



Membership
magazine of the IoD
in Northern Ireland

IoD

DirectorNI

August / September 2023

**Co-Ownership Roundtable -
Delivering the homes we
need in Northern Ireland**

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**Meet our new
IoD NI Members**

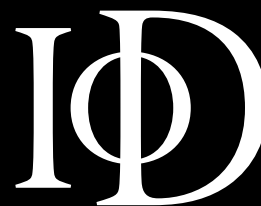
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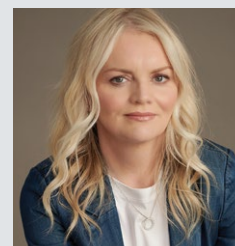
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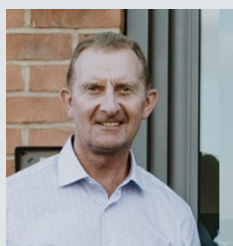
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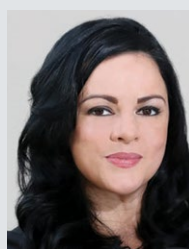
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Think People

IoD members support young people to get into business through volunteering with Young Enterprise



Gordon Milligan
OBE, Chair, IoD
Northern Ireland

The NI economy has a skills crisis. We need skilled young people as our future workforce, to grow the NI economy.

To address this crisis, Institute of Directors members and their companies are working with youth charity, Young Enterprise NI, to support the next generation of business owners and leaders.

The charity gives young people the opportunity to set up and run their own business at school to gain an insight into business start-up and gain employability skills that businesses need them to have.

IoD member Gavin Annon has volunteered with Lagan College over the last year as their business mentor and explains why he gets involved.

"I am a firm believer in paying it forward in life. When the opportunity arose to volunteer as a mentor with Young Enterprise NI, I grabbed it with both hands. I had the pleasure of working with five amazing students from Lagan College who created an incredible concept called 'The Little Guys' to help young people manage their emotions. I would highly recommend the mentoring programme with YENI. It was inspiring to see the students develop over the term and help steer them to success."

Young Enterprise has recently had public funding removed due to the NI budget reduction, meaning that the support of business is even more important for them to deliver their work.

“IoD NI are proud to be supporting Young Enterprise Northern Ireland via a charity prize draw at the IoD NI Annual Dinner 2023 on Thursday 28 September.”

Carol Fitzsimons MBE, CEO of Young Enterprise and IoD member, explains, "Young Enterprise values the support that IoD members give the charity through our YE Business Backer campaign. These businesses are demonstrating their support for the young people of Northern Ireland, and making it clear that the skills they develop through our programmes are valued by them as employers.

"The recent removal of public funding for the charity means that

47,000 young people from areas of greatest social disadvantage will miss out of Young Enterprise in the year ahead. The only way to avoid this is

for businesses to get behind the charity and directly support the skills development of their future workforce.

"YE Business Backers are individuals and businesses who believe in our mission to develop the entrepreneurial skills of young people. Young people are our future workforce and the business start-ups of tomorrow. We are grateful to IoD members that have become Business Backers and are investing in young people to build a prosperous future for Northern Ireland."

IoD NI are proud to be supporting Young Enterprise Northern Ireland via a charity prize draw at the IoD NI Annual Dinner 2023 on Thursday 28 September.

If you would like more information on becoming a YE Business Backer, please register your interest or contact Jan Donaldson directly on 028 9026 7103.



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

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

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Sustainability through innovation – Why invest in sustainable projects?



Jamie Watts,
Commercial
Director, Amplifi
Solutions

Businesses face a sustainability choice; they continue to invest, evolve and adapt or they sit still and weather the current storm of cost pressures and challenging market conditions. Jamie Watts, Commercial Director at Amplifi Solutions, R&D tax credit specialists, outlines some of the potential benefits of making the choice to embrace sustainability.

Sustainability as part of an ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) strategy is a headline topic for many businesses across the UK. Whilst there is no shortage of innovative businesses who have the capability to deliver sustainable products and services, it has moved further down the priority list for some thanks to the current economic climate.

However, given the available external funding options, market sentiment and investor expectations, there is much to be gained by continuing to move forward with sustainable innovation.

“The picture is clear: sustainability creates business value for long-term profitability.”

Funding support

The Climate Change Act commits the UK government by law to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels (net zero) by 2050. This has forced the

hand of the government to take action through the creation of sustainability specific grants and reliefs for businesses who are willing to invest in these types of projects.

Examples of this include the recent £70m Industrial Energy Transformation Fund, the £240m Net Zero Hydrogen Fund as well as Innovate UK's Net Zero focus which has targeted an investment of £1.2bn between 2022-2025.

Building value, efficiency and growth

Therefore, the financing is available to businesses who are ready to tackle this issue, but just what benefit to the bottom line is there in doing so?

Research by Deutsche Bank (Non-Financial Report, 2021) revealed that companies with high ESG ratings outperformed the market in the medium (5 years) and the long term (5-10 years) and that companies with the best ESG scores had a 33.3% higher return over one year, beating the broader market by more than 8%. Efficiency improvements, developed through sustainable practices, can in turn boost operational profits by as much as 60% according to McKinsey & Company.

A strong sustainability proposition will help businesses tap into new markets, while also expanding into existing ones. Creating innovative, sustainable solutions to solve global environmental and social problems pushes entrepreneurs and business leaders to rethink their operations, evolve, adapt, and develop new products and services.

Customer demand

A 2022 Deloitte report (CXO Sustainability Report) indicates a major move by consumers towards sustainable products. Millennials are the largest generation of our population and a study by Nielson

indicates that millennials are two times more likely, compared to baby boomers, to change their consumer habits with a view to reducing their environmental impact. Hence, creating a sustainable business meets the values and demands of a consumer majority.

Similarly, large corporate buyers will more often than not have an ESG procurement strategy and these large contracts can be critical to continued growth for many businesses in the UK. The main barrier to change remains price and businesses will need to find a way to deliver sustainable products that are affordable.

Investors focus

The BVCA (British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association) released a report in March of 2023 on the creation of sustainable growth through private capital. It outlines the focus of the wider investment community to ensure that ESG plays a large part in any future investments undertaken.

There are now many examples of 'impact funds' whose criteria cites the requirement for a sustainability play. A good example of this is the AIB Foresight SME Impact Fund; designed to support businesses across the island of Ireland with their net zero plans and the transition towards a low carbon economy.

The picture is clear: sustainability creates business value for long-term profitability. Strategies which are implemented for longevity create buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders no longer interested in short-termism.

We are fortunate to have many local businesses leading in the production of innovative, sustainable products. Each project taken on is an investment into the future of business, the wider economy and ultimately the environment as a whole.

The importance of cyber resilience



Terry Moore, CEO, Outsource Group; Eamonn Bunting DiploD, Managing Director, Outsource Group and Tony Hughes, Director of Cyber Security and Technology Risk Consulting, ANSEC IA Ltd

At our recent cyber resilience event, we emphasised the famous boxing quote, “Everyone has a plan until you are punched in the face”, highlighting the importance of readiness in dealing with cyber incidents.

In the same way athletes train and prepare for major sporting events, organisations need to be ready for their own ‘big event’ in the form of a cyber incident. Achieving true cyber resilience requires a cohesive team and strategy to tackle the challenges posed by skilled adversaries, going beyond the notion of ‘letting IT deal with it’. This involves being prepared for the technical, organisational, and psychological aspects of incidents like ransomware attacks or data theft.

With the increasing reliance on technology, cyber-attacks have become all too common in today’s world, making it crucial for organisations to assess the impact of such incidents and determine how to contain the threat and expel the intruder from their networks. To ensure effective response capabilities, organisations must invest in resources and skills. This involves

creating a comprehensive recovery plan based on best practices, employing the right personnel, and establishing fail-safe processes that can function even when key participants are unavailable. It’s important to understand that cyber resilience is not solely reliant on technological solutions - it requires a holistic approach encompassing people, processes, and technology.

However, being prepared is just the first step. To validate the effectiveness of your cyber resilience strategy, it is vital to have an intimate understanding of your business, its critical components, and how to restore them in the aftermath of an attack.

