



Membership
magazine of the IoD
in Northern Ireland



DirectorNI

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Conference 2024**

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IoD NI Members**

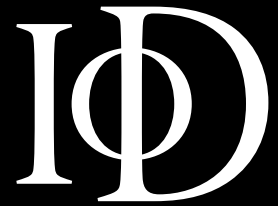
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Employers considering incentives

to get staff back to the office more often



Luke Fuller, Client Engagement Director/ Director - Accountancy & Finance, Hays Recruitment

Whatever type of organisation you lead, it is highly likely that the topic of hybrid working has been discussed at some point over the past couple of years.

Since the pandemic forced many of us in office-based roles to work from home for an extended period, there has been a shift in attitudes towards hybrid and flexible working arrangements amongst both employers and employees.

Hays' annual What Workers Want survey, which received 8,853 responses including 382 from NI, found that 69% of the Northern Ireland-based employers surveyed offered hybrid working to staff. That number would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

Over half (54%) of Northern Ireland professionals said their preferred way of working is hybrid, while 26% said they prefer fully working in the office, and only 20% have a preference for fully remote working.

But while hybrid is accepted as the "new normal" by many, our survey found that almost a third of employers in Northern Ireland are planning to change their hybrid working offering this year and will ask staff to come into the office more frequently.

According to the survey, 43% of local employers offer flexible working to all

staff, whereas 53% assess each role individually when deciding whether to offer flexible working options.

Of the employers polled, 28% said they expect their hybrid offering to change this year, with 12% saying they are already offering incentives to encourage staff back to the office and a further 13% of employers said they are considering it.

“ The most popular incentives with staff are subsidised lunches (45%), on-site café (42%), subsidised travel (42%) and access to gym facilities (38%). ”

The most popular incentives being offered by employers include access to better hardware/software in the office (50%); bike storage and showers (50%); onsite café and free drinks (42%); paid or subsidised access to gym facilities (33%); social events (33%); paid or subsidised travel (25%).

The most popular incentives with staff are subsidised lunches (45%), on-site café (42%), subsidised travel (42%) and access to gym facilities (38%).

While some employers are keen to attract staff back to the workplace, 44% of those surveyed expected the proportion of employees based fully

remotely to increase in the next 12 months, compared with 22% who think it will decrease and 33% who expect numbers to stay the same.

A conclusive 82% of the employers surveyed said transparency about their organisation's approach to flexible working is very or quite important to attracting staff, while 94% of staff viewed it was very or quite important. Of the employees surveyed, 72% said the use of hybrid or remote working is included in their contract.

While people working in many industries have to be in their workplace every day to do their job, for those whose roles are more office-based and reliant only on having access to a computer and the internet, there has been a cultural shift towards remote and hybrid working patterns since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many employers have adapted and accepted that hybrid will be their model for the long term. But others now feel they need more time when their people are together and are offering incentives to encourage people into the workplace.

Each employer will need to find what works for them but while the labour market is so tight, it is incumbent on them to work out what it is that prospective employees want in order to join or stay with their organisation.

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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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WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

8 MARCH 2024

CROWNE PLAZA, BELFAST

This year's event is taking place on Friday 8th March 2024 from 9am-4pm in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Belfast.

The 2024 IoD NI Women's Leadership Conference will be a celebration of success - of women in leadership roles and of the conference itself.

After the huge success of the 2023 event, with over 550 delegates joining us in person, we are delighted to return for 2024 to unite a community of inspiring and innovative leaders, sponsored by Herbert Smith Freehills.

The theme for the 2024 conference is:

"In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders."

- Sheryl Sandberg

This conference is set to be another complete sell-out with world-class speakers, the 8th 'Pitch Perfect' competition for a chance to win a £4,000 bursary for your female-led start up business, and a chance to connect with over 500 attendees in person.

A special thanks to headline sponsor Herbert Smith Freehills as well as associate sponsors NIE Networks, KPMG, Danske Bank, Henry Brothers, SONI, The Irish News, HireIQ and Translink for their continued support.

GUEST SPEAKERS:



Mariella Frostrup
Writer and Broadcaster



Anna Burns FRSL
Author and 2018 Booker Prize Winner



Marie Gleeson
Former Irish Navy Ships Captain and Founder of NavMar Leadership



Danni Barry
Executive Head Chef, Ballynahinch Castle



Carol McTaggart
Chief Executive, Clanmill Housing Association



Jennifer Neff
Managing Director & Co-Founder, Access Elemental



Stacey Murtagh
Health Coach and Yoga Teacher

"In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders."

Sheryl Sandberg





Northern Ireland's top directors revealed

at Institute of Directors Ceremony

Twelve leading directors from across Northern Ireland have been recognised by the Institute of Directors Northern Ireland at the annual Director of the Year awards, held on Friday 8th December at the Merchant Hotel, Belfast.

Among the list of winners was SHS Group Director, John Stewart who was named Large Business Director of the Year; Consumer Council Chief, Noyona Chundur CDir, who picked up the Public Sector award, and Julie McKeown of Henry Brothers who topped the Family Business Director of the Year category.

More than 120 people attended the lunchtime ceremony which was held in partnership with AIB. On the day, two special awards were made celebrating excellence in philanthropy and excellence in director and board practice.

The Chair's Award for Excellence in Director and Board Practice sponsored by AIB, went to Paul Terrington, CBE. Mr Terrington has been a partner at PwC since 2003 and has over 30 years' experience as a consultant, dealing primarily with large-scale transformation projects. Judges commended Paul for his strong record in delivering change programmes both within the public and private sectors and recognised the contribution he has made to a number of boards including the Ulster Rugby Management Committee of which he is currently Chair and his role with the NI Hospice.

The Community Foundation Northern Ireland sponsored the Philanthropist of the Year award which was presented to founder of online estate agents Purple Bricks, Kenny Bruce MBE. The Larne native was recognised for the contribution he had made to local sporting organisations, and in particular his role in rejuvenating Larne Football

Club, having donated significantly to the renovation of Inver Park Stadium and supporting growth and development within the club.

Congratulating the winners, Gordon Milligan OBE FIOD, Chair of the IoD NI, said:

"Strong, authentic leadership can really set businesses apart and in today's challenging environment, it's more crucial than ever to have the right kind of leader holding the reigns.

