



Membership  
magazine of the IoD  
in Northern Ireland

# IoD

# DirectorNI

August / September 2025

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## Our committee



John Hansen, Chair, IoD Northern Ireland



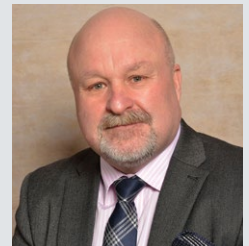
Tanya Anderson, Bank of Ireland



Professor Gillian Armstrong MBE, Ulster University Business School



Barry Byrne, Mount Charles Group



Colin Coffey CDir, Invest NI and Natural World Products



Aodhán Connolly, The Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels



Patrick Gallen, GallenTCF Limited



Claudine Heron, W&R Barnett



Emer Hinphey, AAB People



Richard Johnston CDir, Northern Ireland Civil Service



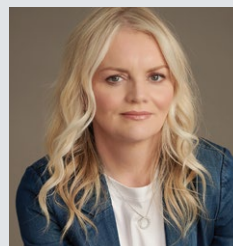
Joanne Mallon, Queen's University Belfast



Lorna McAdoo, Version 1



Cathy McClean, KPMG



Nuala Murphy, NOW Group & Global Advisor Lean In Foundation



Mark Osmer CDir, Translink & Intelligent Buyer Ltd



Natasha Sayee, Belfast Harbour



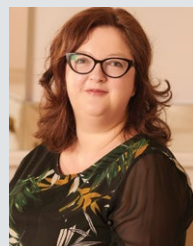
David Smith, Firmus Energy



Philip Smyth, Danske Bank UK



Kathryn Thomson CDir, National Museums NI



Gráinne Walsh, Stratagem NI



Jonathan Williamson CDir, EY Northern Ireland

# Channel 4 Chief to address Institute of Directors Annual Dinner



**The Institute of Directors in Northern Ireland has announced details of its Annual Dinner event which returns to the Culloden Estate and Spa on Thursday 25th September 2025.**

Sinéad Rocks, Managing Director, Nations & Regions at Channel 4, will deliver the keynote address at the event, which will once again see Bank of Ireland return as the headline sponsor and be attended by business leaders from across Northern Ireland.

One of the most anticipated events in the Northern Ireland business calendar, the dinner will bring together over 450 senior leaders from across all sectors for an evening of networking, sharing insights and celebrating excellence in leadership, expertly hosted by Donna Traynor.

Originally from Northern Ireland, Sinéad was appointed Managing Director, Nations and Regions, at Channel 4 in 2019 and has overseen the roll out of a number of changes at the broadcaster. Under her leadership, Channel 4 has opened three regional centres, its National HQ in Leeds and Creative Hubs in Bristol and Glasgow.

Prior to joining Channel 4, Sinéad was the BBC's Director of Education, responsible for a range of content across TV, radio and online and she also played a key role in the BBC's move to Salford, migrating the BBC's Learning department to the Northwest site. She started

her career as a journalist at BBC Northern Ireland and is a former editor of Newsround as well as an Executive Producer for a number of BBC Current Affairs programmes.

John Hansen, Chair of IoD Northern Ireland said:

"The IoD Annual Dinner is always a highlight in our calendar. It is a chance to bring our members and wider business community together to reflect on the last 12 months and look forward to the next year with renewed ambition. We are delighted to welcome Sinéad Rocks back to NI as our keynote speaker, a true Northern Ireland success story with a national and regional perspective on innovation and opportunity. Our sincere thanks go to Bank of Ireland, Arthur Cox and AbbeyAutoline for their continued support in helping us make this such a standout event."



Colm Moane, Associate Director, Corporate and Treasury at Bank of Ireland added:

"Bank of Ireland is proud to once again support the IoD's Annual Dinner as headline sponsor.

This event not only showcases local success, it also highlights the innovation, resilience and ambition that characterise Northern Ireland's

**“ This event not only showcases local success, it also highlights the innovation, resilience and ambition that characterise Northern Ireland’s business community.**

**We look forward to another fantastic evening of connection and inspiration. ”**

business community. We look forward to another fantastic evening of connection and inspiration."

After-dinner entertainment will be provided by much-loved local comedian and host of the Tea with me Podcast, Shane Todd, promising a lively and entertaining close to the evening.

In addition to Bank of Ireland, Arthur Cox and AbbeyAutoline will support this event as associate sponsors.