“ It’s important to understand that cyber resilience is not solely reliant on technological solutions - it requires a holistic approach encompassing people, processes, and technology. ”

To achieve this level of understanding, it is recommended to regularly and rigorously test your recovery plan. This testing helps to identify any gaps in the plan and ensure a smoother recovery process.

One highly effective method for enhancing the necessary skills and capabilities to achieve resilience is by conducting a cyber tabletop

exercise. A cyber tabletop exercise is a simulated scenario that enables organisations to test and evaluate their preparedness and response capabilities in the event of a cyber incident or breach. It serves as a training tool for key stakeholders involved in managing and responding to cybersecurity incidents, including IT staff, executives, legal teams, and public relations representatives. The exercise takes place in a conference room or virtual environment and is based on realistic threats or previous incidents to provide a relevant and meaningful experience for the participating organisation.

During the exercise, participants assume specific roles and responsibilities, such as incident responders, incident commanders, legal advisors or media relations representatives. They are presented with a simulated event that unfolds gradually, and they must collaborate, make decisions, and take appropriate actions to respond to the evolving situation and adapt to new challenges that arise in a fast-moving environment.

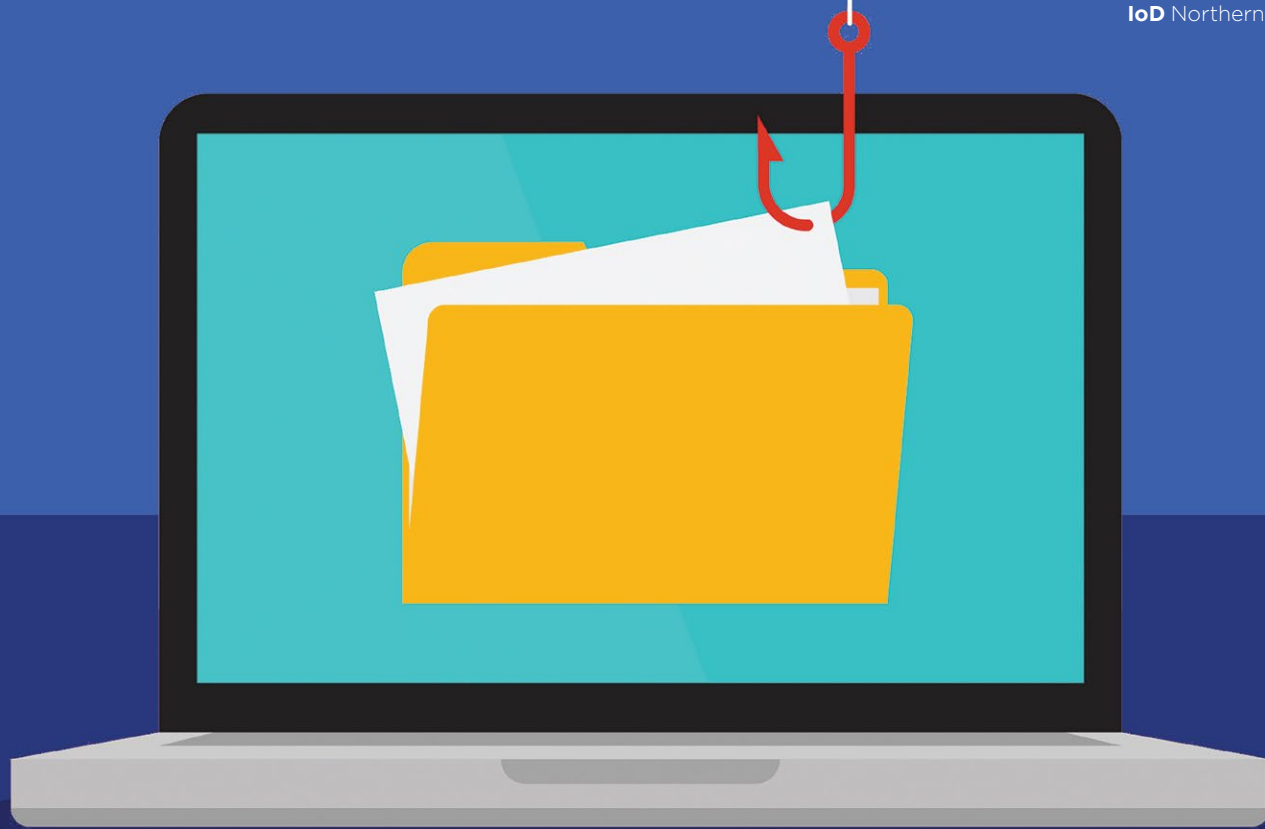
The tabletop exercise serves several purposes:

1. Testing response plans:

By simulating real-world scenarios, organisations can identify gaps, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in their response strategies.

2. Enhancing communication and coordination:

The exercise promotes communication and coordination among different teams and



stakeholders involved in incident response. It enables participants to understand each other's roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes, fostering better collaboration and coordination during a real incident.

3. Identifying strengths and weaknesses:

Through the exercise, organisations can identify their strengths, areas of expertise, vulnerabilities, and limitations in their incident response capabilities. This knowledge allows them to prioritise investments in training, external resources, and improvements to enhance their overall cybersecurity posture.

4. Practicing decision-making:

The exercise provides a safe environment for participants to practice making critical decisions under pressure. They can explore different response strategies, evaluate the potential consequences of their actions, and learn from their mistakes without real-world repercussions. It is better to fail during the exercise than in a real incident.

5. Building familiarity with procedures:

Tabletop exercises help participants become familiar with the incident response procedures, protocols, and tools that would be utilised during an actual cyber incident. This familiarity improves efficiency and effectiveness during a real incident, as responders are better prepared and more confident in their actions. It also helps external resources understand the organisation's procedures and be better prepared to assist in an incident. This process strengthens the organisation's cybersecurity posture and preparedness to handle real-world cyber threats.

Being aware of the latest cyber threats is a fundamental aspect of a good cyber resilience strategy. Understanding these threats enables organisations to better predict, detect, and respond to them. Conducting a tabletop exercise to test the ability to respond is critical for maintaining a high standard of cyber hygiene and informing the cybersecurity strategy.

A mature cybersecurity strategy that encompasses all aspects of threat identification, impact mitigation, and service recovery is essential. The current landscape in most organisations is characterised by technical dependency, and the rise of hybrid working models has blurred

the boundaries of an organisation's perimeter, making it harder to secure. The days of heavily investing in preventive security measures with the aim of blocking threat actors are no longer sufficient.

A paradigm shift is occurring in cybersecurity, with organisations embracing strategies such as 'zero trust' that prioritise resiliency in the face of inevitable incidents. This shift necessitates partnering with strong cybersecurity providers who have the necessary technologies and knowledge to prevent or mitigate incidents while also understanding the organisation's business context.

Ultimately, cyber resilience must be an integral aspect of a contemporary business strategy. With the increasing threats and sophistication of cyber-attacks, understanding your business's assets, how technology supports business objectives, managing technology risk, focusing on recovery, and staying abreast of the latest threats are non-negotiable aspects.

Furthermore, it is essential to remember that a cyber resilience strategy is only as strong as its weakest link. Regular testing and investment in resources are paramount to ensure that your organisation remains strong in the face of cyber threats.

Closing the gap:

Addressing the green energy skills challenge



Gordon Parkes,
Executive Director,
People & Culture,
NIE Networks

There are few issues which have solidified opinion within business and wider society in Northern Ireland than the importance of achieving net zero carbon

Where reducing carbon emissions and creating a more sustainable environment were once considered 'nice-to-haves', they are now a central part of every strategy and, in many cases, environment, social and governance (ESG) credentials are 'must-haves' when it comes to procurement, raising business finance, partnerships and attracting and retaining new recruits.

At NIE Networks, we have been and will be investing heavily in the electricity infrastructure needed to allow Northern Ireland to reach that net zero target as quickly as possible. The business plan we have developed will ensure businesses and households throughout Northern Ireland can connect to low carbon technologies such as electric vehicles, solar panels and heat pumps. It will also increase network capacity to allow over four gigawatts of renewable, non-fossil fuel generation to connect to the network and help meet government targets for 2030 and 2050.

