

# Director**NI**

August / September 2024

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## Our committee



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IoD Northern Ireland



Bonnie Anley CDir,  
Londonderry Port  
and Harbour



Barry Byrne,  
Mount Charles Group



Colin Coffey CDir, AgriFood  
& BioSciences, Invest NI and  
Natural World Products



Professor Gillian Armstrong  
MBE, Ulster University  
Business School



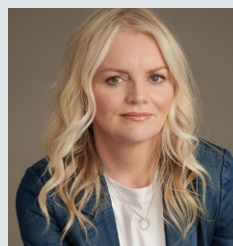
Kathryn Thomson,  
National  
Museums NI



Patrick Gallen,  
GallenTCF Limited



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CDir, Northern  
Ireland Civil Service



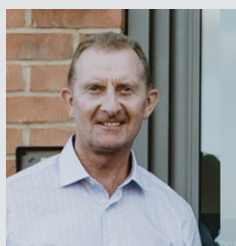
Nuala Murphy



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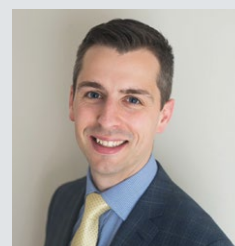
David Henry,  
Henry Brothers



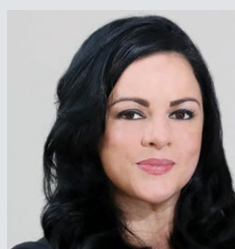
Aodhán Connolly, Director of  
European Division and Head of  
Office, NI Executive in Brussels



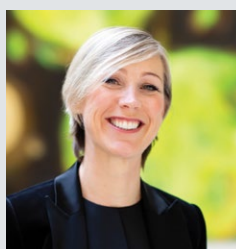
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David Smith,  
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Natasha Sayee,  
Belfast Harbour



Claudine Heron,  
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Philip Smyth,  
Danske Bank UK



Emer Hinchey,  
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Jonathan  
Williamson CDir,  
EY Northern Ireland



# Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate

**IoD NI has collaborated with IoD Ireland on the Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate project, developed specifically for the engagement and participation of the Chartered Director communities of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the students of Creative Futures Academy.**

Through the Creative Ireland Initiative and the Shared Island Fund, Chartered Directors have been identified as having significant potential to bring influence to bear in boardrooms across Ireland and to assist with the challenge presented to us by the climate emergency.

The cutting-edge initiative brings Chartered Directors together with Creative Futures Academy (CFA) students. It enables them to work together to co-create dynamic solutions that can meaningfully address the complex environmental and social challenges that we currently face as a result of climate change.

The fifth Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate co-design session took place on Tuesday 25 June at the Invest NI offices in Belfast. Drawing on the knowledge and skills gained over the past few

months, participants addressed the topic of 'Bringing Climate Change to the Boardroom: the barriers and roadblocks to change'. The Chartered Directors were asked to consider these barriers within the boardroom and discuss the latest relevant national and international research.

**“ What are the biggest barriers to change in my boardroom and how can I work to overcome them? ”**

After being welcomed by John Healy (Chair of Invest NI), Sheila Byrne (Director Development & Training Manager at Institute of Directors in Ireland) gave the group an overview on the state of play of Directors and Boards, both at home and abroad.

The intention of this session was to get the participants to reflect on their individual and collective role(s) in driving climate action considering the question: “What are the biggest barriers to change in my boardroom and how can I work to overcome them?”

Directors further considered how to develop a set of collectively generated guiding principles on 'how to change the climate in the boardroom'. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences and perspective and to consider the key barriers and roadblocks on how they might tackle these barriers at boardroom level through active listening exercises and group discussions. After these sessions, they were offered to chance to re-frame these 'barriers' as 'opportunities'.

Caroline Spillane (Chief Executive Officer, IoD Ireland) and Kirsty McManus (National Director, Institute of Directors in Northern Ireland) were present to hear the deliberations of the participating Chartered Directors before the closing out of this final in-person session of the project.

The Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate project will now move into a phase of reflection and analysis on the key outcomes of the work across the five formal workshops. Supported by the Creative Boardroom team, the director group will remain actively involved in giving expression to those outcomes and the project will conclude with an exhibition in NCAD in November 2024. Details of the exhibition to be announced soon.



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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.

To advertise in Director NI magazine and to find out more about advertorials, sponsored features and other commercial opportunities, please email [aoife.mccreesh@iod.com](mailto:aoife.mccreesh@iod.com)



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# National Museums NI & Hydebank Partnership

**N**ational Museums NI (NMNI) is a group of four museums and serves as custodians of over 1.4 million objects in Northern Ireland's national collection. It believes that museums play an important and valuable role at the heart of society by providing trusted spaces to explore who we are and where we have come from. They unite the past, present and future; enhance health and wellbeing; and make this place more attractive to live in, work and visit.

Over recent years, a key focus has been on developing partnerships to extend the reach and relevance of their work. Collaboration can help its museums access new audiences – in particular, those who would not traditionally visit. It also demonstrates the breadth of a national museum service and the wide-reaching impact collections can have.

In 2018 NMNI conducted a review of the motor car collection at the Ulster Transport Museum which contained 67 vehicles. Many were not on public display and had been

in storage since first acquired. Following a rigorous assessment of the significance of each vehicle, the disposal (the removal of an object from the museum's permanent collection) of a number of generic and duplicate vehicles was approved.

**“ It highlights the sustainable aspect of these vehicle disposals by finding new life through recycling rather than throwing away. ”**

They aim to dispose to other museums, but were unable to do so on this occasion. Hydebank Wood (an educational centre for young male offenders aged 17-24 and a women's prison) had previously expressed an interest in borrowing vehicles for their motor vehicle engineering course. Such loans had not been possible, but disposal offered a new opportunity. To date, three vehicles have been transferred – a 1972 Triumph Dolomite with the aim of restoring it to working

order, plus a 1972 VW Beetle and a 1978 Triumph Dolomite 1500, both of which were in poor condition but could be used for parts.

As a result, students have been able to receive real hands-on experience by being afforded the opportunity to fully restore one vehicle and strip the others. Utilising the parts led to exciting upcycling projects with seats, wall art, garden planters and even the creation of a beach buggy. This in turn allowed the students and teachers of other courses at Hydebank to become involved through the carpentry, gardening and metalwork needed to convert the vehicle parts. It highlights the sustainable aspect of these vehicle disposals by finding new life through recycling rather than throwing away.

Both organisations see great potential for this relationship to continue to develop with other cars being transferred for students to work on, enabling new skills and achieving new qualifications in the process. National Museums NI is delighted at the success of this partnership and the positive future for vehicles that had previously achieved no public impact during their time as museum specimens.

# IoD NI Skills & Workplace Forum launches **Action Report to address skills shortage**

**T**he Institute of Directors (IoD) NI Skills & Workplace Forum has developed an Action Report to address skills shortages and to ensure that Northern Ireland has the workforce it needs to grow the local economy both now and in the coming decades.

IoD members are frustrated by the weak and disjointed skills and education system that hampers plans for business growth. They feel that partnership between business and government is crucial to address this in a way that prepares young talent better for the world of work and brings more economically inactive people into the workforce.

The report was developed following a period of consultation with hundreds of leading NI employers, education and skills providers, the NI Civil Service, the voluntary and community sector and IoD NI's 800 members.

Supported by independent economic analysis from Grant Thornton,

MCS and SONI, the report sets out recommendations in five key areas:

- 1) Reducing economic inactivity
- 2) Greater engagement with schools and business
- 3) Fair and equitable access for all young people to academic, vocational and entrepreneurship routes
- 4) Making childcare work for everyone
- 5) Ringfencing the apprenticeship levy to address critical skills requirements

The Action Report launched in June at Inspire in Belfast city centre, with a series of industry speakers and a closing address by Economy Minister, Conor Murphy.

Among its many proposals, the report says that a 'Teachers in Industry Exchange Programme' should be piloted to give teachers the opportunity to gain insight into new industries and technologies, build relationships

with the business community and capture and embed skills.