"Each of this afternoon's winners have demonstrated that they have the necessary skills and attributes to encourage and motivate their teams and it's wonderful to see such a diverse range of winners from businesses across all sectors and sizes.

"At the IoD NI we're passionate about developing the next generation of business leaders and these awards are a fantastic way to recognise those who are inspirational within the local business community.



“Thanks to everyone who joined us for the event and to those who contributed to this afternoon’s success including our partners at AIB who help us deliver a great event each year.”

Seamus McGuckin, Head of Corporate at title sponsor AIB, said: “AIB is proud to work in partnership with the IoD NI in support of these awards which recognise the exceptional achievements of business leaders here.

“Each of the winners honoured have a remarkable story to tell and rightly deserve to be congratulated on their accomplishments. It was fantastic to celebrate the leaders in our community who have made an important contribution to the private, public and third sector here.”

For more information about the awards or the work of the IoD in Northern Ireland, visit www.iood.com/northernireland

Full list of winners:

- Director of the Year Family Business, sponsored by BDO Northern Ireland – **Julie McKeown, Henry Brothers Ltd.**
- Director of the Year Innovation, sponsored by KPMG – **Alison McFadden, Continu**
- Director of the Year International, sponsored by Invest Northern Ireland – **Ian Kenny FloD, Teknplex Healthcare**
- Director of the Year Non-Executive, sponsored by Deloitte – **Ian Sheppard FloD**
- Director of the Year Public Sector, sponsored by EY – **Noyona Chundur CDir, Consumer Council Northern Ireland**
- Director of the Year Third Sector, sponsored by EY – **Lisa Keys, The Northern Ireland Boys’ Brigade (BBNI)**
- Director of the Year Small / Medium Business, sponsored by Ulster University Business School – **Jack Duddy, HireIQ Ltd**
- Director of the Year Large Business, sponsored by ABL Group – **John Stewart, SHS Group Ltd**
- Young Director of the Year, sponsored by nijobfinder.co.uk – **Ciarán O’Neill, Radius Vehicle Solutions NI Limited**
- Director of the Year Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, sponsored by Tughans – **Don Leeson, Labour Relations Agency**
- Philanthropist of the Year, sponsored by the Community Foundation Northern Ireland – **Kenneth Frederick Charles Bruce MBE**
- Chair’s Award for Excellence in Director and Board Practice, sponsored by AIB – **Paul Terrington CBE FloD**

Northern Ireland's top directors revealed

at Institute of Directors Ceremony



Ashleen Feeney, KPMG and Alison McFadden, Continu - winner of the Innovation Director of the Year Award



Jonathan Williamson CDir, EY and Lisa Keys, Boys Brigade - winner of Third Sector Director of the Year Award



Craig Harrison, Deloitte & Ian Sheppard - winner of NED Director of the Year Award



Kathy Gillie, Tughans & Don Leeson, Labour Relations Agency - winner of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Director of the Year Award



Lesley McGrogan, Ulster University Business School and Jack Duddy, HireIQ - winner of SME Director of the Year Award



Ian McClure, ABL Group and John Stewart, SHS Group - winner of Large Business Director of the Year Award



Brian Gillian, AIB & Paul Terrington, CBE, PwC - winner of Chair's Award for Excellence in Director and Board Practice



Jonathan Williamson CDir, EY and Noyona Chundur CDir, NI Consumer Council - winner of the Public Sector Director of the Year Award



Maybeth Shaw, BDO NI & Julie McKeown, Henry Brothers - winner of Family Business Director of the Year Award



Alan Wilson, Invest NI & Ian Kenny, TeknipleX Healthcare- winner of the International Director of the Year Award



Gareth Clements, Larne FC picking up award from Andi Jarvis (host) on behalf of Kenny Bruce MBE - winner of Philanthropist of the Year Award



Connor Diamond, nijobfinder.co.uk and Ciaran O'Neill, Radius Vehicle Solutions - winner of Young Director of the Year Award

Navigating Legal Horizons in NI Building Safety



Emily Paisley, Senior Associate – Dispute Resolution and Litigation, Eversheds Sutherland and Nuala Maguire, Of Counsel, Construction and Projects

Just recently, we had the opportunity to host a seminar and panel discussion on the current issues in contracts, land and litigation. It was a great way to bring together lawyers and industry leaders to consider the pertinent issues within contract management as well as dispute management and avoidance.

As we near another new year without a functioning Executive in Northern Ireland, there may be a temptation to become complacent in this status quo. However, it is essential to bear in mind and be ready for new legislation that might be waiting in the in-tray of a future Assembly.

In the wake of the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, the United Kingdom recognised the need for comprehensive reform in building safety regulations. Right across England and Wales, the removal of flammable cladding from flats and buildings is still underway.

The resultant Building Safety Act 2022 (“BSA”), which received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022 and which will gradually come into force by April 2024, stands as a crucial milestone in addressing the shortcomings that contributed to the Grenfell disaster. This primarily applies to England and Wales, but before developers and landlords all breathe a sigh of relief, it is important to remember that legislation resembling the Building Safety Act could well be on the agenda of an incoming Assembly.

“The lessons learned from the Grenfell tragedy underscore the imperative for continuous improvement”

What this could mean for the construction industry in Northern Ireland in legal terms is significant. For instance, it could mean longer limitation periods, that is, an extension of the time during which legal actions or claims related to building safety issues can be brought forward. Longer limitation periods provide individuals or entities with more time to identify and pursue legal remedies for

issues related to building safety, which is important for cases where defects or safety concerns are not immediately apparent, allowing for a more comprehensive and equitable legal process.

If a future Assembly chooses to introduce similar legislation to the Building Safety Act, it might also mean provision for liability after Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) winding up. In simple terms, even if an entity responsible for a building project ceases to exist or undergoes dissolution, legal responsibility for building safety issues can still be attributed.

There will of course be methods whereby a developer can seek to mitigate its position, but the best way to offset risk will be to manage and mitigate such building safety risks from arising in the first place, which surely must be the main concern.