We are well aware how important our role is in the route to net zero. It's why we are planning to invest £3 billion over the next 10 years to make sure the network is fit to facilitate renewable technologies, both on the supply and consumption sides.

Our upgrade plans are a significant undertaking and are underpinned by the creation of more than 1,000 jobs at NIE Networks. These are some of the most important and exciting roles

to be created by any organisation in the region and will be pivotal in making Northern Ireland a greener, cleaner and more prosperous place to live for generations to come.

These jobs will be part of an estimated 28,000 to be created in the green economy in Northern Ireland over the next 10 years in line with the government's Green Energy Strategy, part of its 10X economic vision. As such, there will be considerable demand for those equipped with so-called 'green energy skills' - those in large scale energy production, hydrogen, wind and in many other renewable technologies and associated industries - to help NIE Networks and other organisations power Northern Ireland's journey to net zero.

“ We are planning to invest £3 billion over the next 10 years to make sure the network is fit to facilitate renewable technologies, both on the supply and consumption sides. ”

Many of these skills are already in existence, but there is an urgent need for more skilled workers to satisfy soaring demand from the green energy sector, which offers some of the most exciting career prospects and development opportunities of any sector at present.

Of course, in these days of tightened public sector budgets and in the absence of a functioning Executive, it is increasingly difficult for government alone to develop skills programmes which would facilitate the development of green talent. To do that employers need

to work together in collaboration to bolster the skills base and create an ecosystem which services the needs of the sector in the years ahead. Employers need to take ownership of the issue and seek support from government and the education sector!

Luckily, the payback is significant as the development of green energy skills will be self-funding. Take, for instance, the fact that recent research carried out by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) shows that for every pound spent in training an apprentice, £26 is returned to the economy in wealth. For a graduate, the return is three times that figure.

While the rationale is clear, it is perhaps, beyond the means of some smaller employers within the renewable energy sector, to be expected to play a major role in upskilling the workforce and recruiting apprentices and graduates. However, larger employers, such as NIE Networks and others, who have a strong track record of training apprentices and graduates can collectively support training and development programmes for smaller employers, contractors and the supply chain within the energy and utility sector.

My role as chair of the Green Energy Skills Reference Group, which was recently established by the Department for the Economy, focuses on addressing the imbalance between the demand for green skills and supply in Northern Ireland alongside key influencers from business, education and government. We have carried out independent research to investigate the skills required to transition to an advanced zero emission, secure and circular energy economy. It shows that by collaborating we can tackle a number of areas in the education system and labour market which, if improved, would increase supply in line with the needs of the economy.



In many cases, it is about addressing the skills mismatch. Too many young people, such as those who are practically gifted, are still getting left behind by the current education system which, whilst in the process of change, is still heavily focussed on the academic route and needs to strengthen the focus on vocational routes. We are cognisant of the need to focus on core skills and entry level programmes which also value practical skills, as well as taking responsibility for offering industry careers advice in schools. In tandem, we need more conversion courses to allow those who want to transition into the sector to do so.

There also needs to be a broader range of apprenticeships and higher-level apprenticeships encompassing all the skills we will need in the green energy sector in the coming years to include such areas as digital, finance, project management, artificial intelligence and a range of others. It is encouraging to note that our further education colleges and universities already have a number of new programmes in place.

At NIE Networks, we have a 50-year track record in running successful apprenticeships through our award-winning apprentice training programme and the tried and

tested structures and processes in place to ensure we, and the wider Northern Ireland energy sector, have a pipeline of talent. We work in close partnership with regional colleges and the universities and are investing around £80,000 per apprentice over a three-year training and development period. Our training programme has no limits: over 30% of our current senior management team started as apprentices with many of our employees having built 30+ years careers within the organisation.

NIE Networks also works with small and medium sized employers in Northern Ireland to help them train apprentices and establish training structures supported by the Department for the Economy. We know that working together in this manner increases the availability and quality of skills for the whole industry and prevents a skills shortage further down the line.

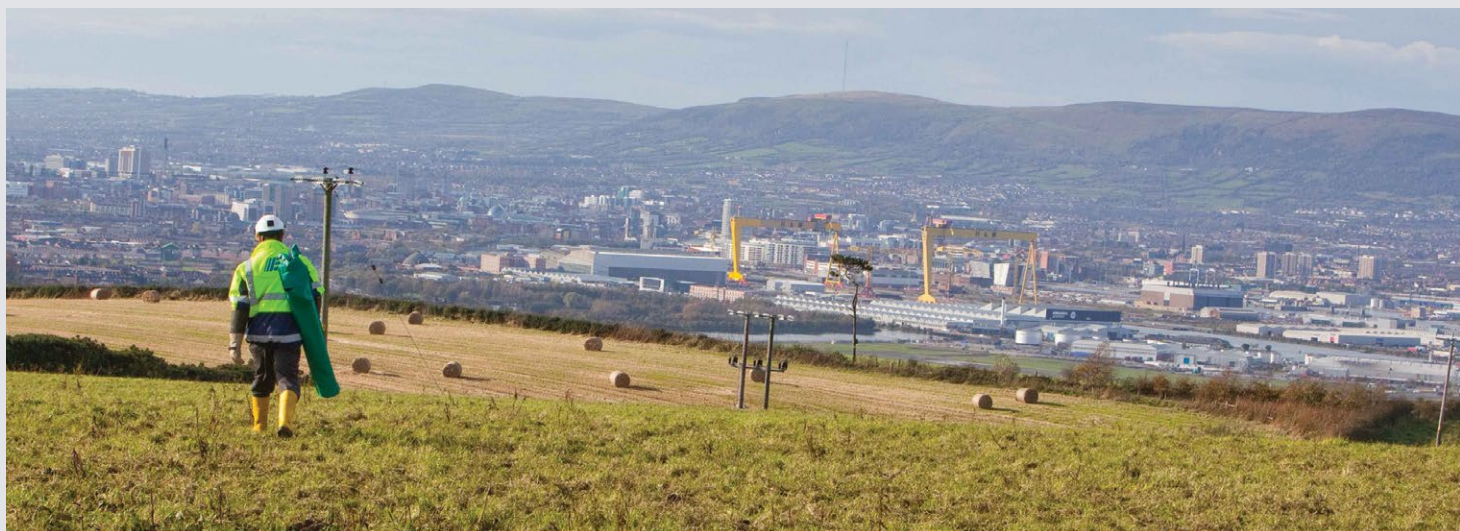
When it comes to further education, the current provision is evolving well but is still falling short of employers' needs in some areas, with not enough apprentices and graduates being encouraged into the sector. That is partly down to the sector's image, one which doesn't perhaps encourage either

graduates, apprentices or indeed a more diverse workforce and in particular, females, to follow a career in the sector. Employers recognise the need to improve the sector's image and a number of steps are being taken to address this. There are plenty of factors to draw diverse talent from all areas of society into the sector, not least the fact that jobs are well paid and very highly skilled.

At NIE Networks, we run an annual scholarship programme for 12 graduates, spending around £40,000 on each, paying for their tuition fees and for paid summer placements. This helps to identify and nurture future talent who otherwise would not join our sector.

Put simply, the green energy sector has a hugely exciting future ahead, but we need the best skilled talent to ensure the sector and the wider economy in Northern Ireland reaches its full potential. As such, it is incumbent on us as employers within the sector, government and the education sector to collaborate effectively and take ownership of developing the talent pipeline.

It is the right thing to do for Northern Ireland, for its people and for the planet.



6 ways to use video for recruitment



Peter Craven
Creative Director,
BlueSky Video
Marketing

In a challenging recruitment market it's more important than ever that we make our organisation stand out from the crowd. Here are six ways you can use video to attract the best talent and fuel your growth plans.

I've been using video for recruitment for the best part of 15 years now and while it's been a great tool for all of that time, there's no doubt that in the last five years, its impact has been more significant than ever.

We've been running a series of recruitment marketing meetups over the last few months at BlueSky Video Marketing and what we've learned from our speakers and attendees is that authenticity, culture, values and personality need to be the cornerstones of your recruitment marketing content.