It suggests that the number of business leaders serving on school boards should also increase and that businesses should be included in the development and implementation of the curriculum in relation to key digital and green skills.

Other recommendations include ensuring a sustainable and equitable funding solution for higher education to retain more of our talented young people. Approximately 5,000 currently leave Northern Ireland every year to avail of degrees elsewhere in the UK and this is expected to rise to 10,000 by 2030.

The report notes that if the £82m Northern Ireland firms (including public sector) pay in the levy towards apprenticeships and skills development, Northern Ireland would be able to create innovative and flexible employment opportunities for 14,000 young people not in employment.

It concludes that bringing more economically inactive people into the workforce is perhaps the most





fundamental tool at Northern Ireland's disposal to bridge the skills gap and that more must be done to make sure this happens.

Commenting, Kirsty McManus, the IoD's National Director for Northern Ireland said: "Businesses in Northern Ireland face very significant recruitment and skills challenges and this negatively affects economic growth by constraining productivity and innovation and impacting on competitiveness. Northern Ireland's rate of economic inactivity also continues to be too high, which has a wide range of negative societal impacts. Addressing all of this is crucial to support economic growth in the interests of everyone, but doing so is complex and requires a multi-sectoral response."

"Our report is intended to be a practically-focussed series of recommendations to realise our full economic potential. We want a needs-based skills agenda that works right across the business community, the voluntary and community sector and the social enterprise sector. It is about addressing challenges today and about preparing for the future world of work, ensuring that we have the skills we need to promote prosperity and flexibility to respond to future opportunities."

Commenting on the Forum's Action Plan, Economy Minister Conor Murphy said: "I welcome this Action Plan which places a clear emphasis on the need to take practical steps that can begin to make a real difference to the lives of people and the success of businesses.

"My economic plan for the North has skills at its core and I'm pleased to see that this report aligns with my plans and emphasises the need to take practical steps to move these forward. By ensuring we have significant and sustained investment in our skills landscape, we will grow our workforce and, importantly, increase the number of good jobs we have, right across this whole region.

**“IoD members are frustrated by the weak and disjointed skills and education system that hampers plans for business growth and say that partnership between business and government is crucial to address this in a way that prepares young talent better for the world of work and brings more economically inactive people into the workforce.”**



By collaborating with business to identify and invest in new and emerging skills, we will be empowered to tackle our stubbornly low productivity levels. And by supporting our further education colleges, our universities, and our business community to work together to explore the emerging opportunities of net zero, we will not only reduce our carbon emissions, but we will develop the skills for our future workforce.

"I firmly believe collaboration between government, business, and education is key to unlocking the potential of our economy. It is essential to the promotion of equality of opportunity, to delivering good jobs supporting quality of life, and to the continued growth of our economy."

To view the full report visit:  
[iod.com/m/skills-workforce-forum-report](http://iod.com/m/skills-workforce-forum-report)



Frank O'Connor - Director of Finance, SONI; Louise Smyth - Group Chief Commercial Officer, MCS Group; Minister Conor Murphy, Department of the Economy; Kirsty McManus - Nations Director for Northern Ireland & Director of PD Services; Andrew Webb - Chief Economist & Director, Grant Thornton; Patrick Gallen - Director, GallenTCF Limited



# Navigating the Green Road: Alternative Fuels in Transportation



Ciarán O'Neill,  
Director, Radius  
Vehicle Solutions

**In the dynamic transportation landscape, the quest for sustainability has spurred innovation and reshaped how we power our vehicles.**

As the largest fuel card network in Ireland and Northern Ireland, Radius | DCI is at the forefront of this transformation, championing solutions that balance environmental sustainability with practicality and efficiency. Our commitment to a greener future involves embracing electric and HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil) as key players in the transition towards sustainable transportation.

## Electrifying Urban Mobility

Electric is a compelling option for urban areas and smaller vehicles, offering zero-emission mobility and quieter operations. The shift to electric vehicles is accelerating, driven by government targets and consumer demand for cleaner transportation. Electric cars and light-duty vehicles, ideal for short-distance travel and urban delivery, are supported by advancements in battery technology and the expansion of our Radius Charge infrastructure, with over 1,400 charge points across the island.

We support the electrification of smaller vehicles and urban fleets with comprehensive solutions, including EV charging infrastructure, management software and fuel card services tailored for electric mobility.

Our DCI REV Card allows customers

to purchase electric and traditional fuels on a single card, offering flexibility for mixed fleets and those transitioning too electric. A fully electric option is also available, ensuring a smooth transition to electric vehicles and contributing to a cleaner urban environment.

## HVO: The Sustainable Solution for HGVs

For heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), HVO is a sustainable fuel alternative that decarbonises transportation while maintaining diesel-like reliability and efficiency. On the island of Ireland, where long-distance transportation is crucial, HVO allows fleet operators to reduce their carbon footprint without compromising performance. Its chemical similarity to diesel ensures seamless integration into existing infrastructure,



eliminating the need for costly engine modifications or upgrades.

HVO offers significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions compared to traditional diesel, aligning with Radius's sustainability goals. Our partnerships with fuel suppliers across Ireland and Northern Ireland have helped us expand HVO availability at selected HGV fuelling stations. Our DCI One card allows customers to purchase HVO like diesel at the pumps, making it easy for fleet operators to adopt renewable fuels without disrupting their operations using our DCI One card for all pumped fuel.

#### **A Multifaceted Approach to a Sustainable Future**

The future of transportation involves diverse technologies and fuels

tailored to different applications. HVO provides a sustainable solution for HGVs balancing environmental responsibility with operational efficiency. Electric vehicles offer a clean alternative for urban mobility

**“ As the largest fuel card network in Ireland and Northern Ireland, we are supporting our customers’ transition to more sustainable transportation. ”**

and smaller-scale logistics. Through innovation and collaboration, DCI and its partners are driving positive change, paving the way towards a greener, more sustainable future.

As the largest fuel card network in Ireland and Northern Ireland, we are supporting our customers’ transition to more sustainable transportation. Whether adopting HVO for heavy goods vehicles or promoting electric vehicles for urban mobility, DCI is ready to fuel the future of sustainable transportation with a range of innovative fuel card solutions for mixed, transitioning, and all-electric fleets.

Visit [www.radius.com/en-ie/](http://www.radius.com/en-ie/) to find out how Radius can help you navigate the green road.







Kirsty McManus, Seamus McGuckin Head of Corporate NI at AIB, Roisin Keenan, Head of Mortgages at AIB (NI)

# Lessons from the Post Office:

Shining a light on corporate governance success and failures in major new event

**T**he award-winning journalist who was at the forefront of reporting on the Post Office Horizon scandal is set to headline a major new event in Belfast this year.

Nick Wallis - who presented, produced, and consulted on three BBC Panorama programmes about the subject and was a consultant on ITV's drama Mr Bates vs The Post Office - will be the headline speaker at the IoD NI & AIB Director Governance & Leadership Summit 2024 on 9 October at the Merchant Hotel.

The half-day event will shine a light on corporate governance successes and failures, in particular lessons from the Post Office. It will also look at the impact of AI (artificial intelligence) on business strategy and discuss how small and medium-sized businesses can ensure they are able to understand and implement ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance).

Other speakers on the day will include Donna Wilson (Head of ESG Transformation and Reporting

at AIB, and representing the Institute of Directors will be Dr Roger Barker, Director of Policy and Corporate Governance.

The summit is a new initiative that seeks to bring senior business leaders together with thought leaders in the field of ESG, AI and corporate governance. It will also provide the opportunity for IoD and AIB to announce the winner of the IoD NI Chair's Award for Excellence in Director and Board Practice - an accolade that recognises the personal imprint of a high-profile leader on the culture and success of their organisation through the implementation of good governance. Previous winners include the late Brian Conlon of First Derivatives, Sir Michael Ryan of Bombardier and Dame Rotha Johnston.