As we anticipate a potential change in the legislative landscape, it’s important that developers and those of us working in this area remain proactive, adaptive, and committed to the highest standards of safety and accountability. The lessons learned from the Grenfell tragedy underscore the imperative for continuous improvement; proactive engagement with potential legislative changes will be pivotal in ensuring the resilience and safety of Northern Ireland’s built environment.



The cost to business of a toxic workplace culture



Don Leeson, Chief Executive, Labour Relations Agency

The cost to business of getting people management practices wrong has never been more expensive.

Thanks to research commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency and undertaken by the University of Westminster¹, we now know the cost to employers of toxic workplace cultures in Northern Ireland; it's around £1 billion per year.

Using data from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) from 2019, and other data sources, Professors Richard Saundry and Peter Urwin estimate that workplace conflict costs employers £851m per year. Given the wave of industrial unrest and employment relations challenges experienced since the pandemic, they confidently predict this annual cost is now closer to £1bn.

The researchers estimate that 37% of employees experience some form of conflict in the workplace every year.

When you think about costs and workplace conflict, litigation through the tribunal system tends to spring to mind. However, only 1% of employees will go on to make a tribunal claim as a result of a workplace dispute; and fewer than 10% of these claims will ever reach a hearing (most will settle through conciliation through the Labour Relations Agency). While the costs of litigation are not insignificant (£49m per year), this is only a small element of the total cost of workplace conflict.

The primary source of the cost is employee resignations. As a Labour Relations Agency colleague of mine often remarks, "People leave people, not jobs." The evidence would suggest this is true. It is estimated that 5% of employees – around 15,000 per year – resign as a result of workplace conflict. Importantly, employees are twice as likely to resign if they also experienced negative impacts on their mental health and/or have taken time-off work.

Such turnover costs an estimated £439m per year – 10 times the cost of litigation – in recruiting and training replacement staff.

“ We now know the cost to employers of toxic workplace cultures in Northern Ireland; it's around £1 billion per year. ”

The human toll is substantial. 160,000 employees – nearly 6 in 10 of those who experience conflict – report suffering from stress, anxiety and/or depression as a direct result. For a minority, the result is time off work; around 450,000 days are lost through sickness absence due to workplace conflict in Northern Ireland, at a cost of £66 million to employers. However, the vast majority of those who experience mental ill health due to workplace conflict (85%) continue to turn up to work. Such 'presenteeism' often has a negative impact on productivity. The costs to employers



of this reduced productivity is estimated to be more than £55m.

The remaining cost (£296m) is attributed to dismissals due to poor performance and/or misconduct. One may speculate how many of these dismissals might have been prevented with earlier intervention to support the employee to improve performance or nip in the bud any sign of poor conduct.

Effective leadership is critical to preventing or resolving the incidence and cost of workplace conflict. Research recently published by the Chartered Management Institute² suggests as many as 82% of new managers in the UK are what it calls 'accidental managers' embarking on the role with no formal training in management or leadership.

Employers might consider IoD's Leadership for Directors course³ for senior leaders. The Labour Relations Agency's Certificate in Effective Line Management Practice⁴ is free of charge and focuses on conflict prevention and resolution for front line managers.

Given the costs of getting people management wrong, the return of investment in leadership development is clearly considerable.

¹ www.lra.org.uk/Latest-News/estimating-costs-workplace-conflict-northern-ireland

² www.managers.org.uk/knowledge-and-insights/research/better-management-report-take-responsibility-take-action/

³ www.iod.com/professional-development/open-courses/leadership-for-directors/

⁴ www.lra.org.uk/events



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

Barry O'Donnell Harbinson Mulholland

Barry O'Donnell is a highly qualified professional with significant experience in the field of accounting and financial services.

A Fellow of Chartered Accountants Ireland, his long-standing career includes 20 years with Harbinson Mulholland in Belfast.

He holds a unique role as a Licensed Insolvency Practitioner, Corporate Recovery specialist and is qualified to oversee and manage insolvency processes for individuals and businesses including bankruptcy and liquidation.

He is also Director of Forensic Services supporting the legal sector with commercial, matrimonial, and criminal cases involving financial



loss. This may involve investigating financial irregularities, fraud, or financial misconduct.

Leading a team of five, Barry is also an Expert Witness, providing specialised testimony in legal proceedings to aid understanding of complex financial matters. He's also experienced in Alternative Dispute Resolution, helping to resolve disputes outside court litigation.

Barry leads the firm's partnership a Fraud Advisory Panel, helping to combat fraud within the business sector and third sector organisations.

MEMBER PROFILE**Jack Duddy****HireIQ**

Jack Duddy is the Co-Founder and Director of HireIQ, the largest specialist Accountancy and Finance recruitment agency in Northern Ireland. Based in Belfast with an office in Dublin, HireIQ caters to clients across to the Island of Ireland, Greater London, and, more recently, New York City.

Jack is dedicated to crafting long-term relationships and providing exceptional partnerships. He has successfully shaped an Accountancy and Finance consultancy, emphasising innovation, integrity, and quality. Jack's expertise lies in leveraging analysis, research, and strategic planning to assist numerous businesses in expanding and thriving through the acquisition, sourcing, and retention of top talent within their respective industries.

**MEMBER PROFILE****Greg Neville****Eagle's Flight**

Greg Neville brings over two decades of experience developing leaders and organisations around the world working as an executive coach, facilitator, mentor, and public speaker. He currently works as VP for Culture & Global Performance for Eagle's Flight. Founded in 1988, Eagle's Flight believes there is immense potential within every human being. Our mission is to help organisations unleash the potential within their workforce to drive results, increase employee engagement, and improve corporate culture. Eagle's Flight is an innovative leader

in the development and delivery of practical training programs for the global business community. Through experiential learning, we give organisations of all sizes a competitive edge by significantly strengthening their workforce through lasting behaviour change. Our offerings include skill-based programmes, corporate events, leadership training, and culture transformations. Globally, the programmes are offered in 20 languages and represented by international licensees in 35 countries. This global network allows us to seamlessly work with large, multinational companies; providing them with consistent training messages, methods and solutions, regardless of geography.



For over 35 years, Eagle's Flight has worked with a wide variety of organisations, including over 50% of the Fortune 500. Our clients span industries from food and beverage, hospitality and retail to finance, energy, pharmaceuticals, automotive, mining and agriculture.