*The IoD Northern Ireland Annual Dinner is open to members and non-members. Booking details will be available on the IoD website, [www.iod.com/locations/northern-ireland/events](http://www.iod.com/locations/northern-ireland/events)*

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## Disclaimer:

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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 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)





# The power of people and communities

**A**t the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI), we believe in the power of people and communities to shape a fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable society.

As a leading independent funder in Northern Ireland, we work hand in hand with communities to build a better future. By collaborating with government bodies, businesses, philanthropists, families, and various trusts, foundations, and funders, we strive to develop initiatives that drive positive change.

Through strategic partnerships and a shared commitment to social impact, we ensure that resources are allocated effectively, supporting communities and individuals in ways that foster long-term growth and resilience. Our approach is guided by a deep understanding of the challenges specific to Northern Ireland, ensuring that every grant we facilitate makes a tangible difference where it's needed most.

For over four decades, we have supported community-led action, built resilience, and championed grassroots change across Northern Ireland. Over the past five years we have awarded £52 million in funding to groups and organisations across the region, making contributions to education, health, housing, the arts, social justice, employment, environmental projects and peace and reconciliation, impacting over 3,988 projects.

We want to drive community transformation by empowering local organisations and individuals to take the lead in solving challenges and seizing opportunities in their communities. We are more than a grantmaker — we are a catalyst for social progress, working alongside our partners to unlock

resources, amplify voices, and support innovation that makes a real difference.

### Our Current Focus and Campaigns

In 2025, we are expanding our commitment through the launch of three new strategic funds, each rooted in equity, innovation, and sustainability.

**Climate Action Seed Fund** - Aimed at community-led environmental change, this fund supports initiatives that promote local climate resilience, nature-based solutions, energy efficiency, and sustainable transport. We are enabling communities to become climate champions, shaping practical, people-powered responses to the environmental crisis.

“As a new donor, partnering with The Community Foundation has a far greater impact. They deeply understand the local needs and groups across Northern Ireland.”

**Equity in Action Fund** - This fund is dedicated to tackling structural inequalities by supporting organisations that uplift marginalised communities. It champions racial equity, LGBTQ+ rights, disability inclusion, and socio-economic justice, investing in the leadership and capacity of groups working to build a more equitable Northern Ireland.

**Inspiring Growth Fund** - This fund is designed to equip community organisations with the digital tools, skills, and resources needed to thrive in today's world by addressing

barriers to technology access and digital literacy. It provides direct support for organisations to build digital resilience, enhance their cybersecurity, embrace AI-driven solutions, and expand their ability to engage with and serve their communities effectively.

### Join Us in Creating Lasting Impact

At the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, we know that real change is made possible by those who step forward to invest in communities, champion meaningful causes, and advocate for a fairer society. Whether you're an individual donor, a philanthropist seeking to make a difference, or a business or foundation looking to create a legacy of social good, your support plays a vital role in transforming lives across Northern Ireland.

“As a new donor, partnering with The Community Foundation has a far greater impact. They deeply understand the local needs and groups across Northern Ireland.”

### Karolyn Cooper, Founder of the Cooper Richardson Fund.

By becoming a donor, funder, or ambassador, you can help us expand opportunities, address inequalities, and foster resilience in communities that need it most. Your contributions—whether financial, strategic, or by simply spreading awareness—fuel projects that drive social progress, from tackling climate change to empowering marginalised groups.

We invite you to be part of this movement for positive change. Partner with us, amplify our message, or support a cause close to your heart. Every effort, big or small, creates waves of impact. Join us in shaping a future where fairness, sustainability, and inclusion thrive.

To learn more or to get involved, visit: [www.communityfoundationni.org](http://www.communityfoundationni.org)



# Gut instinct: a risky way to build your future team



Barry Smyth,  
Founder & CEO,  
MCS Group

**A**sk any business leader whether hiring the right people is important, and you'll get the same answer. Everyone knows it's crucial. But then ask how they make those hiring decisions, and suddenly things get a bit vague.

It's 2025 and I'm still hearing phrases like "I just had a good feeling about them" or "there was something I didn't like, I can't put my finger on it." The problem is, in most organisations - especially SME's - hiring decisions are still being made on little more than instinct. There's no structure, no training, no shared definition of what good looks like. And even in the larger corporates, where process is usually well defined, too often it's being carried out by people who haven't been trained to get the best outcomes. So either the system is missing, or the skill is - the result being too many missed opportunities and not enough great hires.