Kirsty McManus, National Director, IoD Northern Ireland said: "Good corporate governance is the very foundation of any successful business, and we have seen in sharp focus through a range of high-profile examples how badly things can go wrong whenever governance is not done well. That's why we have

founded this new event. It will shine a light on good and bad examples of corporate governance and discuss some of the most pressing challenges business leaders face from a governance perspective including the opportunities and threats of AI. We will also outline some of the IoD's efforts to establish a Code of Conduct for Directors to promote high ethical standards in the profession."

Seamus McGuckin, Head of Corporate NI, at title sponsor AIB, said: "With such an esteemed panel of guests and insightful sessions planned, this conference promises to be an unmissable event for business owners and directors across Northern Ireland who take seriously their responsibilities around corporate governance.

"As always, we are excited to work with the team at the IoD NI to deliver the event and ensure it is a valuable conference for everyone who attends."

In addition to AIB, other associate sponsors of the event will include Tughans, Ulster University and the Irish News.



Panel Session: **ESG for SMEs**

*Donna Wilson, Head of ESG Transformation, AIB*



*Dr Roger Barker, Director of Policy and Corporate Governance, Institute of Directors*



*Lynn Carvill, Chief Executive, WOMEN'STEC*

Panel Session:  
**The impact of artificial intelligence on business strategy**

*Dr Amelia Kelly, Chief Technology Officer, SoapBox Labs*



*Kieran McCorry, National Technology Officer, Microsoft Ireland*

**“ The summit is a new initiative that seeks to bring senior business leaders together with thought leaders in the field of ESG, AI and corporate governance. ”**

## Keynote Speaker:



*Nick Wallis, award-winning journalist who covered Post Office Horizon Scandal*

## In Conversation with:



*Alan Armstrong, Chairman & CEO, Almac Group*



*John Campbell, Economics and Business Editor, BBC Northern Ireland*



**For more information or to purchase tickets visit [www.iod.com/ni](http://www.iod.com/ni)**

# Demystifying Degree Apprenticeships



Jill Crawford,  
Business Relationship  
Manager, Ulster  
University  
Business School

**I**nvesting in skills and people are top priorities for many Northern Ireland companies, with flexible learning pathways like Degree Apprenticeships playing an increasingly important role in attracting talent and enhancing workforce skills.

However, recent findings highlight a considerable gap between the interest in developing apprenticeships and the actual employment of apprentices among businesses in Northern Ireland. The NI Chamber's Quarterly Economic Survey (2023) reported 35% of businesses in the region expressed enthusiasm for developing apprenticeships, yet only 8% of businesses currently hire apprentices. This disparity raises the question, what factors are contributing to this gap, and how can Northern Ireland unlock the potential of Degree Apprenticeships?

Since their introduction in 2015, Degree Apprenticeships have proven to be a valuable, cost-effective route to develop and retain talent and address critical skills gaps. These work-based training programmes provide a viable alternative to traditional higher-level education by blending practical hands-on experience with theory. This approach enables apprentices to develop skills and knowledge directly relevant to industry needs while helping companies nurture future skills pipelines.

Although there is a broad awareness of Degree Apprenticeships, many businesses, particularly SMEs, still have limited knowledge about the range of programmes available and funding options, leading to several common questions about their structure and suitability.

**“ Since their introduction in 2015, Degree Apprenticeships have proven to be a valuable, cost-effective route to develop and retain talent and address critical skills gaps. ”**

## What are Degree Apprenticeships?

A Degree Apprenticeship, also known as a Higher Level Apprenticeship, is a job which combines academic learning with practical work experience, enabling participants to earn a Bachelors or Masters degree while in paid employment. These innovative programmes allow organisations from all types of sectors to develop a workforce with the precise competencies they require, enhancing productivity and innovation.

At the heart of Degree Apprenticeships lies a three-way partnership between employers, the apprentice, and the education

provider. The aim of the partnership is to ensure new knowledge, skills and behaviours are tailored to the specific needs of the business, while ensuring that the apprentice's education is directly relevant to industry. Typically, Degree Apprenticeships are seen as a solution to attract new emerging talent or to upskill existing staff, regardless of their age or experience.

## Time and cost commitment

A common question raised by companies is the time commitment and associated costs of Degree Apprenticeships. Depending on the level of the apprenticeship and the chosen field of study, Higher Level Apprenticeships typically span four years. During this period, apprentices split their time between the workplace and formal education, spending approximately 20% of their time studying and 80% working “on-the-job”. This blend ensures that apprentices acquire a comprehensive skill set that integrates academic learning with practical expertise.

Unlike traditional recruitment processes, which can be expensive because of recruitment and training costs, Degree Apprenticeships can offer a more cost-effective solution for skills development. Funding for the training element of the apprenticeship is either fully or partly funded by the Department for the Economy (DfE), with the employer required to pay the apprentice a salary/wage.

## Retention and career progression

Degree Apprenticeships serve as more than just a means to gain

immediate skills; they strategically contribute to the long-term retention and development of your workforce. Research by ISE (2023) reveals that apprentices tend to stay with their employers for extended durations compared to other graduates. And 74% of apprentices are likely to be retained five years after joining, compared to only 59% of traditional graduates. The structured framework of apprenticeships, combined with customised skill development, boosts job satisfaction and facilitates career advancement, which are crucial factors in retaining employees. This presents an excellent opportunity to invest in both an individual's career and the future of your company.

### Creating staff buy-in

Apprentices thrive in environments where they are integrated into the company's culture and values. When hiring an apprentice, implementing mentoring opportunities and buddy programmes can significantly enhance buy-in from staff. Pairing apprentices with experienced mentors helps them navigate challenges and create a culture of support where apprentices are more likely to feel valued.

### Recruiting an apprentice

Recruiting an apprentice is really like recruiting any other employee: by advertising the job opportunity in the usual way. Once you have identified an apprentice and they have agreed to take part in an apprenticeship programme, simply contact Ulster University, Northern Ireland's leading apprentice provider, to deliver the training. An alternative route is to look within your own team. Existing employees are eligible for Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes if their new role requires substantial training and development and they have not been in post for more than six months from the start of the training.

With programmes available in Accounting, Business Technology, Computer Science, Finance, FinTech, Leading on Customer Operations, Quantity Surveying and more, Ulster University is the leading provider of Degree Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. Our successful apprenticeships are built through strong partnerships with employers and partners, including Deloitte, PwC, Danske Bank and Kainos.

Businesses stand to gain significantly from investing in apprenticeships, not only through enhanced productivity, but also by building a pipeline of

skilled workers tailored to their exact needs. Our employee partner, Caroline van der Feltz, HR Director at Danske Bank, highlighted the positive impact apprenticeships have on their business:

"Through our apprenticeship programmes, we've been able to bring new skills and fresh ideas into the bank while supporting the learning and development of our colleagues. The Danske Futures scheme is a great opportunity for ambitious school leavers to kickstart a career, and it's also a fantastic opportunity for those who are looking for a career change to retrain and reskill, all while studying for a fully funded degree."

With adequate support, collaboration and increased awareness, there is a real opportunity to grow the apprenticeship system in Northern Ireland and facilitate access to more highly skilled jobs.

*If you would like to find out how an apprenticeship could help fill knowledge gaps, solve a business challenge, or support your business retention strategies, get in touch with our Business Engagement Team at [engage@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:engage@ulster.ac.uk)*







# Our members

**A**s 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](mailto:chelsea.brennan@iod.com)

## MEMBER PROFILE

### Andrew Bruce Expleo

Andrew Bruce is Expleo's Director of Software Solutions Delivery for the island of Ireland.

Aged 13, he taught himself to programme computers from home computer magazines and has been fascinated with technology ever since. Andrew started his career over 30 years ago with Nortel, engineering the data transmission software that enabled the dotcom revolution. He went on to take on leadership roles for a Silicon Valley start-up at Insure-tech in the public sector and now engages with Expleo's prodigious client base to ensure they get the software solutions their business needs.



Andrew admits that the only career he would have preferred would to be in a rock band, but the buzz he gets from seeing technology solving real world problems more than compensates.