MEMBER PROFILE**Jacqui Kennedy****Translink**

Jacqui Kennedy has recently been appointed as Chief People and Corporate Services Officer with Translink.

A Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (FCIPD), Jacqui has responsibility for providing strategic leadership in the areas of Human Resources, Organisational Development, Internal Communications and Legal

Services. Jacqui joins Translink at an exciting time as the company takes forward a number of key strategic projects as part of its Better.Connected strategy including the development of Belfast Grand Central Station, Weaver's Cross and the roll out of the company's zero emission buses. Jacqui previously held a number of senior HR roles within Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland, latterly as the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, a post she held for five years. Jacqui began her career in Human Resources in the private sector with roles in the manufacturing and telecommunications sectors. She is



a lay panel member for the Office of Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunals and is also a Trustee of a local charity.

Directors' Duties: avoiding criminal convictions by filing company accounts



Jodie Rankin,
Associate,
Pinsent Masons
Belfast LLP

No two days in the job are the same for any company director. Running a business in Northern Ireland can often require spinning multiple plates at one time – route to market, growth strategy, people, and culture.

However, whilst these focus areas help to drive the success of a business, underpinning the role of a director is the need for compliance with statutory and legal requirements, including those set out in the Companies Act 2006 (the Companies Act).

Successful business leaders often identify that one of the important ingredients for success is having “world class basics”. Whilst the timely filing of statutory accounts might seem to be one such ‘basic’ task, the importance of hitting deadlines is crucial, as failing to do so can risk criminal prosecution.

The law

Limited companies, whether trading or dormant, have a duty to file accounts with Companies House each year. For new companies, the first set of accounts must be delivered within 21 months of the incorporation date. After that, all subsequent accounts must be

delivered within nine months of the company’s financial year end.

Accounts will only be deemed ‘delivered’ once they have complied with all requirements detailed in the Companies Act. Even if the deadline falls on a Sunday or a bank holiday, the accounts must still be filed by that date. Failure to meet the deadline will automatically result in a civil penalty, irrespective of the reason for non or late filing.

“ Going forward, directors will also have to undergo verification checks before filing their accounts in a bid to combat increasing rates of financial crime.. ”

Personal liability of directors

However, a late filing penalty may not be the end of the road, and failure to file company accounts within the requisite timeframe constitutes a criminal offence under Section 451 of the Companies Act. We are seeing circumstances where referrals are being made by Companies House to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for such prosecutions to be taken forward.

Particularly in larger organisations, the practical, day to day preparation and filing of accounts is often delegated. Notwithstanding such practical delegation, responsibility still sits on the directors’ shoulders. Failing to adhere to relevant deadlines can leave a director facing personal prosecution, which carries a fine of up to £5,000. Alongside the fine, however, comes the reputational impact and diversion of management time and resource, to consider how to respond to a criminal prosecution.

In instances where a director either pleads guilty, or is adjudicated guilty by the Court following a criminal trial, the offence will, of course, appear on their criminal record for a specified period of time, and could impact a range of issues, such as travel and employment opportunities.

In addition, if a director has failed to file accounts within the required timeframe on three or more occasions over the course of five years, they may be faced with the distressing prospect of disqualification from their directorships under the Company Directors Disqualification (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, or in accordance with the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 in England and Wales.

Defence

There is a statutory defence to such a charge on the basis that the director proves that they have taken “all reasonable steps” to file the company accounts before



MEMBER PROFILE

Peter Nixon

Nixon McQuade

Peter Nixon is the Co-Founder and Director of Nixon McQuade, a burgeoning recruitment firm with a distinct focus on the accountancy and finance sectors throughout the UK & Ireland. With Peter's commitment to excellence and strategic vision within the industry, Nixon McQuade has swiftly emerged as the go-to partner for organisations seeking top-tier professionals and for individuals aspiring to make impactful strides within their careers.

Peter has an extensive background in recruitment, which has continuously instilled his commitment to build solid and consistent relationships. He has a truly genuine interest in the success of both clients and candidates, which pinpoints Nixon McQuade's mission to redefine the overall recruitment experience.

As part of the successful driving force behind Nixon McQuade, Peter has been committed to crafting a platform where talent meets opportunity. Their results throughout the last year have proven their skills and expertise in navigating the intricacies of this industry, whilst competently embarking on their entrepreneurial journey.

Peter joins the IoD with a view to expanding his professional network and gaining opportunities to learn and develop from the experience of his co-members.



the end of the requisite period. That being said, the threshold associated with this defence is very high and careful consideration needs to be given on approach.

The Court also has a broader power pursuant to s1157 of the Companies Act to relieve a director in proceedings, including for breach of duty, where it appears that the director has acted honestly and reasonably and having regard to all the circumstances of the case, they ought fairly to be excused.

Accordingly, depending on the facts of the case, two options remain available. Firstly, a director's legal representatives may enter into negotiations with the Prosecution, in an attempt to persuade them to drop the charges, but there is no guarantee that such an approach would be forthcoming.

Secondly, to resolve the issue as quickly as possible, some directors opt to admit the offence, whilst entering a plea in mitigation, to try to minimise the level of fine. This would, however, ultimately result in a criminal conviction, which would appear on a criminal record.

Future obligations

For directors, the road ahead looks to be paved with practical, additional hurdles, following the passing of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 in October 2023. The introduction of the new UK law aims to tackle economic crime by imposing new obligations

on companies in relation to the quality and quantity of information to be provided to Companies House. Whilst a handful of provisions have already come forward, it is expected that the remainder of the provisions will filter through in 2024.

In particular, small companies will be subject to more stringent reporting requirements. Going forward, directors will also have to undergo verification checks before filing their accounts in a bid to combat increasing rates of financial crime.

Practical tips

Criminal convictions can have significant professional and personal consequences. It is therefore imperative that directors remember that the responsibility for filing accounts with Companies House ultimately lies with themselves.

To avoid a late filing penalty, and a potential criminal conviction, directors should carefully check when accounts are due, and mark important dates in diaries. Sufficient time should then be allowed for accounts to reach Companies House within the statutory deadlines.

A director who finds themselves in the unfortunate position of facing criminal prosecution for the late filing of company accounts should seek legal advice immediately.

