusted badge of honour. The fact that Diversity Mark's signatories doubled last year and looks set to do the same this year, bears testimony to the rising number of businesses that now recognise the value of investing in diversity.

Paul:

We all know that having a DE&I strategy is the right thing to do, but is it also a must have for business?

Nuala:

Above and beyond attracting and retaining talent, it is well documented that having a diverse workforce can unlock greater innovation within a company, driving its performance and success. Research by McKinsey found that companies in the top quantile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to experience above average profitability than their peers.





Diversity
and inclusion

is no longer just the right thing to do in an equitable workplace, it is a business priority few can afford to ignore. From simple things like attracting the best talent from a wider pool of candidates, to increasing profitability and helping people feel confident in their own skin.

Paul:

So can the IoD help members in their DE&I journey?

Nuala:

Yes, of course. Working closely with both Frances Hill and Paul Gillen, IoD NI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Ambassadors, I look forward to deploying my learnings and those of my colleagues to this role as well as to you, our members, in order to play my part in building a more inclusive economy and society. We can all develop and learn from each other across business in Northern Ireland, regardless of sector, size or where on the journey we find ourselves. The key is involvement in the IoD programme in bringing DE&I to the fore as a business imperative.

Paul:

Great Nuala, we look forward to welcoming you and our other members to our round tables on DE&I.

Would you like to provide a Q&A piece on your business or topic?
Contact chelsea.brennan@iod.com for more details.



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.

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Chelsea.Brennan@iod.com



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Member news

Bauer Media Audio Ireland x Eximo Marketing

From September 22 to January 23, Eximo Marketing has been working with Bauer Media Audio Ireland (BMAI) to help reboot their marketing strategy.

BMAI is Ireland's largest independent media company, reaching 97% of the Irish market each week.

BMAI is the parent company of national radio stations Today FM and Newstalk, youth focused station SPIN, Dublin's 98FM and has just closed the acquisition of Cork's Red FM. They also operate a large digital portfolio with sports brand OTB and GoLoud, home of original podcasts and online listening.

Based in Bangor, Eximo Marketing works with companies to solve their strategic marketing problems.

Eximo Marketing worked with the marketing, editorial and senior teams for Today FM, Newstalk, SPIN, 98FM, OTB and GoLoud to implement a review of their marketing activity, planning cycles and organisational structure.

Chris Doyle, Group Operations Director, Bauer Media Audio Ireland, said, "Working with Eximo Marketing has been an enlightening process for the whole company."

"Having outside perspective on our marketing approach, expertise to help us clarify the key challenges and kick start our planning process has been invaluable for all our brands."

Andi Jarvis, Founder and Strategy Director, Eximo Marketing, said, "It's been a busy yet enjoyable few months working with Bauer Media Audio Ireland. They own



a stable of amazing brands that play an important role in the life of their listeners.

"It's been a privilege to help the teams refine and build on the great work that is already underway. We're looking forward to watching how each brand develops in the market over the coming 12 months."

Simon Myciunka, Chief Executive, Bauer Media Audio Ireland, added, "We selected Eximo Marketing for this work because of their track record in delivering strategic marketing projects.

"Andi's experience and systematic

approach to marketing strategy ensured that we could roll out a consistent approach for all our stations and brands, ensuring that they all benefit equally from this process.

"As we head into 2023 with an ambition to grow all our brands' audiences on air and online, we're confident that we now have the marketing strategy to achieve that.

Pictured: Dermot and Dave, award-winning hosts of Today FM's mid-morning show, part of the Bauer Media Audio Ireland group of stations.

Bank of Ireland announces new Family Matters policies for colleagues

“There is no one-size-fits-all for families, so we are supporting a range of scenarios, including when colleagues face very challenging circumstances.”

Bank of Ireland Group plc has launched Family Matters, an initiative that offers new and enhanced family-friendly policies to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for colleagues at different life stages. The newly launched package is available to 9,000 colleagues across the Group based in Ireland, UK, EU and US, in line with local legislation.

The new benefits include:

- Seven weeks top up of shared parental leave in first year (UK)
- Now 13 weeks’ paid leave for partners, when coupled with paternity leave enhancements adopted in 2022.
- New provision for foster care leave.
- Ten days’ leave for colleagues undergoing fertility treatments.
- Surrogacy leave has now been formalised to match adoptive leave entitlements.

- Early pregnancy leave for the loss of a baby under 24 weeks’ gestation, available to all colleagues.
- Extended breastfeeding breaks for parents with a child up to two-years of age.