**MEMBER PROFILE****Gareth Hanna****G1 Search**

Gareth Hanna is the owner and CEO of recently launched G1 Search – a strategic search and talent advisory firm. G1 Search was launched with the mission of supporting clients to gain a competitive advantage by attracting and retaining top talent within their organisations.

With nearly a decade of experience in the recruitment industry spanning across the UK and Ireland, Gareth has developed successful partnerships with a diverse range

of clients. From global corporations to local SMEs, from government bodies to leading charities, Gareth's expertise has allowed clients to attract and appoint strategic leaders to executive teams, boards, and vital management positions through the use of executive search and professional search.

Throughout his career, one constant reality has remained true: people and culture are the cornerstones of successful businesses. When the right individuals work within a supportive culture and are driven by a shared mission, transformative growth occurs, leaving a positive mark on their industry and the world in the process.

**MEMBER PROFILE****James Eyre****Titanic Quarter**

James Eyre BSc (Hons) first joined the Titanic Quarter team in August 2006 and has had held a number of management and leadership roles within the organisation before being appointed as Chief Executive in January 2024.

James has led numerous developments including construction, occupation, retention and disposal projects across multiple sectors, notably residential, commercial,

leisure, hospitality and education. He has intimate knowledge of the technical, commercial, planning and financial processes associated with major brownfield regeneration, as undertaken at Titanic Quarter. During this period, James has worked with a range of local operators and multinational occupiers including Citi, Amazon, Belfast Met, HBO and PRONI.

He has an experienced team at Titanic Quarter to support him with all aspects of project development, the management of the estate and management of a significant portfolio of commercial and residential investment properties.

**MEMBER PROFILE****Max McDermott****Nihon Cyber Defence**

Max McDermott holds a BSc (Hons) in Cyber Security from University of Warwick and is currently the Lead Cyber Security Consultant at Nihon Cyber Defence (NCD) – a global cyber security company headquartered in Japan. He leads a team of consultants to provide an extensive network of clients with top-class cyber security services and solutions across a number of industries.

Max has experience working with a range of organisations through

the journey of cyber security. His expertise transcends many cyber domains, from performing maturity assessments to incident management. He's passionate about enhancing his clients' cyber security preparedness, resilience and posture through structured, comprehensive and transparent delivery. He has a deep understanding of cyber security good practice, developed over years of client engagements.

Prior to working at NCD, Max started his career with the Big 4 as a cyber security analyst, working with clients from industries such as financial services, renewable energy, manufacturing, technology and public services.



## MEMBER PROFILE

**Michael Hewitt****Corvus People**

A proud Yorkshireman, Michael Hewitt made Northern Ireland his home in 2014, settling in Holywood, where he lives with his wife and two young children.

Michael brings over a decade of expertise to his role as Director at Corvus People, where he leads their Executive Search division with a focus on fostering growth in businesses with turnovers typically ranging from £10 million to over

£1.5 billion. Michael maintains key relationships with director, C-level and non-executive directors along with a high potential talent network.

Michael facilitates strategic alignments between individuals and organisations, driving mutual success in the UK and Ireland. He specialises in identifying, engaging, and evaluating exceptional individuals, ensuring optimal matches between candidates and organisations for maximum impact.

Employing a unique methodology, Michael comprehensively assesses candidates based on array of factors including intelligence quotient (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ),



track record, and behavioural alignment. This ensures enduring partnerships between talent and high-growth businesses.

## MEMBER PROFILE

**Sir David Sterling KCB****Board Chair and Retired Head of NICS**

David spent his career in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). He was a Permanent Secretary in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Finance between October 2009 and June 2017 when he was promoted to Head of the NICS, a role from which he retired on 31 August 2020.

The devolved institutions were in suspension from the time of his appointment until early January 2020. His main challenges during this time were maintaining public services in the absence of ministers, preparing for Brexit, facilitating the resumption of the Executive in January 2020 and dealing with the first wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

He is currently the Chair of NIE Networks, the Northern Ireland Screen Commission and the Chief Executives' Forum in Northern Ireland. He is an Associate with EY, a non-executive director of the Irish



Times Trust, Vice Chair of Ulster Wildlife and a Board member of the Centre for Cross Border Studies and Women in Business NI.

## MEMBER PROFILE

**Barbara Gray LVO QPM****Former Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)**

Barbara recently retired from policing in 2024 after 35 years of dedicated service. As Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police Service she is proud to be the first woman from Northern Ireland to achieve chief constable equivalent rank.

Her extensive and diverse experience includes leading the Met's radical response to counter corruption, professionalism and ethics and leading the Queen's Platinum Jubilee policing operation.

Prior to joining the Met in 2021, Barbara served in the RUC and PSNI. It was here that her strategic and operational leadership skills developed during some extremely difficult and challenging periods of history. She served across Northern Ireland and rose through the ranks to hold critical command roles, (often as the first woman to do so), including Assistant Chief Constable Crime Operations.

She is a people person; her proudest moments remain centred on those colleagues, and community members, who continually strive to safeguard and protect others.

Barbara is an advocate for continued professional development; she has three Masters degrees, Certificate in Company Direction and is a Fellow of the Forward Institute. She has been a member of the Executive



Board of two of the largest UK police services and is now very much looking forward to new challenges!



# → IoD NI member benefits

## Events programme:

We continue to run a hybrid programme of virtual and face to face events.

More info on our programme can be found at [www.iod.com/events/](http://www.iod.com/events/)

## Ongoing consultation with Government:

We work closely with Government to share the views of our members and encourage necessary support for the economy.

Guided by evidence submitted by the IoD community, measures including tax breaks, grants, wage support and insolvency protection have been introduced.

## Non-executive roles:

Did you know that IoD membership gives you access to the latest non-executive director-level jobs from publicly listed, investor-backed, private and family companies, start-ups and charities?

In association with Nurole we're helping IoD members to find their next board-level role or their next board-level hire.

## DirectorNI magazine:

Interested in sharing member news or providing a thought leadership article for our local directorNI magazine? Please email [chelsea.brennan@iod.com](mailto:chelsea.brennan@iod.com)

## LinkedIn group:

Please join the members only LinkedIn group. Contact [aoife.mccreesh@iod.com](mailto:aoife.mccreesh@iod.com) for more details.

## Pall Mall and IoD premises:

Our iconic building at 116 Pall Mall is open to members and has a wide range of options for client meetings, entertaining and co-working.

We also have local member hubs for use by members including Ulster Museum and Mallusk Enterprise Park.

## Professional Development:

We have a varied suite of training programmes, designed and delivered by directors to support our members in becoming highly skilled and informed directors.

There is a recognised pathway to help you achieve Chartered Director status. Alternatively you can attend individual modules that are most relevant to your director development requirements.

Get in touch with [heather.white@iod.com](mailto:heather.white@iod.com) for more information.



**The diploma provided me with the opportunity to build new networks, think through business cases and work through complex situations as a simulated board and the opportunity to learn from each other. Believe it or not, the end of course exam was also fun.**

## Aisling Press

Managing Director of Personal Banking,  
Danske Bank UK

Contact [heather.white@iod.com](mailto:heather.white@iod.com) to book onto the upcoming diploma course in October 2024



# Understanding cybersecurity



Keith Lippett,  
Vice President,  
Deputy Information  
Security Officer,  
Allstate

**Just opening the topic of cybersecurity for a small business can be a daunting task.**

A business leader or owner can see cybersecurity as a VAT on their business. An erosion of profit without a clear way to quantify the benefit. I get it. And indeed this is the challenge for Chief Risk Officers, Boards, and C-level executives as well as IT and Cybersecurity leaders. How much protection is enough?

A very clever leader I had once said to me, "Rigour is the skeleton of an organisation. Too much and you can't move. Too little and you collapse". If there's anything you take away from this article, I hope it's that. The amount of cybersecurity risk you take should be guided by the size and complexity of your organisation. This is what we call Risk Quantification.

To gain a good understanding of your businesses risk, it's really a small number of steps. Consider the following and ask yourself these questions:

**Identify Assets:** Do I understand what assets my business needs to protect, including hardware, software, data and intellectual property?