SONI appoints new independent Board in significant milestone

Northern Ireland's grid operator, SONI, recently announced the appointment of a new independent Board.

According to SONI's Managing Director, Alan Campbell, the appointments mark a significant new milestone on the organisation's journey.

“The wealth of experience and expertise that our new Board offers comes at an important time for SONI.”

SONI is Northern Ireland's Transmission System Operator (TSO). It ensures power can flow safely, securely, and reliably through the electricity grid from where it is generated, by the private companies who own power stations, wind turbines and solar farms, to where it is needed in homes, farms and businesses across Northern Ireland.

“Northern Ireland's Energy Strategy and Climate Change Act sets really ambitious targets to reach 80% of all electricity consumed coming from renewable sources by 2030. We have the important task of transforming the grid and how it's operated so it can manage more variable forms of renewable energy.

SONI recently published an updated version of its Shaping Our Electricity Future Roadmap – the plan which sets out the reforms needed in the electricity system to reach the 2030 targets. The grid operator is also consulting on its draft ten-year Transmission Development Plan which details the new infrastructure required to meet Northern Ireland's electricity needs.

“The scale of change and transformation is unprecedented, but we have a great team of highly experienced engineers and a clear plan for how we get there.”, remarked Campbell, who has been SONI Managing Director since 2020 and the former top executive at Coolkeeragh, one of Northern Ireland's largest power stations.

A lawyer and former Chief Executive of Belfast City Council, Peter McNaney is one of Northern Ireland's most experienced executives and will Chair the new SONI Board.

“From previous experience, I understand the crucial role SONI plays in public life here, and so I relish the opportunity to take on a leadership role in an organisation that has such an important part to play in delivering a cleaner, cheaper and more secure energy future for homes, businesses and farms across Northern Ireland,” started the new Chair.

“We know Northern Ireland has made significant progress to integrate renewable energy into our electricity system in comparison to elsewhere, and SONI has played an important part in that success. To build on that progress, and with less than seven years to meet Northern Ireland's ambitious clean energy targets, we are going to have to be innovative and agile in areas such as policy and regulatory reform and open-minded about doing things differently.

Joining Peter McNaney on SONI's new independent Board is NIE Networks stalwart Peter Ewing, former senior Scottish Power executive Angela Love, and experienced finance and regulatory executive Charlie Villar.

Alan Campbell looks forward to the momentum the appointment of SONI's new Board will provide in driving forward its core mission.

“The wealth of experience and expertise that our new Board offers comes at an important time for SONI. In addition to acting as strong advocates for our organisation and its people, we're looking forward to working with them and our industry, government and regulatory partners to find new ways to accelerate our collective mission to decarbonise the electricity system for the benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland.”

The appointments are the first step in a process to implement a new suite of governance changes which will create greater managerial and operational independence from its parent company, EirGrid plc.





BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Peter Ewing

Peter Ewing is an experienced director of finance and electricity regulation and leader of business change. With over 25 years' experience, Peter has been closely involved in the transformation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland since privatisation.

Peter was previously Director of Finance and Regulation at Northern Ireland Electricity and the Viridian Group, Deputy Managing Director and Director of Regulation and Market Operations at NIE Networks, and a Non-Executive Board Member and Treasurer at Radius Housing. Prior to this he was Finance Director at Moy Park.



BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Angela Love

Angela Love has over 30 years' experience in the GB/EU gas and electricity markets and brings extensive expertise from across most aspects of the energy system.

Angela was a consultant for 13 years, advising clients on market arrangements across gas, electricity and water and developing business strategies. Her past roles include Chair of the Gas Forum, Director of Gas, Communications and European Affairs at the Energy Networks Association and Director of Future Markets and Engagement at Elexon. She is also Chair of Scottish Power's Energy Networks Independent Net Zero Advisory Committee and has recently taken up the position of Chair of the Cadent Gas Customer Challenge Group.



BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Charlie Villar

Charlie Villar is an executive with finance, operations, and transformation experience. He has worked on Boards, as well as with senior officials, regulators and Ministers across Electricity, Post, Telecommunications, Broadcast Media, and Water sectors in GB, NI and Europe.

In these roles, he has developed a diverse understanding of the regulatory, economic and commercial drivers across a range of industries, and how to lead organisations through major transformations.



BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Dr Peter McNaney CBE (Chair)

Peter McNaney has a wealth of experience in senior leadership roles in Northern Ireland gained in both executive and non-executive roles in corporate governance, shaping strategy and effective implementation,

leading change and successfully facilitating complex partnerships.

He practised as a corporate lawyer for 20 years before serving as Chief Executive of Belfast City Council between 2001-14.

As a non-executive, he was Chair of the Governing body of Belfast Metropolitan College and oversaw the building and move to the Titanic campus. He has also served as a member of the Board of Invest NI.



Why joining the UK Export Academy should be next on your to-do list



Emily Lambert,
Trade Adviser,
Department for
Business and Trade

Businesses that sell overseas are more competitive and can grow their sales faster. So, are you ready to explore your business' international potential? UK Export Academy Adviser Emily Lambert takes you through how you can get started.

What is the UK Export Academy?

The UK Export Academy is a free online training programme from the Department for Business and Trade, brought to you by expert international trade specialists and designed to give UK businesses the confidence and know-how to grow sales of their goods and services around the world.

Join thousands of businesses like yours, as we help you explore the benefits and challenges of trading outside of the UK. Discover your export potential and upskill your knowledge of international sales. Prepare your future export plan, network with like-minded businesses, and take your next steps in taking your business to the world.

The UK Export Academy is open to any UK business that has a product or service that can be sold internationally. It is for businesses who know that they want to reach international customers and contracts in the future, as well as those who might already be selling beyond the UK and want to expand into new markets.

What's involved in the UK Export Academy?

Whether you're a first-time exporter, or looking to develop your knowledge further, we have a jam-packed calendar of online training events available all year round.

You can customise your programme with events that suit your needs.



“ UKEA offers free, practical information in short modules, allowing us to quickly choose the specific export advice we need to sell our guitars to the world and grow our business. ”

David Ausdahl II, Lowden
Guitars, Downpatrick

The UK Export Academy is delivered in three stages depending on your skill level:

Essentials

These events repeat each month and cover topics that are essential to becoming a successful exporter. We can help you build your knowledge and confidence if you're relatively new to selling internationally or interested in learning how to start.