The research is pretty clear. Studies like the long-term work by Schmidt and Hunter show that unstructured interviews - the space where gut feel thrives - are only 38% predictive of on-the-job success. Structured interviews improve that to over 50%. Still no guarantee, no silver bullet, but adding in other elements of assessment such as cognitive ability testing, practicals or work samples can improve things further. The funny thing is, we've known this for a long time, yet too many companies still rely on gut instinct after a questionable 'interview' to

make these decisions. The current shift from experience-based hiring to skills-based hiring is going to add a further layer of challenge to an already difficult task.

In recruitment, we see this play out every week. I see companies miss out on great talent all the time - not because the person wouldn't be good at the job, but because they were misread during the CV review or the first chat. Maybe the candidate didn't present in a way that felt familiar. Maybe their background wasn't quite what the manager expected.

**“ The research is pretty clear. Studies like the long-term work by Schmidt and Hunter show that unstructured interviews - the space where gut feel thrives - are only 38% predictive of on-the-job success. Structured interviews improve that to over 50%. ”**

Whatever it is, it triggers a “no”. As recruiters, we'll often challenge that - respectfully - and we're proud of the hires that happen when a client trusts us enough to take a second look. We've seen some brilliant hires made after a hiring manager took another look and gave someone a fairer

hearing. But the reality is, those success stories are the minority. Most don't make it through the net. That's a big opportunity lost.

It's easy to talk about “culture fit” or “chemistry” or “something just didn't click”. But what are we really saying when we say those things? And what do we miss when we default to that language?

Hiring based on instinct feels quicker. You like someone, you get on well, and it feels right. But liking someone isn't the same as knowing whether they can do the job - and do it well over time. If anything, hiring someone who makes us feel comfortable often just reinforces what we already know. It doesn't stretch the business. It doesn't add something new. It rarely gives us the leap forward we say we want.

The better businesses we work with don't leave hiring to chance. They treat it like the commercial decision it is. They get clear on what they're looking for. They train the people making the decisions. They challenge their own assumptions. And when they find a great person who doesn't fit the exact mould, they lean in rather than pull back. They know that recruitment is an investment decision with long-term implications, not an admin task to be squeezed in between meetings.

That doesn't mean you ignore gut feel completely. There's still a place for it - but later in the process, once the proper work has been done. Once you've tested for skill, explored potential, looked at fit in a structured way. Then yes, your judgement and your sense of the person still matters. But that can't be the whole approach.



Hiring managers aren't to blame for all of this. In fact, most want to get it right. But we've created environments where people are expected to interview and assess talent without ever being taught how to do it. So, it's no surprise that mistakes happen. Perhaps training doesn't happen because interviewing is often seen as a 'common sense' activity. Maybe this is why a recent HBR article found that most hiring managers rate themselves as above average interviewers. Statistically, however that can't be true. So either we're not as good as we think, or we're measuring the wrong things - or perhaps we're not measuring at all.

There's a broader business question here. If your firm is spending time, money and energy trying to grow - entering new markets, launching new products, investing in leadership - but you're still making poor

hiring calls at the front end, how much of that investment is being undermined? How many times are we resetting teams, re-recruiting, retraining? What's the cost in lost opportunity and momentum?

And if you're not hiring because you're waiting for the "perfect" candidate, are you missing out on someone who could actually make a huge difference, if only you looked again?

None of this is about getting hiring 100% right. No one does. But it's about shifting the odds. Putting more structure in place. Building some basic capability around interviewing and decision-making. Asking the right questions, not just of candidates, but of ourselves.

If you're in a leadership position, it's worth asking: How confident

are we that our hiring process finds the best people? How well do our managers understand what good looks like? How many great people might we be overlooking?

Because in a market like this, where talent is scarce and growth is hard-won, every great hire matters. And every missed one is a step backwards.

The firms that get this right aren't chasing some idea of perfection. They're just paying attention. They're building teams with intent. They're asking questions, listening to advice, learning from mistakes, and improving over time.

They're definitely not relying on gut feel.

And they're winning because of it.



# Maximise your savings with salary sacrifice

## How EV salary sacrifice can help your business thrive



Ciarán O'Neill,  
Director, Radius  
Vehicle Solutions

**What if you were able to reduce costs and attract top talent while also showing your commitment to sustainability - all with the use of one simple programme?**

At Radius Vehicle Solutions we view EV salary sacrifice as more than just a green initiative, but a powerful tool we can provide to help your business thrive in today's competitive landscape.