**Threat Assessment:** What are the potential threats to my assets such as malware, phishing attacks, insider threats etc? Consider both external and internal threats.

**Vulnerability Assessment:** Can I assess the vulnerabilities that exist within our systems and processes that could be exploited by threats? This includes software vulnerabilities, misconfigurations, weak passwords etc.

**Likelihood Assessment:** Am I able to evaluate the likelihood

of each threat exploiting a vulnerability and causing harm to our assets? Consider factors such as historical data, industry trends, regulatory and the effectiveness of current security controls.

**Impact Assessment:** What would be the potential impact on our business if a threat successfully exploits a vulnerability? This includes financial losses, reputational damage, operational disruptions, regulatory fines etc.

**“ Cyber controls are the skeleton of an organisation. Too much and you can't move. Too little and you collapse. ”**

**Risk Calculation:** Can I calculate the risk? This could be as simple as 'probability score / impact score'. This will help prioritise which risks pose the greatest threat. Take a business approach to this. Protect the things that mean the most to your business.

**Risk Mitigation:** Are there steps I can take? Some of these will be simple and easy. Can I limit the number of people who can access this critical system? Can I make it only accessible from inside my network? Develop and implement strategies to mitigate the highest priority risks identified in the risk assessment. This may include implementing security controls, training employees, updating software etc.

**Monitoring and Review:** I wish I would tell you this is a 'once and done' effort, but vulnerabilities come out every day and attacks change as well. Monitor your systems and processes for new threats and vulnerabilities and



regularly review and update your risk assessment to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

**Continuous Improvement:** Continuously improve your cybersecurity posture based on lessons learned from incidents. Taking the time to make back-up copies is a great personal insurance policy. And those software updates that come out from time to time are a key defence.

Like a car breaking down, all of us should have a plan for a cybersecurity incident. That plan should be equal to the complexity and scale of your business. Like a fire drill, practice helps. Get some advice from experts if you can. And remember those overarching principles.

*Keith A Lippert has been a C level leader in antiterrorism, fraud and cybersecurity for Fortune 100 insurance companies and some of the world's largest investment banks. He is on the Board of Women in Business NI, and contributed to the US Cybersecurity Strategy framework, as well as the Republic of Ireland Cybersecurity Industry strategy. He is currently Vice President, Deputy Information Security Officer, Allstate.*

*Keith is also a member of the Steering Committee for NI Cyber, Northern Ireland's recognised Cyber Security Cluster.*

# IoD Academy

## Professional Development 2024

### Role of the Non-Executive Director

**This one-day course is designed to arm you with practical strategies to build your network, secure an appointment and add value in the boardroom.**

**Gain practical advice from experienced non-executive directors and understand the critical requirements of the role across multiple sectors, including private companies and third-sector organisations.**

**This course will give you the knowledge and skills to:**

- identify the attributes of an effective non-executive director
- understand the legal and practical responsibilities of the role
- define how a non-executive director can help create an effective board
- develop strategies to deal with a range of boardroom challenges
- prepare a robust application for a non-executive director position

The role of the Non-Executive Director course is available to complete in-person in Northern Ireland on the 25 October in the Merchant Hotel Belfast.

Please contact [heather.white@iod.com](mailto:heather.white@iod.com) if you are interested in hearing more.



“

I've been on boards in other geographies and across sectors but, on moving home to Northern Ireland, I felt it was important to learn about the roles and responsibilities of the Non-Executive Director (NED) in this jurisdiction.

The IoD course made the legalities of the NED role very accessible, and the day was packed with useful frameworks and models to make me an even more impactful NED and board member.

The icing on the cake was the guest speaker session where we learned from board placement experts on how best to secure NED opportunities. Overall, it was an excellent programme; relevant, content rich, and engagingly delivered.

”

**Tessa Breslin,**  
**Director, Breslin Consulting**





# New UK Government: Unlocking Fresh Opportunities for NI Businesses



Gráinne Walsh,  
Director,  
Stratagem

**F**ollowing the election of the new UK government, Stratagem's Director Gráinne Walsh reflects on Northern Ireland and the new Labour Government.

With Labour's landslide election victory, it's all change at Westminster. While not unexpected, the scale of the party's majority is remarkable. The question now is how they use their mandate to deliver change, filling in the legislative details with the 37 bills in the King's speech.

While still of course only very early days, the signs and mood music so far look good for relations with Northern Ireland.

In its election manifesto, Labour committed to resetting the UK government's relationship with the devolved governments as well as to working with the "Executive and Assembly to improve public services and generate economic growth."

**“ Northern Ireland's circumstances are often unique and our experiences different to the rest of the UK. This must be reflected in policy being made in London. ”**

On only his fourth day in office, Keir Starmer travelled to Northern Ireland with new Secretary of State Hilary Benn. The Prime Minister met with the First and deputy First Ministers, as well as representatives of the five main parties. He said that there would be an "immediate reset" of the relationship, and an end to the instability in relations.

Indeed, the responses from all the local parties suggest that this reset has the potential to be more than just a soundbite.

Given the challenges for politics locally over the past few years as well as the strain more widely in British-Irish relations, the commitment by Starmer and Taoiseach Simon Harris

to work on a closer relationship between the UK and Ireland immediately is very welcome.

On the policy front, there are also promising signs for business. Over the last number of years, Labour has engaged extensively with business, building relationships, instilling confidence and priming investors.

A number of Labour's five pledges for office – including economic growth, clean energy and apprenticeships – align with the ambitions shared by the IoD. The IoD's Manifesto for Business provided a policy road map for the new government, included a combination of local and UK wide recommendations including the reform of the apprenticeship levy so businesses in Northern Ireland can directly access levy funding to attract and upskill their workforce as well as reform of the Companies Act to reflect the key role that directors play in modern society.

However, the shift from opposition to government, and the challenges of delivering for a party with its eyes on Scotland, Wales as well as the north of England means that there will be many competing demands on the time of the front bench.





## Marketing your brand and products to IoD members

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

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

To advertise in Director NI magazine and to find out more about advertorials, sponsored features and other commercial opportunities, please email [aoife.mccreesh@iod.com](mailto:aoife.mccreesh@iod.com)



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How active a role, especially now that the devolved institutions are back up and running, will the Secretary of State play? Given Keir Starmer's previous role with the policing board, will he take a greater interest than some of his predecessors?

From the off however we are presented with new and exciting opportunities for engagement, and this opportunity from the very outset to build relationships with key policy makers and influencers.

It also means realising the importance of Westminster when it comes to decisions that affect this place including trade, climate and the Fiscal Framework. It is about understanding how what happens in Westminster sets the tone and strategic direction for cross cutting agendas including life sciences and clean energy.

This means selling what Northern Ireland has to offer, focusing on the potential of this place, rather than on the problems.

Northern Ireland is a world leader in a range of innovative industries. This makes it an exciting place to do business, with access to the UK and EU markets. And key to securing the opportunities that accompany

this is the ability to set out our stall in a way that will generate growth.

Northern Ireland's circumstances are often unique and our experiences different to the rest of the UK. This must be reflected in policy being made in London. Local business and industry have an important role, and indeed responsibility, to play in sharing their expertise and insights as well as ambitions for the region more widely.

Key to all of this will be strong and impactful working relationships with officials and elected representatives, something that the IoD NI team locally continues to prioritise.

This is something which we see every day in our work at Stratagem – the importance of having those relationships, knowing the right people and the right time to engage with them.

The coming weeks and months present an exciting opportunity for businesses in Northern Ireland to engage with the new UK Government, focusing on our exceptionality as something that makes us an exciting prospect for investment.

# The Prince's Trust's multi-agency approach to Empowering NI's youth



Prince's Trust



Nathan McAuley,  
Head of Service  
Delivery, Prince's  
Trust Northern  
Ireland

**If you reflect on the journey leading up to your very first paid job, you might recall the invaluable support you received from those around you - a teacher, friend, family member, or mentor.**

Perhaps they helped you create your first CV or coached you for your first job interview. But for many young people, such support may have been lacking, making that initial leap into employment a daunting challenge.