Masterclasses

Once you have a good understanding of the basics, our Masterclass events will broaden your knowledge in areas such as sales and marketing, internationalising your website, e-commerce, managing overseas partners, and much more.

Sector and Market events

Discover how you can use our sector experts and overseas networks to access sector specific and in-market opportunities, such as exploring the benefits of new free trade agreements and how to do business in your overseas target markets.

Why should I sign up?

Here's a taster of what else you can expect once you sign up:

1. Listen to expert advice from business owners like you:

Join our monthly Ask an Exporter events to hear top tips and insights and find out how our Export Champions have witnessed global success through selling their products and services internationally. Our Export Champions include businesses of different sizes and from a wide range of sectors.

2. Tap into the expertise of international trade experts:

At all our live sessions, you can ask your burning questions all about selling overseas directly to myself and other international trade experts. You can hear from DBT market specialists at our "Get your Business ready for..." events with their top tips on how to get started with trading in different overseas markets including South Asia, USA and Chile

3. Catch up at a time that suits you:

The recordings and slides from our events are available to directly download from your account. Recordings are available for four weeks, so you can catch up in your own time if you miss the live session. We also know that your time is precious, so we have made some of our most popular Essentials series of events available on-demand to watch anywhere, and in any time zone".

How can you join the UK Export Academy?

Scan the QR code below or visit great.gov.uk/export-academy to sign up for free and explore our calendar of events.

If you would like to have a chat with the UK Export Academy team, email us at exportacademy@businessandtrade.gov.uk.



“ Exporting is enjoyable. It’s great to learn about different cultures and what customer service means in each country. It may be daunting at first but don’t let that put you off as the UKEA is there to help! ”



Paula Cowan, SFXRay, Belfast

Collaboration - the missing piece in the SME puzzle



Robert McConnell,
Managing Director,
Pinnacle Growth
Group

As Director of an SME business, I know that it can often feel like we are only ever one step away from success. My peers tend to agree that if only we could identify that elusive ingredient, we would all achieve exponential success

Of course, some of that is just wishful thinking, or even optimistic growth planning but it is worth considering whether bridging the small gaps could create new opportunities and successes for an SME.

At Pinnacle Growth Group, most of the enquiries that we receive from prospective clients relate to support around Finance for Growth.

Whilst securing finance provides a good foundation for expansion, innovation and sustained growth, there are other important elements to consider.

Robert John Meehan said, “The most valuable resource that we all have is each other. Without collaboration our growth is limited to our own perspectives.” And our most successful clients have one thing in common – they’re all open to collaboration. Working with another business, they utilise each other’s strengths to create mutual success, overcome problems and challenges and capitalise on opportunities that might otherwise be out of their reach.

Like growth, collaboration requires a specific mindset. To collaborate effectively, SMEs should be prepared, and have relevant processes and working practices in place.

“Like growth, collaboration requires a specific mindset. To collaborate effectively, SMEs should be prepared, and have relevant processes and working practices in place.”

They must also have trustworthy, established collaborators in place. I often find myself explaining the benefits of collaboration to clients who may be new to the process, or who operate in sectors and industries that aren’t typically collaborative. On these occasions, our team will use the PARTNER acronym to summarise the key benefits of collaboration.

P - Problem solving

Whilst a task may seem insurmountable when faced by an individual, the collective efforts of multiple people can help find an effective solution. I would suggest seeking guidance from a mentor, partner, or trusted resource for help with overcoming challenges.

Partnering with another SME allows for more input when tackling a challenge or problem. Remember that the more complex the problem, the more beneficial it can be to seek external assistance. Embracing a fresh perspective often results in outcomes that exceed your initial expectations.

A - Achieve growth

Collaboration enables SMEs to compete with larger brands by pooling knowledge, consumer reach, and technology. Through combined efforts to support one another, SMEs can flourish and overcome challenges that they might struggle with individually.

Establishing a foothold in the market can be tough for smaller companies when competing with businesses with more resources and a larger workforce. However, by collaborating, SMEs can achieve mutual growth.

R - Reduce risk

Collaborating on a project can reduce risk in several ways. Shared experience, for example, can mean that someone with experience of a similar situation can identify a mitigation that has worked in the past.

Similarly, distributing the risk across a wider resource base can reduce it. For example, a financial risk could be amortised over a larger collaborative team.

Risk management and reduction is often more pronounced in larger organisations, because they have the time and resources to consider it fully and collaborating



SMEs can operate in this way. This can allow them to compete with larger businesses to mitigate risk on projects and for clients.

T - Time saving

Working together and ideally concurrently, can save time. By collaborating, SMEs can shorten project lead or delivery times.

This can be attractive to clients and can result in higher fees, prompt payment, and higher customer satisfaction. Like risk reduction, this can provide SMEs with the resources to compete with larger organisations.

N - Network

Successful SMEs collaborate by connecting their professional circles, leading to the development of a more extensive network than each business could achieve independently.

The key to business success lies in continually forging new connections, establishing alliances, and reaching out to fresh audiences. Expanding your network can also be really enjoyable! IoD events are a great way to meet new people.

E - Expand

Collaboration allows SMEs to expand their services, products and knowledge. The rapid advancement of technology has conversely led to shorter product life cycles but has hugely increased Research & Development costs.

However, collaboration allows businesses to pool resources, cut costs and mutually benefit from innovation. This can be seen in the automobile industry, with cars integrating in-vehicle tech such as Apple's CarPlay and Google's Android Auto. This facilitates growth for both industries.

One major advantage of collaboration is knowledge sharing. Every interaction with individuals outside of our immediate circles can offer valuable insights. Successful business collaborations often involve professionals with diverse perspectives, skillsets, and knowledge.

Working together empowers you to leverage the skills and expertise of others while contributing your own. Collaborating allows everyone to access a collective pool of resources, ideas, knowledge, and skills. Gaining a broader understanding of different business practices can enrich your decision-making processes and enhance day-to-day business activities.

R - Results

The main aim of collaborating is to achieve results and SMEs thrive by nurturing collaborative environments.