Now you'd expect me to say this - but video is the best way to do this and that's why it should be a part of your recruitment marketing efforts.

But where do you start? Here are six ways you can use video to:

- Attract candidates
- Reduce time to fill
- Reduce hiring costs
- Improve employee retention

1) Tell your story

If you don't make it clear to people what your organisation does, what it stands for and what its ambitions are then it's very difficult to make other people want to come on the journey with you.

The target for your recruitment marketing efforts is to attract the people that will be a good fit for your organisation. People that align with your values and your way of working. People who can get excited about your product or service. People who want to be a part of the success that you're going to enjoy in the years ahead.

I've always been an advocate for treating a recruitment process in the same way that we treat our sales processes.

- Be clear about our customer / candidate targeting - we don't try to sell our products or services to everyone. We understand what a good customer looks like and focus our efforts on winning more of them.
- Always on - we don't stop selling because we have hit our monthly sales target. We keep building the pipeline and telling our story so that we can be sure we'll hit our sales target every month.

Success with sales is about 'mental availability' - making sure we're on the shortlist when our target customers think about the product or service that we are selling.

The same is true for recruitment marketing.

How many times have you heard people saying, "The people we need aren't looking for a job"?

It's these inactive jobseekers that this part of your recruitment marketing will awaken to the opportunities that exist in your organisation.

2) A day in the life

Once we've got our target candidates to a point where they are thinking "That looks like a place that I'd like to work", their information requirements change.

Just like in the sales process, we've now created the 'awareness' of our organisation at the top of the funnel and now we're into the 'consideration' phase.

The questions that we need to answer here include 'What is it like to work there?' This is where 'day in the life' content can work very well. It not only paints a picture of what it's like to work in your organisation but also allows you to profile people in the specific roles that you know you will be recruiting.

Your 'day in the life' content should present the absolute best bits of working for your organisation. Yes, you need to show some of what the actual job involves, but you also need to show how the team interacts with each other - the canteen conversations, the social events.

You and I know that not all of this great stuff happens on the same day - and so do your candidates. Your content should not simply be a representation of what happens on one day, but an outline of what new recruits can expect from the experience of working in your organisation for a prolonged period.

So now you have created demand for the roles you are promoting and given people a glimpse of what working for you is like, what happens next?

3) Have a bit of fun

This content is not about your organisation or the job. It's about showing some personality. Loosening up and letting people find out more about the humans that occupy your organisation. This could be content from one of your team social events, a silly video that you do for Christmas or some rapid fire questions that you ask your team

that helps potential candidates feel that as well as being able to achieve their personal ambitions, they might just enjoy themselves along the way.

This is the type of content that can work very well on social media channels in particular and if it's well considered you can create a library of video assets that will allow you to communicate with your target candidates in an engaging way over a prolonged period of time.

4) Libraries of short form content

Consistency is crucial in any marketing campaign and it's no different when you're thinking about recruitment marketing.

Being able to communicate regularly with your target candidates helps you to reinforce your key messages and ensure that the 'mental availability' with your audience is maintained.

From our experience, short form content featuring your people talking about what it's like to work for your organisation is very well received.

One of our customers recently told me that at every interview they do, candidates are quoting directly from these videos when being asked why they had decided to apply for the role.

Leaving aside the metrics around impressions, reach, likes and shares on your social channels (which are useful metrics from a brand awareness point of view), the evidence from interviews where candidates are quoting your people, provides the evidence that this sort of content does deliver a return on investment.

The great news is that this content is relatively easy to capture and a little effort can go a long way.

On one of our projects we were able to produce 50 short form videos from one day spent interviewing people.

If you're thinking of publishing a video per week for the next 12 months - that's the job done.

5) Your culture, values and purpose

We've talked a little bit about this already in the 'Tell your story' section.

The content that tells your story has a responsibility to outline

how your organisation has got to where it is today, The reason the organisation came into being, the success journey so far.

The content that focuses on your culture, values and purpose is entirely forward looking and provides you with the opportunity to outline your ambitions for the future. It's this message that will get potential candidates excited about being part of the journey.

Show people your direction of travel. Outline the opportunities that will present for them - not only to be a part of something special but also to achieve their own personal growth ambitions.

If all of this content you've created works, then at this point you'll be getting more applications from better candidates. You'll be filling your roles more quickly and you'll be building a pipeline of talent ready for future opportunities.

“ In the last five years its impact has been more significant than ever. ”

But anyone working in recruitment knows that there's a risky period between a job offer being accepted and a new employee arriving with you for the first day.

This is the time when they can get a counter offer from their current employer, they may have other job applications running alongside the application for your role.

So how can we reduce the risk of getting the 'thanks, but no thanks' email a week before their start date?

6) Onboarding content

Up until now all of the content we have discussed has been for the public domain - your website, your social media channels.

This time, it's targeted content that is intended for the consumption of individual candidates.

If you've bought a car (or enquired about buying a car) over the last 10 years, you've probably seen the videos that the sales person sends you - a walk around the car, an introduction to the

features - the heated seats, the leather interior, the alloys.

I don't know about you, but when I receive one of these videos I feel obliged to follow up with the sales person because of the effort they have put in to create the video.

Creating onboarding content for candidates who have accepted roles but haven't started yet can have the same effect.

While they are trying to talk themselves out of the big decision that they have just made, while their current colleagues are in their ear about how they will be missed, while their partners are asking them if they're sure they've made the right decision - an additional piece of content from you could be the thing that seals the deal.

It can be done in a lot of different ways - a short message from the members of the team that they will be joining, a welcome message from their line manager, an outline of what their first week / month will look like.

All of this works to make the candidate feel comfortable with the decision that they have made and ignore the doubting voices.

Work better, not harder.

"If we keep doing what we've always done, we'll keep getting what we've always got."

If what we're currently doing to try and attract the right candidates isn't delivering the results we need it to - and is threatening our growth ambitions - then it's probably time to try a different approach.

While video isn't the only answer, our experience with video for recruitment marketing over the last 15 years tells us that it is definitely part of the solution.

Peter Craven is the Founder and Creative Director of BlueSky Video Marketing, founded in 2017. Prior to that, he worked in global marketing roles for almost 20 years. He's a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and has been an IoD member since 2017.

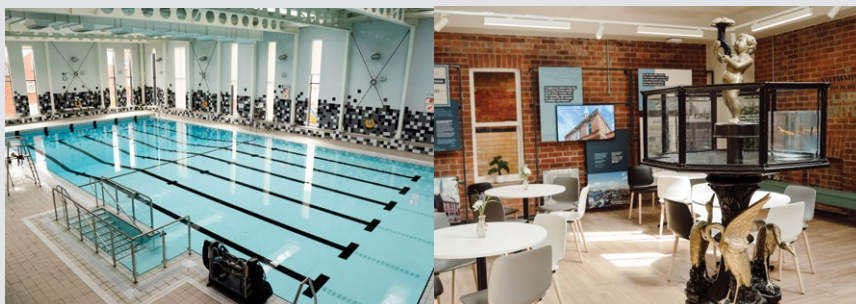
Investing in Belfast's future

Belfast City Council's physical investment programme is a £400 million commitment to making the city a better place to live, work, visit and invest.

The programme comprises around 400 projects, including major schemes to boost the economy, create jobs and improve the quality of people's lives in neighbourhoods across the city.

Here we describe a few of the standout projects that have recently been completed.

“The programme comprises around 400 projects, including major schemes to boost the economy, create jobs and improve the quality of people's lives in neighbourhoods across the city.”



Templemore Baths

The £17 million restoration and expansion of Templemore Baths has breathed new life into one of in east Belfast's most iconic buildings.

The project, funded by Belfast City Council and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, involved the sympathetic restoration of many of its original features including the 'major pool' which is fully operational again, and its old slipper baths.

Much of the building's interior has been repurposed into an interactive visitor centre focusing on the heritage of the much-loved local landmark. Its former courtyard area has also

been transformed into a café within an attractive new atrium, featuring the original Victorian fountain which has been restored as its centrepiece.