You may recognise the significant impact your first job had on your skills development and personal growth. Did it bolster your confidence, enhance your communication skills, or elevate your self-esteem?

Each year, The Prince's Trust provides essential support to over 10,000 young people aged 16-30 in Northern Ireland across the themes of Education, Employment and Enterprise. Some of our hardest to reach young people face a range of barriers - from a lack of basic skills and entry-level qualifications, to mental health issues, financial obstacles or rural isolation. Many young people also having caring responsibilities or are living with a disability or long-term illness.

The Prince's Trust adopts a comprehensive approach, offering a tailored 'package of support' for every young person. For some young people that 'intervention' could be short-term, for example, a financial grant to access education. For others, the support could be longer term, involving multiple stakeholders. Progressing young people facing such multifaceted barriers is not merely about connecting them with job vacancies, but about providing holistic support that addresses their diverse needs and circumstances.

At the Prince's Trust, we recognise that no single organisation can address the complex needs of young people alone. Therefore, we actively work with a wide range of





partners, including government, schools, colleges, community organisations and businesses (eg Microsoft and Marks & Spencer), to coordinate our support services to benefit young people's lives. We leverage our collective expertise and resources to provide comprehensive support tailored to the unique needs of each young person.

Getting the support package right might include specialised counselling from partner organisations, one-on-one engagement with Prince's Trust staff, engagement with a local college to secure a qualification, mentorship from a volunteer and support from an employer partner to secure employment. By working together to address the underlying factors that may hinder progress, we can empower young people to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals, both in the workplace and beyond.

**“ Could you lend your support to our vital work at The Prince's Trust? Together we can make a tangible difference in the lives of tomorrow's leaders and entrepreneurs. ”**

For our young people today, we need to recognise the reality of an ever-changing employment landscape. Once buoyant industries are in decline, while other sectors have seen resurgence and growth.

The integration of AI brings both opportunity and uncertainty to multiple sectors. Hybrid working has become commonplace in many workplaces and presents new challenges for employers. Economic uncertainty creates an unstable environment for entrepreneurship.

Are we equipping the young people of today for the opportunities of tomorrow?

Could you lend your support to our vital work at The Prince's Trust? Together we can make a tangible difference in the lives of tomorrow's leaders and entrepreneurs.

*For more information get in touch with Nathan on [nathan.mcauley@princes-trust.org.uk](mailto:nathan.mcauley@princes-trust.org.uk)*

# IOD Better Directors. Better Results.

**“** The Chartered Director Programme combines professional development with access to a network and the assurance of a recognised qualification.

It has been one of the best learning experiences I have been through, and I was able to progress at my own pace. I was also part of a cohort of talented individuals which allowed me to tap into a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. **”**

*Noyona Chundur CDir  
Chief Executive,  
Consumer Council  
for Northern Ireland*



**#wheredirectorsaremade**

# Accommodations vs Accessibility:

Building truly inclusive workplaces from day one



Paul Gillen, IoD Ambassador for DE&I, Cathy Donnelly, Chief People Officer and Martin McKay, CEO at Texthelp.

**In today's evolving workforce, organisations have a unique opportunity to harness the potential of an untapped talent pool.**

Neurodivergent individuals currently make up 15-20% of the global population - a number which could rise to 50% by 2050. This includes individuals with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia and more.

In this article Paul Gillen, IoD Ambassador for DE&I gathers insight on neurodiversity inclusion from Cathy Donnelly, Chief People Officer and Martin McKay, CEO at Texthelp.

Cathy brings over 25 years of experience in human resources and is passionate about creating cultures where everyone can bring their whole selves to work. Martin, our CEO and Founder, has been a dedicated ally for neurodiversity inclusion and was diagnosed with dyslexia just last year.

Texthelp is a global leader in inclusive technology, with a wide range of tools that have positively impacted the lives of over 250 million people. This includes our literacy flagship product Read&Write for Work, which empowers neurodivergent employees to work to their unique strengths.

**Why is neurodiversity inclusion important and how can this bring a competitive advantage to the workplace?**

**Cathy:** "Texthelp spoke to 500 neurodivergent people about their experiences at work and found that 61% have experienced stigma in the workplace. When asked why they don't disclose being neurodivergent, 44% felt it would negatively impact their career, 42% were concerned that their managers and colleagues would view them differently, 19% didn't know how to raise it with their manager and 19% have had a previous negative experience when they did disclose it. I think those statistics are particularly shocking. We have a duty as employers to make our workplaces inclusive and make sure that people can bring their full selves to work and be the best version of themselves that they possibly can be.

"Research from Accenture has shown that companies that champion neurodiversity and disability inclusion benefit from 28% increased revenue, 30% better profit and double net income. Studies from Cloverpop also show that inclusive teams make better decisions 87% of the time."

**Martin:** "It always struck me as odd that I struggled with certain tasks. Now I understand it's due to my spiky cognitive profile. I excel in numbers, data, visualisations, verbal reasoning and I believe I'm good at communicating with people and explaining things in simple terms. Additionally, I often offer a different perspective because of my unique way of thinking, which is beneficial for our business decision-making process.

"The unemployment rate for autistic individuals is as high as 80%. For dyslexic individuals, it's 45%. However, these different thinkers could be people with the exact strengths your business needs to grow, innovate and address the widening skills gap. Neurodivergent

workers can hold unique abilities in hyper focus, adaptability, complex problem-solving, cognitive flexibility, pattern recognition - skills identified by the World Economic Forum as crucial for the future of work."

**How are accommodations evolving in the workplace and what can businesses do to move beyond the disclosure gap?**

**Cathy:** "Research shows that 76% of neurodivergent workers choose not to disclose their condition at work. If workplaces are set up to only provide inclusive solutions to those who request or submit a diagnosis, this can result in many individuals struggling in silence. The truly inclusive approach is providing neuroinclusive support and solutions to all staff from day one. That is what many of our customers are doing with Read&Write, such as Lumen, EY, KPMG, and more.

**“Neurodivergent individuals currently make up 15-20% of the global population - a number which could rise to 50% by 2050.”**

"Our dedicated DEI council implements mandatory neurodiversity training to all employees to raise awareness and challenge stigma. We recently held a training session around recruiting and managing people with autism and we've run several sessions for employees around disability inclusion and how to create an inclusive workplace."

**Martin:** “Instead of waiting until someone discloses a condition, workplaces can take a proactive approach. There are many ways to encourage disclosure - for example, we have dedicated Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) who can help create a culture of community and boost belonging. Once we make neuroinclusion support available to all, we are building trust from day one. Many employees can't obtain a diagnosis or know what to look for, but by raising awareness and making inclusive tools easily accessible, we are removing hidden barriers to success.

“There is often a hereditary link to some forms of neurodiversity, such as dyslexia. Many neurodivergent workers may also have a neurodivergent child, parent, or sibling. By offering Read&Write Free for Family companywide, employee families can use it free of charge. This not only helps you empower your employees but those who matter to them most and strengthens your CSR strategy.”

### How can companies be more neuroinclusive in their hiring and recruitment processes?

**Cathy:** “It's not only thinking about neurodivergent employees but thinking about it earlier in the process. To make it possible for people who are neurodivergent to apply? Firstly, When you land on our careers page, you're invited to download our Read&Write software, which makes it much easier to apply. We also encourage applicants to reach out if they need any support during the application or interview processes.

“Secondly, we've reviewed all our job descriptions to ensure that we don't exclude anyone through our choice of vocabulary and that we don't ask for unnecessary skills. Our new inclusive hiring statement ensures we maintain inclusivity in our hiring practices. For example, prioritising skills and experiences at the shortlist stage instead of subjective requirements ensures we're choosing the best candidate for the role and minimising bias.

“We're also working to support candidates throughout the recruitment process. To uphold our commitment to inclusion, we commissioned an external audit of our hiring practices to identify

areas for improvement. Some upcoming changes include offering a selection of adjustments at the application stage. This can help build trust by demonstrating our readiness to accommodate needs and providing options to assist.”