Collaboration can streamline workflows, strengthen relationships and increase productivity. This in turn can boost morale, improve motivation, and benefit all stakeholders. In short, collaborating to win a contract, deliver a project, achieve grant funding or seize an opportunity will increase success for all involved.

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

Member news

Wilson Nesbitt Announce Seven Senior Team Promotions

Following the leading NI firm's recent successes and ongoing team development, Wilson Nesbitt is delighted to announce seven senior team appointments;

Stepping into the role of Partner leading the Family Law team is Ciara Brolly. Ciara is renowned for her technical expertise and direct advice in divorce and financial settlements. Ciara leads on high value, complex private client matters.

Sian Brunt has been promoted to Senior Associate. Sian's expertise focuses on dispute resolution, recovery litigation, employment law, professional negligence including fraud and conflict mediation and contentious banking matters.

Hannah Simpson has also been appointed to Senior Associate level. Hannah is a personal injury specialist handling road traffic injuries including credit hire recovery, accidents at work and industrial diseases. She also focuses on medical negligence; on which she lectures and trains solicitors.

Sharon Hawthorne is promoted to Senior Manager. She assists with the management of the residential banking team in our lender services department, contributing to its impressive record on meeting strict service delivery criteria.

Daniel McCracken has been made Associate. Daniel leads on estate disputes advising on



will validity, financial provision claims for disappointed family members and contentious trust and land matters. He also provides technical support for the wider private client team.

Izabela Treacy has also been appointed Associate in the real estate team. She specialises in commercial and social property development, investment and landlord and tenant transactions.

Chi Ling Tip becomes Senior Solicitor, assisting in commercial property, including development, leaseholds and title rectifications.

Managing Partner Gilbert Nesbitt said; "Our Partnership would like to congratulate the team

on their promotions. These latest appointments reflect the trajectory of Wilson Nesbitt as a firm and are a direct result of the exceptional support this team provides to both our clients and their fellow members. We are very proud of their achievements and believe their promotions acknowledge their growth to date, along with their dedication to the progression of the firm. We wish each of them every success in their new roles. We will continue to support and empower them as they progress."

For more information on Wilson Nesbitt Career Opportunities, including Solicitor and Trainee contract positions, visit www.wilson-nesbitt.com/careers/

McKeever Hotel Group Set for Growth Under new Leadership Structure

McKeever Hotel Group, the Antrim-based hospitality business, has revealed its strategic three-year plan, which includes the growth of its operation on an all-island basis and across its existing hotels in NI and Donegal.

The ambitious strategy, which coincides with the Group's 30th anniversary, aims to increase turnover to £60million over the next three years, with further acquisitions and hotel management contracts included in the growth plan.

The strategy is underpinned by McKeever's recent £3million capital expenditure across its five hotels. This includes a significant refurbishment and upgrade of Dillon's Hotel in Donegal and further investment in the Group's flagship Dunadry Hotel & Gardens in Antrim.

To deliver on the future-focused strategy, the McKeever Group has also reorganised its Board

structure and announced a change in its leadership team.

Eugene McKeever, who established the business in 1993 when he bought Corr's Corner in Newtownabbey, will move from Managing Director to Chair of the Group.

Eugene's son Eddie, who was formerly Operations Director, has been appointed Group Managing Director, while his sister Bridgene Keeley becomes Company Secretary and Director of Governance.

Eugene's wife Catherine McKeever, with whom he co-founded McKeever Hotels, remains a Director and has also been appointed Chair of ESG.

Victoria Walton joins the Board as Director of Finance while Martin Toner, who has over 30 years experience as General Manager across the McKeever portfolio, is the new Director of People.

"The journey to this important new phase in our development has been both challenging and exciting," said Eugene McKeever, "And I'm so pleased that our travels continue, albeit with a new captain in place."

"The impact of Covid was immense for everyone, but we embraced the change and

used it as a period of reflection, learning and consolidation. We remained loyal to our staff, our suppliers and our customers and have emerged stronger than ever with a clear focus and a results-driven strategy which we will achieve under our new leadership structure."

Central to McKeever's growth is its commitment to its team, with £250k set aside for investment in the training and development of its 300 strong workforce.

Eddie McKeever believes this is reflected in the Group's 'we do more' culture:

"We are only as good as our people - and we have the best. We are already recognised as an employer of choice and we will continue to support and develop our team to ensure our 'we do more' ethos is evident though the quality and professionalism of the service we provide."

"I'm so looking forward to bringing the vision behind our strategy to life. This is entirely achievable thanks to the passion and focus of the likeminded leaders on our Board. From our environmental and sustainability responsibilities to our connection with the communities where we are based, we are primed and prepared for this important new stage in our development."





Faces of Family Business Exhibition

The phrase “One picture is worth a thousand words” has been in existence since the early 1900s and a recent exhibition sought to explore how visual imagery and artefacts can powerfully convey the narrative, history and legacy of family businesses.

Organised by the Northern Ireland Family Business Forum, a partnership between Harbinson Mulholland and Ulster University’s Centre for Sustainable Family Enterprise, this unique exhibition entitled ‘The Faces of Family Business’ ran from 27th to 29th November on Ulster University Belfast campus.

Eleven family businesses submitted photographs and artefacts that they felt best represented their story, history and essence of what it means to be a family in business. Family business forms the backbone of our economy, but also the social fabric of our communities

and this exhibition sought to shine a light on the power of story through imagery.

These images and artefacts often have deep historical and cultural significance, representing the roots and traditions of the family business. They serve as tangible links to the past, connecting the present generation with their ancestors and the origins of the business. This connection to heritage can be a source of pride and inspiration for family and non-family members alike.

Dr. Ian Smyth from Ulster University Business School said, “We were delighted to be able to host this unique exhibition and bring together the family firms that took part. Imagery can be a powerful tool to link the past, present and future and in hosting this exhibition we wanted to showcase the best of what being a family business represents and the richness and diversity of the stories on show here – stories worth unlocking through imagery”.

We are grateful for the support of Belfast School of Art and Frances Smyth (designer) in curating this unique exhibition. Most importantly, we thank the family firms who have taken part.