A newly built 28,000 square foot extension has more than doubled the building's footprint. It includes modern leisure facilities including a 25m six-lane swimming pool with spectator seating, an 80-station gym, spa facilities and changing rooms.

Templemore is the sixth of seven new leisure facilities built as part of the council's ambitious £105 million Leisure Transformation Programme.



St Comgall's

The Grade B1-listed St Comgall's on Divis Street in west Belfast has been transformed thanks to a £7.2 project delivered by the council on behalf of Falls Community Council.

The project saw the former school building transformed into a stunning new facility which now includes offices, conference and exhibition facilities, an events space and a café.

Belfast City Council contributed £3.5 million funding towards the project, with £3.7 million provided by the Northern Ireland Executive's Social Investment Fund.



City Cemetery Visitor Centre

The council developed another wonderful tourist facility with the opening of a new visitor centre documenting the history of Belfast City Cemetery and the people buried within it.

It includes an interpretive exhibition with digital touchscreens and interactive features for children, as well as interactive genealogy research stations for visitors to find out more about the history of the site or to trace their own family history.

The visitor centre is a key element of a £2.8 million heritage project which also seen the restoration of a number of listed heritage assets, new visitor signage throughout the site, an app for self-guided tours and an ongoing activity and outreach programme.

The project was funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Belfast City Council and the Department for Communities.

Other projects

54 major council-led projects worth £95 million are currently underway.

Projects include the new 12-kilometre Forth Meadow Community Greenway, new buildings for Shankill Shared Women's Centre and the Black Mountain Shared Spaces Project, sports and leisure facilities including the redevelopment of Ballysillan Playing Fields and Marrowbone Millennium Park, plus the next phase of the Lagan Gateway project, to name but a few.

For more information on Belfast City Council's physical investment programme, visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/investment



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

Aubrey Calderwood Gateley Capitus

Aubrey Calderwood is Managing Director of Gateley Capitus, a Belfast based consultancy advising businesses on the tax incentives available for investment and innovation. Formerly a manager in the corporate tax practice at a 'big four' accountancy firm, he established Capitus in 1997 as an independent consultancy. In 2016 Capitus was acquired by national legal and professional services group, Gateley and became Gateley Capitus. The company acts for varied clients across all sectors, ranging from hospitality and leisure, care homes, logistics and distribution, data centres, manufacturing, property development and investment.



With his wealth of experience in advising companies and individuals, Aubrey believes that many are unaware of the Government-backed tax incentives that exist to encourage investment and innovation. Even if they are, they often don't fully appreciate how to identify, claim and utilise them to their advantage. With a strong background in property and tax, he has more than 30 years of experience of advising in this complex area. Aubrey and the team at Gateley Capitus have generated billions of pounds of tax savings for businesses, which are then able to reinvest that tax relief to support innovation and growth.

MEMBER PROFILE**Jonathan Lancaster**
Practice Edge

Jonathan Lancaster is the Co-founder and Director of Practice Edge, specialising in helping professional services firms maximise their revenue potential and enhance client value. Through practical workshops, coaching, and support, he guides busy professionals in refining their performance to serve their clients better.

With over two decades of experience in business-to-business and commercial settings, Jonathan has risen from trainee to leadership roles, managing teams and executing large, competitive deals across the UK, Ireland, and beyond. In recent years, he has focused on supporting ambitious entrepreneurs and professionals in accounting, consulting, and advisory services.

Jonathan drives improvement in critical success measures by helping leaders align strategic goals with targeted interventions. He holds an MSc in Business Development and Innovation from the University of Ulster and is certified by the Integral Institute to work holistically with



teams and individuals. His versatile skillset inspires and empowers professionals seeking growth and success in delivering exceptional value to their clients.

MEMBER PROFILE**Natasha Adamson**
Wilson Nesbitt

Partner Natasha Adamson leads Wilson Nesbitt's Banking & Residential Lender Services team.

She specialises in lender instructed residential property matters, acting for more than 25 banking brands including Lloyds Bank, Nationwide, Santander, Barclays, HSBC UK Virgin Money, Bank of Ireland, Aviva and Just Retirement

Natasha acts as a technical resource for her lender clients in relation to all legal and technical aspects of residential lending in Northern Ireland.

Natasha's team is highly regarded for its work in the finance sector, ranking in the Legal 500 for 2023 and 2022.

**MEMBER PROFILE****Kieran Donnelly**
Morrow Communications

Kieran has been a Director at Morrow Communications, one of the island's leading integrated communications consultancies since 2005. In that time, he has delivered strategic communication advice and support to many leading business and public sector organisations and played a vital role in the company's evolution and growth, championing its integrated communications offering.

With nearly 30 years' experience working in all aspects of integrated communications and Public Relations, including Corporate and B2B PR, Media Relations, Crisis

Communications, Public Affairs, Marketing Communications and Community Relations, Kieran has developed a broad knowledge of the needs of business and the wider economic and policy environment. He advises many blue-chip clients and senior leaders on their strategic communications across several key sectors, including agri-food, banking, ICT, manufacturing, construction, retail, energy/environmental and public sector.

Kieran graduated from Ulster University with a first-class (Hons) in Communications Advertising and Marketing and was recognised as best overall student. He began his career in an international communications consultancy based in Dublin, gaining a wealth of experience of the Irish and European marketplaces. While there he was



voted European Communicator of the Year across 18 European offices. Most recently he was the 2022/23 IOD Director of the Year Awards in the Agility & Resilience category.



MEMBER PROFILE

Paul Magee

Bank of Ireland

Paul Magee leads the Corporate Banking team in Northern Ireland for Bank of Ireland. He has over 18 years' experience in the local banking market supporting some of NI's largest companies across a range of sectors in their aspirations for growth.

With a Batchelor of Accountancy and a Masters in Law, Paul is also a graduate of Cambridge University having read Real Estate Finance. He is an affiliate of the Institute of Bankers and a member of the CBI Council in NI.

Paul is also an active committee member with the children's charity Wooden Spoon, raising funds for physically, mentally and socially disadvantaged children and young people, and supports both domestic rugby and the professional game in Ulster through various appointments at Ulster Rugby.



MEMBER PROFILE

Jules Alexander

Bid Excellence Ltd

Jules is an experienced bid management professional with a demonstrated history of strategic operational delivery. She's currently launching her entrepreneurship as Owner and Director of Bid Excellence Ltd, offering work-winning strategy collaboration and implementation, project management, software integration and compliance support.

Her aim is to work as an extension of your business, providing a strong pipeline of potential opportunities and adding value from results-driven, targeted tendering to successful project delivery.

Her mission is to work with like-minded businesses to implement, improve and refresh current ways of working to maximise success and growth in accordance with strategic business objectives.

She provides project management support throughout the bid lifecycle process, offering challenges, review and editorial support, allowing you to concentrate on your overall solution.

Jules loves working with new teams and sharing ideas, researching carefully to ensure understanding and offering experience and strengths to finalise a seamless submission with strong messaging.



MEMBER PROFILE

Tessa Breslin

Tessa has just moved home to Northern Ireland after 25 years in leadership consulting and talent roles in London and New York. She was formerly on the Board and Global Leadership Team of YSC, a leadership strategy consultancy, and Managing Director of YSC's North American business. Previously she led the talent agendas for a global facilities management organisation and an airport management business. She has broad, international experience working with Fortune 500 and FTSE 100 CEOs and C-suite leaders on their leadership strategy, talent development, and CEO succession.

Tessa has been coaching at executive levels in global companies and her practice enables CEO and C-suite leaders to identify the impact and change they want to make in their business and leadership, and then achieve that ambition. She has passion for coaching senior women leaders, in particular, to maximize their potential.

Tessa holds a BSc Psychology, First Class Honours, and a Masters in Occupational Psychology, both from Queen's University, Belfast. She is a Chartered Psychologist and an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. She is a practitioner with the Health Promotions Council (UK), an ICF Accredited Coach, and a Director on the Foundation Board of Queen's University, Belfast.

She is looking forward to enabling businesses in Northern Ireland to realise their strategic ambitions through world class leadership.