### What is it?

Salary sacrifice is a form of employee benefit, that allows employees to give up part of their salary in exchange for an electric vehicle (EV) provided by their employer. This means that the employee will pay a reduced amount of Income Tax and National Insurance contributions on the exchanged salary. The employee also pays Benefit in Kind (BIK) on the car benefit, but with that currently fixed at 3% rising by 1% per year up to 7% in 2028 and 9% in 2029, the BIK cost of a 40k EV is just £20 per month. This allows for significant savings for the employee, particularly higher rate 40% tax payers, as well as providing them with the benefit of a fully maintained company car.

### Employee benefit and what do I get?

Who doesn't love the smell of brand new car without having to put down thousands of pounds up front or go through credit checks with expensive financing costs? Under

an EV salary sacrifice scheme, an employee will take delivery of a new, fully maintained EV inclusive of insurance, home charger, servicing, maintenance and tyres. This simplifies budgeting for employees and often results in better value. EVs tend to have lower running costs compared to traditional petrol or diesel vehicles, including cheaper fuelling (electricity vs. fuel), especially when utilising the many day/night electricity tariffs available on the market.

However, most significant is the value achieved versus using your post tax income to purchase a car under traditional PCP or HP alternatives. As the EV car is classed as a benefit, you will not pay Income Tax, at 20%/40%, or National Insurance contributions on the portion of your salary that you sacrifice. As a result, the savings you can achieve with a salary sacrifice car lease will vary based on your individual situation, including your salary and income tax bracket.

### What's in it for employers?

Implementing an Electric Vehicle (EV) salary sacrifice scheme can offer several benefits to companies, employees, and the environment. In an employment market where everyone is competing for and striving to retain the best talent, you can boast that competitive edge with a forward-thinking employee benefits package, and increase existing employee satisfaction. By encouraging the use of electric vehicles, the company can contribute to reducing its overall carbon footprint, proactively reducing tail pipe emissions and aligning with their corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals and sustainability targets. Many businesses are experiencing this as an ever-increasing requirement for tenders and something many companies now state within their strategic report.

Clearly the financial benefit for employers should not be ignored

and is often not fully understood. Employer National Insurance Contributions rose to 15% from 13.8% in April. Under a salary sacrifice scheme, the total contribution exchanged by the employee does not qualify for employer NIC representing a 15% saving.

**“ This allows for significant savings for the employee, particularly higher rate 40% tax payers as well as providing them with the benefit of a fully maintained company car. ”**

On a £700 per month lease this would equate to a £1,260 per year saving. As a result of the changes to employer NICs introduced in the budget, effective from 6th April, with the NIC % increases to 15% and the threshold for payment reducing from £9,100 to £5,000, without a scheme this budgetary change will introduce an annual cost to the business of £615 per employee.

Another saving rarely considered by employers is in relation to the VAT reclaimed on the cost of the vehicle. The employee exchanges the gross amount of the rental as a deduction from their monthly pay, whereas the employer can reclaim 50% of the VAT on the finance element of the lease and 100% of the VAT on the maintenance element. An important consideration is that both of these employer savings can be retained by the company or indeed passed back to the employee to further increase their monthly saving, its entirely up to you.

### What happens if an employee leaves?

Undoubtedly one of the most frequent and understandably, important questions that every employer asks us is “what happens if the employee leaves, loses their licence, gets pregnant etc?” Fortunately, our EV salary sacrifice scheme comes with a comprehensive employer risk mitigation insurance package that covers the cost of the lease payments should an early termination event arise. This gives employers that protection they rightly ask for and need to protect the interests of the business.

### Power your salary sacrifice scheme with fixed-rate EV charging across Ireland

As more employers in Northern Ireland adopt salary sacrifice schemes to support electric vehicle uptake, managing charging costs and infrastructure access has never

been more critical. The Radius One Fuel & EV Card simplifies this transition by giving drivers access to Ireland’s largest multi-network EV charging infrastructure — including ESB, IONITY, EasyGo, and more — all through one powerful card.

With fixed EV charging rates, zero connection or transaction fees, and consolidated VAT-friendly invoicing, Radius One removes the unpredictability and admin complexity often associated with EV charging. Paired with the Radius Charge On Road App for live station availability and seamless expense tracking, it’s the ideal solution to deliver cost control, convenience, and confidence to employers and employees alike.