### So, what are Cathy's and Martin's top tips for inclusion?

- 1) Make the workplace suitable for everyone and broaden the definition of 'accessibility'. For example, refurbishing offices to include quiet spaces is important for those who struggle to focus in a hectic, noisy environment.
- 2) Actively listen to your employees. Survey them regularly, not to target solely people who are neurodivergent but to find out about real experiences and how you could do better.
- 3) Look beyond physical disabilities and think about things that may hinder people with invisible disabilities. Consider making inclusive technology products available to everyone so
- employees don't have to raise a hand and self-identify.
- 4) Talking and sharing lived experiences is helpful in normalising subjects that have traditionally been off limits. Create opportunities for people to share in a safe space. This approach creates psychological safety for others.
- 5) Think inclusion every day - make it part of business as usual. Think about making processes inclusive from the outset and don't wait until someone asks for an accommodation. When you make decisions, ask yourself if you're being inclusive. For example, instead of perceiving spelling errors as carelessness for candidates, consider that they may have dyslexia. It's important that we place our focus on the strengths and experience displayed, rather than minor details.

Visit [texthelp](http://texthelp.com) for more information:  
[www.texthelp.com](http://www.texthelp.com)







CHARTERED  
INSTITUTE  
OF EXPORT &  
INTERNATIONAL  
TRADE

# Digitalising trade

## to unlock Northern Ireland's economic growth potential



Paul Brooks, Head of UK Nations/Regions & UK Manufacturing Lead at the Chartered Institute of Export & International Trade

**N**orthern Ireland is at a pivotal point in its economic growth. It already has a major advantage in its dual-market access, being able to trade with both the EU and the rest of the UK.

When we combine this with the ongoing efforts to digitise international trade, we could see Northern Ireland become a powerhouse for imports and exports.

The digitalisation of trade is transforming the landscape of global commerce. It significantly enhances the scale, speed and accessibility of trade and expands the range of goods and services that can be exchanged cross-border. This evolution presents opportunities to unlock previously untapped potential and facilitates entry for smaller businesses into global trade. It contributes to economic growth by streamlining processes to improve the overall efficiency of the trading system. The ICC estimates the adoption of digital tools could boost trade across the G7 nations by \$9 billion by 2026.

The UK has experienced slow rates of economic growth in recent years, with the latest 2024 IMF statistics indicating a GDP growth of 0.6%, making it one of the weakest performers in the G7. The digitalisation of trade presents a valuable opportunity to change this. As a world leader in services

and innovation, the adoption of digital tools can enhance the UK's position and unlock the potential for further growth through digital cooperation. It is important that alongside the adoption of national digital initiatives, there is cooperation at the international level by all trading partners to ensure interoperability of digital trading systems.

**“ The UK has experienced slow rates of economic growth in recent years, with the latest 2024 IMF statistics indicating a GDP growth of 0.6%, making it one of the weakest performers in the G7. ”**

### Digital trade as an economic growth tool

In the fast-evolving landscape of global commerce, digital trade serves as a catalyst for economic expansion. Increased digital access has enabled the emergence of e-commerce, boosted digitally delivered services and digitally ordered goods and services, as well as improving supply chain resilience.

Trade through e-commerce platforms has grown exponentially in the last decade. In 2020 alone, digital trade accounted for approximately 25% of global trade according to the OECD. This has been fuelled by the reduction of costs for data sharing, internet connectivity and international

transactions, allowing more businesses to connect to customers abroad through innovative business models and types of delivery.

As of 2024, a significant amount of global trade transactions are still paper-based, making processes unnecessarily time-consuming, expensive and unsustainable. Singapore stands as a prime example of how digitalisation can empower nations in global trade. Its border clearance processes rank as the best in the world, led by top marks for efficiency, predictability and transparency. Singapore's success in leveraging new technologies to enhance its trade infrastructure has enabled it to streamline processes, reduce costs and improve efficiency in cross-border transactions. This has resulted in Singapore's digital economy accounting 17.3% of its GDP in 2022, 13% higher than 2017. Despite its small size, Singapore has emerged as a leader in global trade, partially due to its early adoption and integration of digital technologies in its trade processes.

### Digitalisation of trade can help create supply chain resilience

Recently, we have witnessed shocks to global supply chains, often as a result of heightened geopolitical tensions and the effects of climate change. This has significantly impacted the supply and movement of goods and emphasises the need for efficient, transparent and resilient supply chains.

Digitalising supply chains allows businesses to have a better understanding and control of their suppliers and processes, enabling them to become more resilient to external shocks. This can lower trade costs in various aspects of the export

journey at a time when the cost of doing business is high. Increasing the visibility of supply chains can also anticipate and prevent security risks and help businesses diversify their supply chains to increase resiliency against geopolitical and climate-related challenges.

There are significant initiatives currently taking place in the digital trade space. One example is the Transport Logistics Information Pipeline (TLIP), an infrastructure solution based on IOTA's distributed-ledger technology, which captures documentation and events for each consignment journey. The TLIP infrastructure is being deployed across Africa, the UK and EU and is an important demonstration of what paperless trade can do for these regions.

### Challenges of transitioning to paperless trade

Even as the benefits of digital trade are increasingly recognised, significant challenges prevent its growth, including lack of

interoperability between markets and restrictive trade measures.

Progress towards multilateral digital trade governance is being threatened as several countries adopt stricter measures to safeguard their technology industries. For example, some states are seeking to terminate the WTO E-commerce Moratorium, which grants businesses continued tariff-free access to digital trade. The potential for customs duties to be introduced on this trade, along with data localisation requirements and regulations affecting online payment services, conflicts with multilateral cooperation towards making digital trade easier and more accessible.

The different trade digitalisation approaches results in non-interoperable systems which can prevent the proper utilisation of established digital infrastructures. Despite national efforts to increase digital trade through initiatives such as the planned implementation of the UK Single Trade Window and the Electronic Trade Documents Act, the benefits can be nullified

without compatible systems with key trade partners.

In addition to national trade digitalisation, the UK should also endeavour to promote the necessary international cooperation in global digital trade. By establishing itself as a global leader in digital trade governance and by promoting interoperability with trade partners, the UK can unlock its economic growth potential from international trade.

In addition to working on national trade digitalisation, the UK should also work to promote Northern Ireland as a global leader in digital trade. If Westminster can help turn Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Lisburn into hubs for advancing digitalisation in international trade, both Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole, can unlock its economic growth potential through digital imports and exports.



# The Era of Fractional Executives

Expertise as a service - a new trend in leadership



Lydia McClelland,  
Director,  
LMC Associates

**A**fter the global pandemic, a new trend is emerging in the business world: Fractional Executives. This new concept in leadership is gaining attention for good reasons.

With businesses embracing flexibility through remote work, part-time engagements and freelance consultations, many visionary leaders are becoming Fractional Executives. However, there's still some confusion about what this role entails and how it operates.

## Understanding Fractional Executives

Fractional Executives are experienced professionals who offer their expertise to businesses on a part-time basis. They fill leadership gaps and bring in

external knowledge during critical times in a company's growth.

These executives are a mix between Advisors and Interim Executives, working within a company for a specific period. They are often former founders, operators, or executives.

Here's a closer look at these roles:

### Advisors

Advisors provide valuable advice but don't get involved in day-to-day operations. They share their knowledge, which is crucial for a company's success. Their level of

commitment varies: some meet with company leaders monthly, while others spend up to four hours a week advising. They typically work within the core leadership team without taking on actual tasks.

Advisors charge high hourly rates but often work just a few hours a month, sometimes opting for a mix of cash and equity as payment.

### Fractional Executives

Fractional Executives combine advice with hands-on work, usually dedicating 7-21 hours a week to manage teams and drive important outcomes. This role requires efficient leadership and management skills to fill strategic and operational gaps, often identified through collaboration with company leadership.

### Interim Executives

Interim Executives work full-time, usually more than 40 hours a week and have a broader scope of responsibilities compared to

“Fractional Executives are experienced professionals who offer their expertise to businesses on a part-time basis.”