The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) funding calls opened

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has recently opened a number of funding calls within the €1.14 billion PEACEPLUS Programme, a new European Union (EU) funding programme designed to support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

The PEACEPLUS Programme is an evolution of the earlier EU PEACE and INTERREG Programmes which have been in operation for over 25 years, with the most recent iterations due to conclude at the end of 2023. The new initiative will encompass elements of both programmes which have, to date, delivered over €3 billion of funding to 23,000 projects.

The SEUPB, a body set up under the Belfast/Good Friday agreement will administer the PEACEPLUS Programme. This new €1.1 billion investment represents a partnership between the European Union, the governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Executive, and has been designed to address longstanding social, environmental, and economic challenges.

This cross-border cooperation programme aims to address the challenges this region faces as a result of our violent past, and will promote social and economic stability and growth to further peace and prosperity. The opportunities presented with this funding are particularly important given the current economic climate which businesses and community groups in Northern Ireland and Ireland now find themselves facing.

We met several of the affected organisations at our recent public PEACEPLUS information roadshows which provided them an opportunity to learn more about the funding calls with the SEUPB staff on hand to provide detailed support and guidance. There are more roadshows planned for autumn and all relevant details will be published on the SEUPB website at www.seupb.eu/latest/events.

A core component of the PEACEPLUS Programme is its emphasis on economic development and job creation. It recognises that economic stability is crucial for sustaining peace and social cohesion. Through targeted investment and support, the programme aims to stimulate entrepreneurship, boost

employment opportunities, and enhance the overall economic infrastructure of the region.

Gina McIntyre CEO of the SEUPB says:

“It is incumbent on us all, in private, public and third sectors to facilitate, support and encourage local businesses to take proactive steps that will create commercial advantage and increased competitiveness – enabling them to survive, and even thrive, in the difficult economic times ahead.”

PEACEPLUS will provide investment to support and encourage enterprise and entrepreneurialism, particularly amongst SMEs and in sectors with significant growth and export potential, assisting them to scale up and maximise their export potential. Businesses will also be encouraged to become increasingly outward looking by learning from best practice internationally, and working collaboratively with research partners to bring new products and services to the market.

All information in relation to the current funding calls and how to apply can be found on the website: www.seupb.eu/funding/current-funding-opportunities



PEACEPLUS

IS NOW OPEN

Full details of Investment Areas now open can be found at www.seupb.eu/funding/current-funding-opportunities



PEACEPLUS
Northern Ireland - Ireland

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European Union | UK Government

Member news

Tughans officially launch new headquarters in the Ewart

Leading Belfast law firm, Tughans has officially moved its headquarters to Grade A office building, The Ewart. Located at Bedford Square on Bedford Street in Belfast, the firm's new premises spans the 11th and 12th floor with stunning views across the city centre.

The move from its previous office in Victoria Street marks a period of growth and change for the law firm, which celebrated 125 years in business in 2021, as it looks to recruit new talent and foster new ways of working. Designed by Ply Designs and executed by specialist fit-out firm, Somerville, the office space is open plan and purpose-built to promote collaboration. The move was project managed by Johnston Houston.

Tughans is one of Northern Ireland's largest commercial law firms, providing specialist legal advice across all business sectors. The firm was recently recognised as the most active law firm in Northern Ireland for the eighth consecutive year by the Experian MarketIQ M&A League Table.

Built by property developers, MRP, The Ewart has achieved a BREEAM Excellent rating, making it one of Belfast's most sustainable new buildings, aligning with Tughans' own sustainability goals. Merging a historic building in the city's Linen Quarter with a brand new 17-storey extension, the landmark redevelopment of The Ewart



has attracted dynamic local and global businesses to the area.

Patrick Brown, Managing Partner of Tughans commented:

"The move to The Ewart marks a new era for Tughans. Having outgrown our offices in Victoria Street, we sought a new office that was appropriate for the forward thinking and innovative firm that we have become. With impeccable sustainability credentials and enviable views across the city, The Ewart was the perfect choice and will support our ESG targets. We're excited that we have now moved in and can start to make it our own."

David Jones, Real Estate Partner at Tughans said:

"With an open plan layout, the new office will help to nurture a collaborative environment and foster new ways of working between teams in the firm. It is very much designed with our staff and our clients in mind to create a welcoming, comfortable yet professional atmosphere. With various private meeting and events spaces along with relaxed common areas, we look forward to welcoming clients to the building."

Pictured L-R: Toby McMurray, Partner; David Jones, Partner; and Patrick Brown, Managing Partner, Tughans.

Aer Lingus Regional connects Belfast City Airport to 13 UK destinations

Ahead of the busy summer travel season, Aer Lingus Regional, exclusively operated by Emerald Airlines, has completed the launch of its full summer schedule from Belfast City Airport to 13 destinations across the UK.

This marks a significant milestone for the carrier, being the largest airline to operate at Belfast City Airport, further strengthening its commitment to providing air travel services to customers across Northern Ireland and beyond.

Katy Best, Commercial Director at Belfast City Airport, commented:

“The summer is one of the busiest times of the year at Belfast City Airport, and we often have up to 10,000 passengers a day using the terminal.

“Aer Lingus Regional’s summer schedule incorporates flights to 13 destinations, including popular holiday locations such as Jersey and Isle of Man. This provides passengers with ultimate choice and convenience to help them make it a summer to remember.

“In addition to an extensive selection of routes, passengers who choose Aer Lingus Regional from Belfast City Airport can travel hassle-free thanks to our unrivalled city centre location and average security processing times of just six minutes.

“We look forward to the future of our partnership with Aer Lingus Regional and to greeting many more travellers to Belfast City Airport.”

Commenting on the announcement, Keith Butler, Chief Executive Officer at Emerald Airlines, said:

“We are delighted to be providing a plethora of choice for those travelling to and from Belfast City. Whether it’s a city break in Manchester or in a summer weekend in Newquay, our destinations cater for those travelling for both business and leisure purposes. We are committed to providing the highest standard of customer service, ensuring seamless travel experiences for our passengers.”

Passengers can now enjoy seamless connections from Belfast City Airport to Birmingham, Cardiff, East Midlands, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Jersey, Isle of Man, Leeds Bradford, Manchester, Newcastle, Newquay and Southampton.

Fares begin at only £39.99 one way.

Flights to all 13 destinations can be booked online now via aerlingus.com.





ScaleX Summit to welcome global thought leaders to Belfast

Global thought leaders and experts in business and scaling are set to converge in Belfast later for the first-ever ScaleX™ Summit, a one-day conference to inspire, connect and enable company business leaders and founders to take their businesses to the next level.

Scheduled for 15 November at Belfast ICC, this event expects to unite over 500 entrepreneurs and business leaders to connect and explore the latest industry trends, challenges and best practices that are shaping the business world today.

Billed as “Ireland’s first dedicated scaling summit”, keynote speakers will deliver sessions on topics including the future of hyper sales growth, sustainability for greater profitability and impact, ascending to greatness by mastering your mindset, and much more.

Co-founder Brendan McGurgan said: “The disproportionate but hugely positive impact of SME scaling businesses is far-reaching, from economic growth and productivity to better cultures and employment opportunities. Sadly, the latest statistics in the UK suggest that less than 1% of the 5.7m SMEs are scaling. This summit is an opportunity for business leaders to be inspired to defy the norm and create flourishing, scalable businesses. It offers a chance to learn from the industry’s best, propelling their journey towards becoming part of that aspirational 1%.”

Co-founder Claire Colvin added: “Our vision is clear: we aim to position this small island as a global scaling powerhouse. It’s our purpose to lay a solid foundation for both the current and the next generation of ambitious entrepreneurs and business leaders by providing them with the blueprint for scaling. Like the proverb says, we’re planting trees under whose shade we may never sit, and it’s this foundation that creates great societies and communities. For business leaders, attending the ScaleX Summit is not just a decision, it’s a defining moment – it’s where they will

find insights, connections and tools to transform their businesses and join the elite circle of successful scale-ups.”