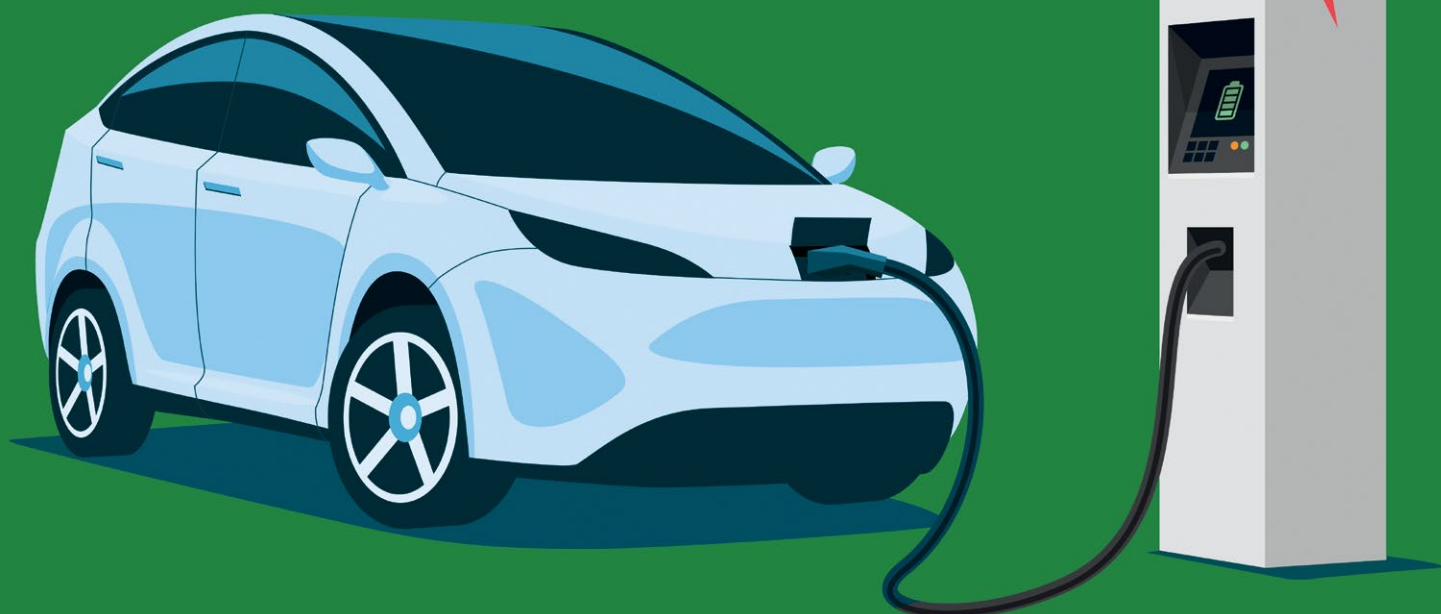
### Are you ready to drive change?

Radius Vehicle Solutions, part of the wider Radius Group, have been operating in Ireland for over 20 years,

priding themselves on providing fleet management, and more recently, EV transition solutions to some of the most well-known household names across the island. From consulting and advising on company car schemes and bandings to sourcing vehicles, managing leases, maintenance and insurance, we take care of it all via our local team.

If you are looking to empower your business and team while also prioritising sustainability, we at Radius Vehicle Solutions would love to help you make the smart investment to boost your business and its image. With our highly skilled team, we bring decades of experience, ensuring that we can deliver a salary sacrifice programme that works seamlessly for your business. If you are ready to make this step, please contact a member of our team today.

*For more information, email: [rvs.ie.info@radius.com](mailto:rvs.ie.info@radius.com)*



**IoD Northern Ireland**  
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Start your journey to becoming an IoD chartered director

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**Role of the Director  
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10-11 September 2025  
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast



**Leadership for  
Directors**

5-6 November 2025  
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast



**Finance for Non-Finance  
Directors**

8-10 October 2025  
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast



**Strategy for  
Directors**

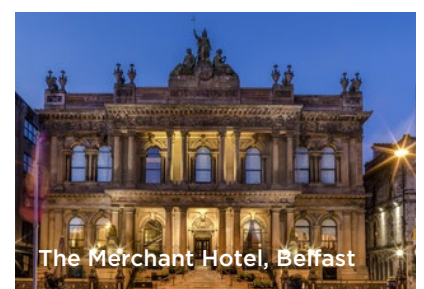
25-27 November 2025  
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