Bank of Ireland has also made all family leave policies “day-one” entitlements for colleagues, meaning they can avail of benefits from the first day of employment.

Myles O’Grady, Group CEO, Bank of Ireland said: “As one of the largest employers in Ireland, we want to build a progressive workplace and contribute to a progressive society. This is also important for our business which competes hard to attract and retain the talent we need to serve our customers, support growing businesses, and also grow as a company.”

“We constantly challenge ourselves to foster a work environment where colleagues are treated with fairness and flexibility. There is no one-size-fits-all for families, so our people policies aim to support a range of scenarios, including when colleagues face very challenging circumstances.

“Family Matters is the culmination of a number of significant policy improvements we have implemented to ensure a supportive and inclusive culture for all colleagues. A key part of this is supporting colleagues

throughout their careers and the milestones in their lives, like becoming a parent or a carer. Our new and enhanced policies will have a positive impact on both the personal and financial wellbeing of our 9,000 colleagues and their families”.

In developing Family Matters, Bank of Ireland reviewed all existing HR policies to identify new benefits which would best support colleagues. Family Matters benefits will complement existing initiatives introduced last year, including Menopause Leave, improved Paternity Leave and the Domestic Abuse Policy. Benefits are Groupwide with the exception of policies specific to the jurisdiction based on legislative differences.

The Bank has launched an informative Family Matters Handbook illustrating all key supports and benefits available, whatever the colleague’s journey.

Bank of Ireland colleagues in need of support can contact people managers confidentially or access the Bank’s Family Matters Hub or Wellbeing App. They can also avail of the Group’s Employee Assistance Programme, Here for you 24/7 which provides counselling and information services.





LRA Conference paves pathway to productivity

Latest research reveals workplace conflict in NI estimated to cost employers up to £1 billion per year

With workplace conflict in Northern Ireland estimated to cost up to £1 billion per year, the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) is challenging local employers to consider how improved employment relations could lead to economic success through improved productivity.

The theme took centre stage at the LRA's first major conference in over 10 years, which brought together leading employment experts from the private, public and academic sectors.

Attended by over 250 HR and people professionals, a key objective was to explore the rationale behind a 'good employment' framework or charter and establish how its application could dramatically enhance performance and boost productivity.

Reflecting NI's position as UK's least productive region, almost 20% below the UK average, the conference theme was aligned with the Department for the Economy's 10X vision,

which places innovation, inclusion and sustainability at the heart of its growth plan.

"We are in the midst of challenging economic times," said Don Leeson, CEO of the LRA, "with strikes, pay disputes, unrest, cost of living, retention and recruitment all impacting on the labour market.

"If Covid has taught us anything, it's that we need to re-examine the workplace and what it delivers to our workforces. Much can be achieved by prioritising our people and ensuring good employment relations are at the heart of an organisation's strategy and focus."

Speaking at the conference, Prof Peter Urwin, Director of the Centre for Employment Research at the University of Westminster, launched research that estimates the annual cost to employers of workplace conflict in NI at £851 million. Prof Urwin noted, "This figure was derived from historical data sources. With the wave of industrial disputes experienced over the last 12 months, the costs could be as high as £1 billion."

Conversely, as Professor Chris Warhurst, Director for the Institute of Employment Research at the University of Warwick, reflected, "The business case for good employment relations is clear, through pay-back in terms of improved productivity and

innovation, which are needed if the 10X vision for NI is to be achieved. Furthermore, employees benefit through improved health and wellbeing."

Amongst the leading thinkers speaking at the conference was Carol Halford from Greater Manchester Combined Authority who outlined how the Council's Good Employment Relations Charter has positively impacted on the economy in the NW of England.

In championing the Good Employment Charter concept, the LRA is challenging employers and company leaders to consider how success elsewhere could apply to Northern Ireland.

Don added, "It is clear that organisations which choose to adopt good employment practices, acknowledge the value of an engaged workforce, and harness the contribution of their employees, are best placed to thrive.

"Shaping and applying a formal Charter or framework, which is a best fit for the local economy, is the next logical step. Our conference proved the right platform to bring this important matter to the fore and we look forward to working with our stakeholders to bring the concept to life in the months ahead."