Among the headline speakers announced are:

- Professor Damian Hughes, author of The Sunday Times bestseller, High Performance: Lessons from the Best on Becoming Your Best;
- Marga Hoek from Thinkers50 and author of Trillion Dollar Shift;
- Oleg Konovalov, a global thought leader, author, business educator, consultant and C-suite coach; and
- Nick Bradley and Jack Daly, renowned speakers with decades of commercial success and insight.

ScaleX Summit will provide opportunity to gain valuable insights and practical strategies that leaders can implement immediately on their scaling journey and connect with like-minded leaders, entrepreneurs, investors and innovators from diverse industries and backgrounds.

A limited number of early bird tickets have been released for the event at a reduced price.

For more information go to www.scalexsummit.com

Weev partners with Park Centre as part of transition to greener motoring future

Leading Northern Ireland electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure company Weev has partnered with Park Centre, a retail and leisure facility in Belfast, to provide four new public charging stations.

The new chargers form part of the company's £20 million investment in a new public EV charging network, which will see 1,500 new charging points installed over 350 locations across Northern Ireland before the end of 2024.

Weev installed four charging points at the shopping centre, one of which is a 50kW charger

allowing customers to power a battery to 80 per cent in as little as 45 minutes.

Thomas O'Hagan, Chief Commercial Officer at Weev said:

"Our aim is to make EV charging more accessible than ever before by rolling out an EV charging network for drivers in Northern Ireland that is fit for purpose, maintained, and supported locally.

"EVs represent a new era for driving, and Weev is supporting Northern Ireland in its transition towards a greener, more sustainable motoring future.

"It is great to have the support of businesses such as Park Centre, and we look forward to installing even more chargers at shopping centres, hotels and other convenient and strategic locations across the region."

Located in the heart of Belfast, Park Centre has over 30 outlet stores, offering customers a wide range of retail and hospitality choice.

Installing Weev chargers on the premises will enable Park Centre to ensure it is future proofing the facility for many more years to come.

Ruth Lindsay at Park Centre added:

"We are very pleased to partner with Weev to install charging points in our car park, answering the growing demand from shoppers.

"Park Centre aims to provide choice and convenience to our customers and with the recent installation of chargers we look forward to providing them with the very best EV infrastructure.

"By investing in EV charging points, we hope to continue to enhance our product offering to not only meet but exceed customer expectations in a sustainable manner."

For more information about Weev's domestic and fleet charging options, wider charging network and EV range please visit: www.weev.ie



Support exciting early-stage startups and enjoy 50% tax relief on your investment with SEIS

Discover new investment opportunities with qualified startups at Raise Pitch Nights.

The new financial year brings exciting opportunities for individuals to diversify their investment portfolio and have a transformative impact on local startups with a global vision. The startup ecosystem across the island of Ireland both North and South, while vibrant and disruptive, requires early-stage backing to accelerate their growth and reach greater impact worldwide.

While angel investment is on the up in the regions outside London by 21%*, Northern Ireland still has the lowest uptake of angel investing and getting SEIS and EIS tax relief across all of the UK.

Introduced to support the growth of innovative startups, SEIS and EIS offers angel investors 30 - 50% of their

investment into early stage startups back. Investors can also receive capital gains tax relief on any profits they make from the sale of their shares.

While it's no surprise that investing in startups carries a certain level of risk, the opportunity to make a significant financial return along with the related tax benefits make it an inviting proposition for those hoping to diversify their investment portfolio. In a world of uncertainty technology, in particular SaaS (software as a service), remains one of the most resilient and sustainable business models. Technology startups across Northern Ireland need your support.

Raise Pitch Nights are the only public startup-investor connection events in Northern Ireland. Connecting startups with investors and advisors to accelerate their growth, the recent Sunset Pitch Night presented five investment-ready tech startups showcase their innovative solutions to almost 100 investors locally and across the globe.

The pitching founders are disrupting their respective industries using cutting edge technology and scalable solutions to solve real-world problems. From AI-driven video summaries to sensors saving lives in the agricultural industry

- and everything in between - attendees were given a flavour of the opportunity presented by early involvement in emerging startups from the island of Ireland in the health and fitness, cybersecurity, creative, agritech and deeptech industries.

Raise's Sunset Pitch Night fell on 'World Pay It Forward Day' and pitching companies sought support beyond just money, pitching for mentorship, connections and board advisors. They were able to tap into the expertise in the room where successful investors, advisors and entrepreneurs paid it forward with their experience.

Startups from the night said, "You guys put on a great night last night, with some brilliant people in the audience. We've had a very hectic day today so far - there's been a string of enquiries and meetings set up since last night so I'm very happy so far with how things went."

Angel Investors who attended said, "We really enjoyed the pitch night, and it was great to see it attended so well - it certainly showed there's a need for what you guys are doing at Raise Ventures."

Pictured L-R: Avril Power of Giyst, Ryan O'Reilly of NetworkFit, Clare Ryan of Cybrisc, Brendan Digney of Machine Eye and Loraa White of BudgetMusicVideos





Derry firm Modern Democracy ensures smooth running of English elections

Polling stations serving an electorate of more than two million operated a digital check-in at the English local government elections thanks to Derry-based firm Modern Democracy.

The company deployed its cloud-based digital platform Modern Polling that modernises the polling station experience across 1,500 locations in 24 councils for the 4th May vote.

The digitised registration solution dramatically improves the voter pathway, speeding up the check-in process by eliminating the need for paper-based check-in and verification while also simplifying the work of the poll clerk and providing the

election management team with a real-time view of election day turnout and instant statistical reports when the polls close.

Siobhan Donaghy, CEO, Modern Democracy said:

“The voting experience at polling stations has been virtually the same for almost a century, but that’s changing. The era of digital transformation is improving processes in every walk of life and the polling station is no different.

“We all know what it’s like to turn up at the polling station and meet your local poll clerk scanning through a mighty paper register and marking you off with a ruler and pencil. Using our solution, poll clerks at the English local government elections were able to simply scan a QR code on the voter’s polling card using a secure iPad, which automatically retrieves their details for verification. The digital register simplifies the process for the voter and the poll clerk.”

The introduction of Voter ID in England for the first time in the election, following changes made by The Elections Act 2022,

also significantly increased the administrative burden for those running the polling stations.

Siobhan added:

“Our solution makes administering Voter ID so much easier for the poll clerk and eliminates the end of day paperwork, automatically generating all the required statutory reports improving accuracy and replacing hours of laborious manual effort.

“It also makes the job of the election team easier, giving them real time visibility of all poll stations, allowing them to monitor live turnout figures and respond quickly to voter and staff needs.”

Modern Democracy was founded in 2014 and is the market leader in digital transformation at the polling station. The company successfully delivered government pilot schemes on electronic poll stations in 2018, 2019 and 2020, now proven at scale in the 2023 local elections.

Customers include local authorities across Great Britain.



National Trust, WWF and RSPB send urgent SOS for nature as Sir David Attenborough says ‘we must act now’ to

Save Our Wild Isles



Sara McCracken
FCIP, Head of
Fundraising and
Communications
RSPB NI

Save Our Wild Isles is a major campaign that combines the might of three of the largest charities in the UK – RSPB, the National Trust and WWF.

Millions of viewers watched with awe the wonder and fragility of UK nature in the recent Wild Isles series, narrated by Sir David Attenborough. Never-before-seen footage of bees seemingly flying on broomsticks, the goriness of leeches consuming toadlets, and salmon leaping to the height of their ability through waterfalls all combined to showcase our spectacular wildlife.

And yet, wildlife is suffering serious declines. Northern Ireland is the 12th worst country in the world for biodiversity loss. Curlews, immortalised by Seamus Heaney, now number around 200 pairs. Butterflies, hedgehogs, bees, garden birds – I could go on; They are all in peril.

It's not too late. Businesses leaders like you can take active steps to work together to aid nature's recovery and help nature begin to thrive again. Our future generations deserve to enjoy nature in its fullest glory, but we need to act now to make this happen.

RSPB NI is asking you – as business leaders – to put nature at the heart of your decision-making, as your business can have a major impact on the natural world both in Northern Ireland and globally through your value chain.