**Stage 2 Diploma in Company Direction**



15-17 October 2025  
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

Please contact  
[heather.white@iod.com](mailto:heather.white@iod.com)



# How we help local clients achieve their financial goals



Paul Kerr, Financial Planning Director, Rathbones

**W**ith Rathbones offices throughout the UK and Channel

**Islands, you are never far away from high-quality, personalised financial planning and investment management services.**

Rathbones' combination with Investec Wealth & Investment (UK) has brought together two businesses with common values, aspirations and cultures. At Rathbones Group Plc, providing continuity of service to our clients has remained central to what we do and we are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead for the combined business.

## Helping answer life's financial questions

From helping you answer the question, 'Can I maintain my lifestyle in retirement?' to advice on how best to transfer your wealth to the next generation, knowing where you stand financially and receiving high-quality financial advice can empower you to achieve a life well lived.

Whatever stage of life you're at or whatever your personal goals, financial planning and investment management can help your money work harder for you. The harder your money works, especially when the financial landscape becomes more tumultuous, the more freedom of choice you gain. However it is important to remember that with investing your capital is at risk.

As Financial Planning Director, I am proud to be leading the financial planning team in Rathbones' Belfast

office. Six years ago, I joined the business as a paraplanner and have since enjoyed the opportunity to work face-to-face with clients who are planning for retirement, weddings, inheritance tax, the trip of a lifetime and so much more. Providing a high-quality service that keeps our clients at the heart of everything we do is paramount at Rathbones.

**“ Providing a high-quality service that keeps our clients at the heart of everything we do is paramount at Rathbones. ”**

Over the last eighteen months, we have strengthened our financial planning team in Belfast with two new Associate Financial Planning Directors, Niall McMonagle and Paul Connolly, two paraplanners, Rebecca Ellison and Karen Parkinson, and three internal promotions, Mary Wilkinson, Pius Kulama and Carol Wood.

Many of us don't have a clear financial plan for our future and as a result, can fail to capitalise on opportunities to grow or protect our wealth.

In a world full of uncertainty, we at Rathbones have a responsibility to manage our clients' investments through the ups and downs, seeking to minimise the risks and find the best opportunities to help them reach their long-term financial goals. Working with a financial planner at Rathbones can help bring focus and clarity to many of life's financial questions, helping you invest well to live well.

Being prepared and making informed decisions is key to financial health and expert financial planning advice can support people at all ages with taking control of their finances. By focusing on the future now, it can give peace of mind knowing that you are on track to meet your goals, or at the very least know what you need to do with time to make any changes where necessary.

Situated along Belfast's iconic waterfront, Rathbones office in City Quays reflects the growth and ambitions of our local team to help more local clients.

*If you'd like an informal conversation, please get in touch on tel: 028 9032 1002*





# Hunter Apparel Solutions Limited (Hunter) Celebrates double victory at 2025 BSIF Safety Awards

**H**unter has been named winner of the highest global honour in the professional clothing industry – taking the top prize for Safety Product Innovation at the 2025 NAUMD Awards in North America.

The award, issued by the Network Association of Uniform Manufacturers & Distributors (NAUMD), represents the global standard of excellence for innovation in uniforms and PPE. Hunter’s winning product, FLEXGUARD®, is a game-changing protective limb system developed for public order professionals.

The NAUMD victory caps off a landmark month for the Northern Ireland based company, which also secured two major UK awards at the British Safety Industry Federation (BSIF) Safety Awards 2025 – with FLEXGUARD® winning Product Innovation of the Year and the company’s firefighter PPE decontamination system, Deconology®, named Safety Solution of the Year.

“To win the top global product safety innovation award just weeks after winning two UK national awards is a defining moment for our business,” said Simon Hunter Esq, M.B.E., Chief Executive Officer.

“ Hunter remains the longest-surviving clothing and textile company in the region, combining traditional tailoring expertise with modern robotics, advanced materials, and eco-conscious engineering. ”

“It confirms that a purpose-driven approach to business drives success and recognition. Putting the fire-fighters and officers we serve front and centre of what we do leads us into exciting innovative areas daily.”