Jack Peel joins Housing Association Board

Jack Peel has been appointed to the Board of Management at Grove Community Housing Association, serving on both the Finance and Governance Committees. Grove Community Housing is a local Housing Association that provides high-quality, affordable homes in North Belfast.

Jack is the Finance Director at Refresh Property Solutions. He previously worked in the Social Sector as part of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In 2016 he joined the Institute of Directors and was later awarded the Chartered Director certification in 2019. Most recently, he completed the Post Graduate Certificate in Zero Carbon Engineering at Queen’s University.

Talking about his appointment, Jack said: “I look forward to working alongside the Board and the team at Grove Housing as it continues to deliver essential homes and services to people and families within the local area.”



Arthur Cox appoints new managing partner of Northern Ireland practice

Law firm Arthur Cox has announced the appointment of Lynsey Mallon as the new managing partner of its Northern Ireland practice.

Ms Mallon's will take over as managing partner from Catriona Gibson next year, while also continuing in her role as head of the firm's corporate and commercial department.

She is among the top corporate lawyers in Northern Ireland and is a specialist in mergers and acquisitions, investments, and corporate reorganisation and restructuring.

Ms Mallon, who joined the firm in 2007, said: "It is a tremendous honour to be named as the next managing partner of one of the most respected law firms in this jurisdiction

"Under Catriona's leadership, Arthur Cox has maintained its reputation for providing pragmatic, nuanced and commercially minded advice.

"The firm is also known for its strong roster of clients that includes local businesses of all sizes alongside internationally-recognised brands and multinationals as we look after their interests in Northern Ireland.

"In the years ahead, I will seek to further cement that reputation, backed by our exceptional partner group comprising market-leading practitioners across a wide spectrum of legal specialisms."

Current managing partner Catriona Gibson will step down from the position and continue as head of litigation. Ms Gibson said: "Leading Arthur Cox has

been the greatest privilege of my professional career and it is a pleasure to pass on the mantle to an incredibly capable and dedicated lawyer.

"There is no doubt that Lynsey has been a key driver to the success of Arthur Cox over recent years, working on some of the highest-profile transactions involving Northern Ireland entities, and with some of the best-known organisations in the region.

"I look forward to continuing to work with Lynsey in her new role and know that her period in charge will be a tremendously successful one."

Arthur Cox advises clients in the private, public and third sectors on a full range of legal matters. As well as offices in Belfast the firm is also represented in Dublin, London, New York, and San Francisco.





Spotlight on events

**IoD NI & Investec Wealth
and Investment: Market &
Political Update Breakfast**

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IoD NI & Carson McDowell: Director Bootcamp

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**IoD NI & Queen's
University Belfast:
Fellow & CDir
Lunch ^ v >**





**IoD NI & NIE
Networks:
Celebration of
IoD's Professional
Development
Graduates**

^ v >



Jonathan Williamson CDir

My Journey to Chartered Director

I began my professional career over 20 years ago in autumn 2003. I joined one of the Big 4 accountancy firms to train as a Chartered Accountant. Having joined the firm with a Master's Degree in Accounting, I only had to pass the Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) Final Admissions Exam (FAE) before qualifying as a Chartered Accountant in 2006.

During the last 20 years I spent 10 years in Audit, 2 years in Consulting and 7 years in Operations and Managed Services, as well as spending some time working for the Northern Ireland Civil Service. During these years I attended numerous training courses and was also involved in education, being a FAE examiner for CAI for several years. However, I never completed any major professional development programmes.

Twenty years on from starting my training and career as a Chartered Accountant, I decided the time was right to push myself and undertake some more professional qualifications which would advance my career and provide me with the skills that I now need in my role.

I have been operating at an executive level for a number of years and have also been a Trustee in a local NI charity and so was drawn to the IoD's Chartered Director's Programme. In that programme, I saw the opportunity to gain skills relevant to my role, complete a professional qualification, and connect with other business leaders in Northern Ireland from across all sectors.

I had considered other avenues but I felt the Chartered Director's programme was the right programme for me at the right time and would equip me for Board Room decision making. Meeting Directors from various sectors during the courses has added to the richness of the experience and gave me insight into how other people and organisations approach similar situations.

Once I signed up to the Certificate Level, I was determined to pass the exams as quickly as possible. I started the Certificate courses in September 2022 and by January 2023 had passed all the exams and obtained the Certificate in Company Direction. I then achieved the Diploma in April 2023 before reaching the Chartered Director status in June 2023 – almost exactly 20 years after starting my professional career.

It was tough completing all three levels in less than a year – but it is doable! My advice for the certificate is to book the exam dates immediately and use those deadlines as a motivation to clear each hurdle. Once you have the Certificate, the Diploma exam really consolidates what you have already learned and adds the ability to apply that knowledge in a case study scenario. So, again, my advice is to complete the Diploma as close to the Certificate as possible whilst all the knowledge gained from the Certificate is fresh in your mind!



The Chartered Director qualification requires your demonstration of sufficient breadth and depth of experience at Board level. If you meet the criteria, then you should definitely apply for this and seek the qualification to accredit your experience and receive the recognition you deserve.

I'm very proud to be both a Chartered Accountant and Chartered Director and I believe I use both qualifications daily in my current role as Chief Operating Officer in NI for EY.



Start your journey to becoming an IoD chartered director

Stage 1 Certificate in Company Direction

Option 1



Role of the Director and the Board

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The Merchant Hotel, Belfast



Finance for Non-Finance Directors

15-17 October 2024
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast



Leadership for Directors

5-6 November 2024
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast



Strategy for Directors

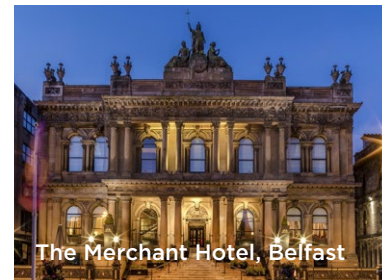
26-28 November 2024
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

Option 2

Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction

14-19 May 2024
Culloden Estate

- Role of the Director and the Board
- Finance for Non-Finance Directors
- Leadership for Directors
- Strategy for Directors



The Merchant Hotel, Belfast



Culloden Estate



Stage 2 Diploma in Company Direction

22-24 October 2024
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

Please contact
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