Fractional Executives. They shape company culture, manage daily operations, and set strategic directions for their roles. Unlike traditional executives who commit long-term, Interim Executives work for a set period.

Their pay varies widely based on factors like location, industry, equity, and specific roles.

### Two models of Fractional Executives

There are two main models of Fractional Executives

#### Part-Time, Flexible Engagement:

This model involves part-time work without a set end date. It's suited for smaller to mid-sized organisations, offering cost-effectiveness and a chance to evaluate fit before committing to full-time.

#### Full-Time, Fixed Engagement:

This model involves full-time work for a specific period, usually six to nine months. Larger organisations often use this model to address complex processes quickly while searching for permanent hires.

### Benefits of Fractional Executives

There are numerous benefits of Fractional Executives:

**Cost efficiency:** Fractional Executives can deliver significant return on investment (ROI) by reducing the costs associated with relationship-building typical of traditional executive roles. They spend less time on internal communications, allowing them to focus on immediate challenges and deliver results.

**Niche expertise:** Fractional Executives bring specialised skills tailored to a company's current stage of growth, which is particularly valuable in the startup ecosystem where different phases require different skill sets.

**Mentorship:** Fractional Executives often mentor full-time team members, demonstrating strategies that advance the business and paving the way for internal talent to take on more responsibility.

**Avoiding bad hires:** Companies can test out leaders before hiring them full-time, reducing the risk of misfit hires. Fractional Executives

also provide relief for executives experiencing burnout, offering a chance to contribute without the demands of a full-time role.

Fractional Executives are becoming more accepted as businesses adapt to flexible work norms. They help companies overcome specific challenges and innovate quickly without the need for full-time commitments. This approach benefits both seasoned leaders and growing businesses, leading to more efficient operations and a stronger, more adaptable workforce.

Lydia McClelland is a Chartered Marketer and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing. She is a marketing and business mentor, trainer, consultant and fractional CMO at LMC Associates. She also works as a fractional CMO with VCMO.

VCMO helps SMEs and investor-backed portfolio companies with a £2 million or higher turnover that operate without a full-time Chief Marketing Officer. Our Fractional CMOs and tailored services transform marketing potential into a competitive advantage that delivers scalable and predictable growth, increased profits, and enhanced enterprise value.



# Member news

## The Lodge Hotel joins the McKeever Hotes Family

**The McKeever group has confirmed the acquisition of The Lodge Hotel in Coleraine. It becomes the sixth hotel in the family-owned hospitality company, which already owns the Dunadry and Dunsilly hotels in Co Antrim.**

The 56-bed three-star hotel at the Lodge Road Roundabout is one of the most popular events and conference venues on the north coast.

The change of ownership coincides with the retirement of Ivor Boyd and Norma Wilkinson, who successfully ran the venue for 30 years, along with their third partner, the late Brian Stockman who joined the business in 2003.

Eddie McKeever, managing director of the McKeever Hotel Group said: "We're so pleased



to welcome The Lodge to the McKeever family and regard this investment as great news, not just for staff and customers, but for the local community and the hospitality sector as a whole.

"The links between our hotels are many, not least the strong focus on quality service, professionalism, and customer care.

"This move is also strategic and totally aligned with our

wider growth plans which have been supported by our banking partners Richard Lusty and Andrew Tew from Ulster Bank. It also continues our long term relationship with Linus Murray from McKee's Solicitors who has looked after many of our acquisitions.

"We look forward to extending the McKeever welcome to the local team and guests in the months ahead."

## Radius Vehicle Solutions appoints all-island Head of Group Operations

**Radius Vehicle Solutions (RVS), the only all-island provider of car and van leasing services has appointed Natasha Ramsay as its new Head of Group Operations across both Northern Ireland and Republic**

**of Ireland, to drive the company on through the industry's biggest gear shift in history.**

Natasha is paving the way for women into senior roles. As a seasoned Operations Executive with over 24 years of experience within the Motor Industry, Natasha has proven success in driving Operations, Client Services and Customer Excellence and building and developing agile team across operational and sales functions. Natasha joins RVS with a Master's in Business Management, having previously held multiple senior and executive positions and



is adept in executing change management with a blend of practical skills and expertise.

Congratulations on your new role Natasha!

## Coffology Ireland - the coffee that cares

**Coffology, a venture of water coolers and boilers and provider AquAid Northern Ireland, announced its charity partnership with local health charity Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke (NICHs) back in August 2023. Funds raised through the partnership go towards supporting the up to 470,000 people living with a chest, heart or stroke condition in Northern Ireland.**

Coffology was created by a family team and provides a range of high-quality bean

to cup coffee machines for all business settings including retail, restaurants, takeaways and offices.

Daniel Rafferty, Coffology Director, explains; "Coffology was created from the ground up to support Northern Ireland businesses wherever possible. We use local coffee roasters, marketing agencies and printers for example."

"It was important to all of us to choose a local charity as a partner so Coffology can play its part in helping make a difference to communities throughout Northern Ireland."

"Through our partnership with NICHs, we hope to raise vital funds for the charity's work by making a donation for every coffee machine we sell or rent to



customers. We will also donate a percentage of our ingredients sales each month, so for every beverage sold that uses our coffee beans, chocolate or milk, money will go directly to NICHs – a donation with every cup!"

## The Irish News is 'Trading Up' in new podcast

**The Irish News announced it is expanding its media portfolio with a new business podcast, 'Trading Up'.**

Building on the success of the newspaper's business coverage, the podcast will offer a weekly discussion on major business stories, combined with deep-dive analysis and engagement with business leaders.

Trading Up is hosted by experienced broadcaster and journalist Jim Fitzpatrick, who is returning to his Irish News

home where he began his career on the business desk.

Speaking on the announcement, Jim, who is also taking up a new role as Consulting Editor at the Irish News, said: "Trading Up is all about delivering weekly business insight from the best. It's going to be a space for business leaders to share their secrets of success. It will be serious and quality content, but with a fun approach."

Each episode will include a swift analysis of the week's news with help from the Irish News business team Gary McDonald and Ryan McAleer; a detailed look at key economic numbers; a deep-dive into the life of a business leader; and an irreverent



look at what policy idea would change the world for the better.

Trading Up will be sponsored by EY, a key contributor to the economy in Northern Ireland.



**IoD NI wish to express their sincere condolences to the families of Andrew Dougal OBE and Carmel McKinney OBE.**

Both Carmel and Andrew contributed to Northern Ireland Business, Public and Voluntary sectors and were strong supporters of IoD throughout their years as members.

They will be sorely missed.





*Caroline Van Der Feltz, HR Director at Danske Bank UK, Patrick Gallen, Director at GallenTCF, Sarah Orange, Managing Director - Artemis Human Capital, Heather White, Nations Manager, IoD NI*

# Spotlight on events

**IoD NI & Artemis Human Capital:  
HR Dinner with Caroline van der  
Feltz, HR Director, Danske Bank UK**

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## **IoD NI & Queen's University Belfast: Lunch for Fellows & Chartered Directors**

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*Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive at National Museums NI, Eddie Friel, Director of Alumni Engagement and Philanthropy, Queen's University Belfast, Heather White, Nations Manager, IoD NI, Siofra Healy, Head of Individual and Corporate Philanthropy, Queen's University Belfast, Sophie Crumlin, QUB Student*







## IoD NI & Carson McDowell: Director Bootcamp

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Gerard Armstrong, Partner at Carson McDowell, Rosie Timoney, Senior Associate (Corporate) at Carson McDowell, Sharon O'Connor CDir, Non Executive Director and Consultant, Chris Gray CDir, Chief Executive at Gray's Marketing and Comms Specialist, Richard Gray, Partner at Carson McDowell LLP





*Jason Starbuck, Partner at Deloitte Ireland, Claire Carroll, Founder, Claire Carroll Consulting, Kirsty McManus, Nations Director for Northern Ireland & Director of PD Services, Peter Stafford Partner, A&L Goodbody*

## IoD NI, A&L Goodbody & Deloitte NED Forum: Ethical AI

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