Carbon offsetting and net zero are familiar terms, and to align with these, RSPB NI has developed a Nature Investment Plan for Northern

Ireland. The plan demonstrates that investment in nature restoration alone could help create 2,000 jobs per year. In addition to this, it provides cost effective solutions to many societal challenges we face, including climate change, mitigation and adaption, as well as improving health and well-being.

“ Businesses leaders like you can take active steps to work together to aid nature's recovery and help nature begin to thrive again. ”

Other actions you can take include:

- Assessing and prioritising your business impacts and dependencies on nature and be proactive in acting upon them - we don't have time to wait for perfect.
- Becoming nature positive in your decision-making.
- Avoiding and minimising negative impacts on nature and working to enhance and restore nature across the supply chain.
- Increasing awareness of the importance of nature with your stakeholders, employees and within society.
- Calling on governments to support regulations and frameworks to create a stable environment for business action.

We know these aspirations cannot be achieved without a substantial uplift in current levels of funding for the protection, management and restoration of the natural environment, and new partnerships are necessary to grow the relatively untapped area of private sector financing and action for large-scale nature restoration in Northern Ireland.

RSPB NI has already developed successful partnerships to deliver environmental benefits. For example, working with Mid and East Antrim Council, Keeran's Moss, a 96-hectare peatland site unmanaged for 50 years has been restored for nature, people, and heritage. Long Point Wood, a beautiful setting on the shores of Lough Beg is a collaboration with Mid Ulster District Council. If you are enjoying a glass of water while you read this article, you should know of RSPB NI's peatland restoration work with Northern Ireland Water that improves water quality and reduces costs, as well as delivering conservation outcomes including carbon capture and better habitats for wildlife.

There are so many actions you can take from your business' perspective to improve our natural world, either locally or globally.

Nature is in crisis. Together we can save it.

www.rspb.org.uk





Spotlight on events

**IoD NI & Outsource Group
Cyber Resilience Breakfast ^ >**

**IoD NI & nijobfinder.co.uk
Building Success on & off the
Pitch with StatSports v**





**IoD NI & NIE Networks
with Dame Rotha
Johnston DBE** ^ >

**IoD NI & Carson
McDowell Director
Bootcamp** v





IoD NI & Investec Dinner with Brian Reid CertIoD, CEO, Deli Lites ^ v



IoD NI and Co-Ownership Roundtable Discussion: Delivering the homes we need



Discussing how we support the Northern Ireland economy by ensuring everyone has access to safe, affordable, and sustainable homes.

The IoD NI and Co-Ownership brought together leaders from across business, government and social sectors to discuss the current local housing system, exploring to what extent it meets the need of people and the economy and what changes would improve the system as a whole.

Co-Ownership Chief Executive Mark Graham FloD chaired the discussion with contributions from Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control, Belfast City Council, Vincent Bradley, Development Director, Braidwater Group, Jordan Buchanan, Chief Operating Officer, PropertyPal.com, Fiona McGrath, Head of Place Shaping – Belfast, NI Housing Executive, David Polley, Director – Housing Supply Policy, Department for Communities and Jan Sloan, Executive Director of Development and New Business, Clannmill Housing Group.

Welcoming participants, Mark Graham reflected on the thinking behind organising a housing roundtable at this time. Drawing on customer insights shared in Co-Ownership's most recent Social Impact Report, Mark highlighted the value of a safe, secure and affordable home with its positive impact on wellbeing and peoples' life-chances.

Beyond separate narratives

Mark reflected that there are two broad narratives about housing – as something you invest in and as a human right. But another aspect that needs explored further is housing as critical infrastructure. It is as important for prosperity as water, roads or broadband but doesn't feature in our thinking or discussions enough. These different perspectives often exist in different spheres, so the part of the housing sector that considers it as an investment, thinks about things like scheme viability, and doesn't talk particularly well to the sector that thinks about social housing and homelessness. He concluded, "I think sometimes differing perspectives don't understand each other that well. Today is about getting those perspectives together to start a conversation."

“All of that wealth and that growth in property prices which is increasingly seen as a pension, is benefitting a smaller cohort of people. That cultural view of housing primarily as an asset class needs questioned.”

Jordan Buchanan



Meeting need and demand

Despite coming close to starting 2,000 new social homes in recent years, Fiona McGrath reflected on continued demand, highlighting the high use of temporary accommodation and the 34,000 people categorised as being in housing stress. Welcoming moves towards an affordable housing strategy, something that has already been in place in parts of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland for some time, Fiona discussed the value of Intermediate Rent as providing secure rental arrangements for people as well as the intermediate affordable for sale route, such as Co-Ownership, accepting that while it might not work for everyone, is important and mixed tenure needs to become the norm.

Taking a long-term perspective, Jordan Buchanan reflected on successive choices at Westminster, that have led to the financialisation of the housing market, concluding that, in short, the housing system is not meeting the needs of people or the economy. For example, Stamp duty tax cuts is a regular go-to policy as a way of stimulating the housing market.

But it is a short-term 'fix' which distorts market activity and pushes prices upwards, particularly in more expensive locations and reducing longer term home ownership rates of younger households.

He outlined the relationship between our specific culture of home ownership and the exclusion of more groups from home ownership, which is reflected in changes in homeownership rates over the last 40 years with the number of 25- to 34-year-olds falling from 45% to 30% of households while over the same time period the home ownership rate of 65-year-olds plus has grown from 50% to 80%. He concluded we need to look to other economies where housing is firmly up the policy ladder, Northern Ireland hasn't reached that yet.

From numbers to place making

Kate Bentley discussed the importance of achieving a culture of delivery. "The Local Development Plan was critical, it was about the aspiration to grow, it was about seeing housing as part of infrastructure, wanting to bring

investment and businesses to Belfast. We must have the housing for people to live in to support our growth agenda." It was generally agreed that the well-known challenges on city centre sites in Belfast are something we need to work collectively on.

“If we want to grow our economy, attract investment, people need affordable, attractive places to live.”

Mark Graham FIoD

IoD NI and Co-Ownership Roundtable Discussion:

Delivering the homes we need

“Housing needs a stand-alone position in the Programme for Government and be seen on an equal footing as health and education. It is the third leg of that stool.”

Jan Sloan

Changing needs and demands

Building between 300 and 400 social and private houses regionally each year, Vincent Bradley reflected on the planning system from a

user perspective. From statutory consultee response times to the unintended consequences of incremental regulatory changes to the comparative experience of operating in Scotland and England, cultural change - the need for joined up thinking and pragmatic problem solving is essential.

Reflecting on the development of the Housing Supply Strategy, David Polley said that while wastewater capacity had emerged as a new immediate issue, the two long term structural challenges are our aging population and decarbonisation. The conversation returned to city centre living and people's changing housing needs over the course of their lifetime, and the often-conflicting messages between need and demand – communities want family homes when single people constitute half of the social housing waiting list.

“We need a proactive and enabling approach from government agencies to get more homes built.”

Vincent Bradley

David moved the conversation to the next step change in the housing system - decarbonisation. Drawing on the Welsh model, where social housing has led the way, the question is whether we have the skills, supply chain and workforce. From a developer perspective, Vincent was clear, “We have known it's coming and have been getting prepared”,



highlighting the inclusion of low carbon technology including PV and heat pumps in recent builds.

Jordan discussed the role of surveyors, lending institutions and a national infrastructure fund to drive this massive infrastructural and market change. Homeowners and home buyers need good advice on what they should do – ultimately people will wait for government policy – what will the incentives be to change behaviour?

Touching on the status of social housing, Jan Sloan argued that increasing numbers of mixed tenure housing solutions will increase the acceptance of social housing as a vibrant tenure of choice, concluding “We’ve been a tenure of choice and a tenure for delivery when the market goes down and we have been able to support our partners in the construction sector because we have a social housing programme.”

“We’re talking about decarbonation but we’re not talking about our aging population. We’re building houses that people cannot age in.”

David Polley

Drawing the conversation to a close, Mark returned to the need to think systemically about all the elements of the housing system, welcoming the fact that this challenge is recognised in the new Housing Supply Strategy. He concluded, “Today’s conversation illustrates how we all have a part to play in improving the housing options for people in Northern Ireland and that by working together we have a better chance of achieving this goal.”



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