Aer Lingus Regional further strengthens its Belfast schedule with new service to the Isle of Man

Emerald Airlines, exclusive operator of Aer Lingus Regional services announces a new service linking Belfast City with the Isle of Man. The new route will commence on 24 April, operating four times per week, increasing to six weekly for the peak summer season. Tickets are on sale now at www.aerlingus.com

Commenting on the announcement, Conor McCarthy, Executive Chairman at Emerald Airlines said:

“We are delighted to be bolstering our Belfast City

schedule by adding a new link between Belfast and the Isle of Man. We look forward to continuing to grow our services, providing more options for those travelling to and from Belfast.”

With more flights and more choice for the travelling public, the airline is progressively bolstering its 2023 schedule, with over 2.5 million seats on sale, across 28 routes and 17 destinations in Ireland, UK, and Channel Islands.

Katy Best, Commercial Director at Belfast City Airport said:

“This new service to Isle of Man will be the 13th Aer Lingus route from Belfast City Airport providing excellent choice for passengers this summer.

“The airline will also operate new routes to East Midlands, Jersey, Newcastle and Newquay. This is in addition to its existing services to Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Leeds Bradford, Manchester and Southampton.

“The first Aer Lingus flights operated by Emerald took off in March last year and we are very pleased with the performance and growth of the routes since then.”

Earlier this year, the airline reaffirmed its commitment to the UK, by adding 15,000+ seats across its existing network from Belfast. With more flights and more choice for the travelling public, the airline is progressively bolstering its Summer 2023 Schedule, adding 200,000+ extra seats this Summer from Belfast City Airport.

Recruitment is ongoing for the airline’s Belfast and Dublin bases, all vacancies can be found at www.emeraldairlines.com/jobs

For great value fares, book your flights now at www.aerlingus.com

For further information, please contact: Emerald Airlines, Media Relations media@emeraldairlines.com





Kilwaughter doubles Larne FC Brighter Futures support

Kilwaughter Minerals has committed a further £20,000 to Larne Football Club's official charity, the Brighter Futures community fund programme.

The donation doubles the amount contributed to the scheme by the leading minerals processor since it commenced the partnership in 2021.

The money will go towards group and community projects throughout Larne and the surrounding area.

Dozens of projects across the borough have already benefited from grants through the programme, which are made available in four categories including Sport

and Recreation, Business Enterprise, Education and Training and Community Needs.

Gary Wilmot, CEO, Kilwaughter Minerals said:

"As a business, we are very mindful that we are also part of our community and we are proud to help support others through a variety of different programmes and initiatives.

"Brighter Futures make an incredible impact across Larne and the wider east Antrim borough, and we're privileged to play a part.

"Throughout our partnership, it has been a pleasure to see first-hand the tangible difference the grants have made to many. We are delighted to renew our support with this very worthy scheme and look forward to seeing further positive impact from the subsequent awards."

Kilwaughter Minerals was recently named the winner of the Business in the Community

category at the Larne Times Business Excellence Awards and was awarded Silver Status as part of the latest Business in the Community (BITC NI) Environmental Benchmarking Survey.

Gregg Humphrey, Brighter Futures Chairman added:

"Brighter Futures acts as the charitable arm of Larne Football Club and has been in operation since 2019.

"The scheme has been tremendously well received across the borough with a huge take up from a wide variety of groups and individuals.

"Quite simply, the success of Brighter Futures would not be possible without the backing of corporate partners and thanks to Kilwaughter Minerals for its continued valuable support."

To find out more about Brighter Futures and how to apply, visit larnefc.com/brighterfutures

Call for business community to get footloose and fancy-free for HIV



Jacquie Richardson,
Chief Executive,
Positive Life

Positive Life, Northern Ireland's only dedicated HIV charity, is calling on businesses and organisations to support its Strictly Come Dancing style fundraiser – a crucial event in the diary as the funding landscape becomes increasingly challenging.

Taking place Friday 16 June 2023 at The Crowne Plaza, Belfast, the high energy event will be an ode to the movies, with classic soundtracks transporting guests to Hollywood for one night only. And all for an important reason.

Jacquie Richardson, Chief Executive of Positive Life, explains: "It's important that we continue to shine a light on HIV to reduce new diagnoses, and provide and campaign for people living with and affected by the condition. 76 new diagnoses were made in 2021 showing that there's still a need for awareness raising and education. However, the funding landscape for the charity sector has never been more limited and it continues to restrict our ambitions. People living with and affected by HIV need our support, and we are committed to our goal of ending new diagnoses in Northern Ireland. Partnership and collaboration have always been at the heart of what we do, so corporate giving is a natural space for us to engage."

There are lots of ways IoD members can get involved with the event to support this important cause.

Corporate Sponsorship

You can treat your employees or your clients to a night of toe-tapping entertainment by sponsoring a table of ten for £1000. The evening will begin with a bubbles reception, and be followed by a sumptuous three-course meal, before the dancers take to the floor to win the support of the audience and the all-important judges. Each table will be guaranteed a spot prize within the ticket price, and a raffle with top notch prizes, promises even more fun on the night.

“ The aim is to raise £20,000 to help people living with and affected by HIV so every penny counts. ”

Learn to Dance

Always wanted to recreate the iconic dances from Footloose, Flashdance or Grease? Well good news, you can sign up to participate as a dancer! People of all abilities are welcome and will be paired up with someone suited to their level of experience. Dancers will learn their own individually choreographed dance by the award-winning Debbie and Michelle of Ballroom Blitz. Over a ten-week period, dancers will be put through their paces to ensure they're perfectly polished and ready to impress on the evening. In even more fun, couples can theme their costumes to suit their dance and

their tune to make their performance unique to them. Think bright red tailcoat to recreate the look of Hugh Jackman in The Greatest Showman, or use a watermelon to bring to life the moves of Baby in Dirty Dancing. Along with all of the craic, each couple will raise £500 to support Positive Life's service users.

Support a Dancer

You can always purchase a ticket or give a few bob to a dancer too! Keep an eye on Positive Life's social media channels to donate online. The aim is to raise £20,000 to help people living with and affected by HIV so every penny counts.

Positive Life has been making a difference to the quality of people's lives for 35 years. In 2022 it brought new energy to the fundraising space by launching Northern Ireland Buyer's 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 members to help Positive Life defeat the stigma crippling the lives of local people affected by HIV today.

Some members of the NI Buyers Club include IoD Northern Ireland, Zenith IT, Kingsbridge Private Hospital and Sandown Dental Care.

To get involved in the Strictly event and for more information visit positivelifeni.com or email Jacquie on jacquie@positivelifeni.com

The Windsor Framework:

A new way forward?



Gráinne Walsh
Director at
Stratagem

From the Backstop to the Protocol to the Windsor Framework, voters in Northern Ireland must be one of the most expert populations on matters of international trade agreements.

For the third time since the Brexit referendum, we have a proposal in the form of the Windsor Framework which aims to address both practical business challenges as well as the constitutional and identity related anxieties that have dominated our politics since 2016.

A mixture of emotion, technicalities and practicalities, the latest Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool tracker poll published in the Irish News the week of the Westminster vote indicates a more nuanced understanding of the Framework by voters across all political parties.

Whilst some elected representatives and campaigners were quick to reject the deal, the picture on the ground doesn't reflect this. Indeed, many see the positives, including over 65% of unionists agreeing that the Irish Sea border on trade has been removed and almost 40% of nationalist voters who believe that political parties underestimated the need for re-negotiation of the protocol.

Delving into the strands of the agreement, both DUP and TUV supporters acknowledge the wins; unfettered access to trade and to medicines; the removal of a ban on

some products, and a green lane for products destined for Northern Ireland are all now in play as a result of changes to the Protocol.

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings is the high number of 'don't knows' and what this means for the battle for hearts and minds by both political parties and those representative organisations who have been working hard so that the UK and EU can move into the next phase of their relationship and that Northern Ireland can move into the next phase of devolved government.

“ Many see the positives, including over 65% of unionists agreeing that the Irish Sea border on trade has been removed and almost 40% of nationalist voters who believe that political parties underestimated the need for re-negotiation of the protocol. ”

Given that only 15.7% of unionists said they oppose the Windsor Framework compared to 45.8% who support it, is there an opportunity for us all to bank the wins and work the



proposed institutional checks and balances, whether in the form of the Stormont Brake or the enhanced EU stakeholder engagement arrangements?

Fifty years after the UK and Ireland joined the EC and twenty-five years after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, the future prospects of these Islands remain entwined. With the drama of the parliamentary vote behind us, is there room now for reflection and quieter conversations supported by future UK, Irish and international investment in our people and place?



Spotlight on events

IoD NI & Tughans: Sharing best practice with NI's Diversity & Inclusion Leaders Breakfast v

IoD NI, A&L Goodbody & Deloitte NED Forum: Ransomware and cyber security attacks: A real Boardroom dilemma v >

IoD NI & NIE Networks: Private Dinner with Professor Simon Haslam CDir v



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