## FLEXGUARD® – Setting a new standard for frontline protection

FLEXGUARD® redefines mobility, comfort, and protection for police and prison service personnel by replacing the stiffness of traditional armour with lightweight, articulated limb systems.

Key features include:

- Patent applied fully hinged elbow and knee joints allowing full movement without compromising protection
- Blunt-trauma exoskeleton shells using lightweight, energy-dispersing materials
- Inclusive sizing range developed with physiotherapists and operational advisors
- 3D cool mesh airflow system to enhance thermal comfort during deployments
- Modular UK construction, enabling rapid maintenance and domestic supply resilience

The product has already been selected by major UK frameworks and continues to generate international interest across Europe and North America.

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### Deconology® — Protecting firefighters beyond the fireground

Hunter's Deconology® platform offers the UK and Ireland's first Liquid CO2 decontamination service for firefighter PPE — eliminating over 99% of harmful contaminants compared to just 15–40% from conventional water-based washing.

In just its first year, Deconology® has been chosen to protect over 60% of Irish firefighters, including being a key part of over £5 million in contracts with Irish fire services including Dublin Fire Brigade, with major UK fire services engaged in trials and workshops. Hunter have also been able to host representatives from over 50% of the UK's fire services to tour the new facility in Northern Ireland in the last 18 months alone.

The system reduces cancer-linked toxin exposure, extends garment life, and eliminates the need for water, heat, or chemical-heavy cleaning — aligning with both health and climate goals. It aims to help improve the long-term health outcomes of the firefighters Hunter serve.

### About Hunter Apparel Solutions Limited

Hunter is a technical PPE and uniform manufacturer with a mission to protect those on whom society depends. Now approaching 90 years in business, we are a fourth-generation family company that has evolved into a digitally driven, AI-powered, innovation-led operation serving emergency services, and large private-sector bodies across the UK and Ireland.

From its operational base in Northern Ireland, Hunter combines nearly a century of craftsmanship with cutting-edge innovation — delivering smart, sustainable, and scalable solutions for modern uniform supply chains.

### A multi-Year innovation journey — now ready to scale

FLEXGUARD® and Deconology® are the result of several years of behind-the-scenes research, prototyping, wearer trials, and marketing investment. Hunter has built two distinct brands from the

ground up — educating stakeholders across sectors, and setting new expectations for what protective uniform services can deliver.

With these award-winning innovations now gaining national and international traction, Hunter is entering a major growth phase — expanding its operations, accelerating product deployment, and engaging new public-sector and export partnerships.

"This is only the beginning. Our platforms are ready, the demand is growing, and we are poised for scale," added Director, Jeff Hunter. "We're always interested in hearing from professionals who want to be part of our journey."

Learn more about our award-winning products at:  
[www.hunterapparelsolutions.com/deconology](http://www.hunterapparelsolutions.com/deconology) or [www.flexguard.co.uk](http://www.flexguard.co.uk)

# From governance to growth: The strategic value of NEDs in driving scale and resilience



Gareth Hanna,  
Founder and  
Director, G1 Search

**T**he role of the Non-Executive Director (NED) continues to evolve to meet the strategic demands of today's business environment.

Once viewed solely as a compliance figurehead, today the most impactful NEDs operate as strategic advisors, individuals who actively contribute to business direction, resilience, and long-term growth. For scaling organisations, particularly across Northern Ireland and wider UK regions, the right NED appointment can be transformational.

Historically, NEDs provided oversight on governance, regulation, and fiduciary matters. While these remain important, modern NEDs are increasingly valued for their ability to bring fresh perspective, constructive challenge, and commercial insight.

In an economic climate where many businesses face market uncertainty, technological change, and succession complexities, an experienced NED offers the kind of counsel that internal teams, however talented, may lack.

At G1 Search, we believe the most effective NEDs work alongside, not above, executive leadership. They bring a blend of strategic thinking and hands-on business acumen, often acting as a sounding board in moments of critical decision-making. Whether navigating expansion, investment readiness, or leadership transition, their presence often provides calm clarity and outside-in perspective.

## A broader view of the role

While governance remains core, the scope of NED contribution has broadened. In competitive or fast-changing sectors, they help boards stay aligned with long-term vision, avoid short-termism, and assess risk with rigour. Their insights often shape strategic decisions, influence leadership development, and guide commercial repositioning. Increasingly, they can also play a role in ESG strategy, stakeholder communication, and digital innovation.

One useful analogy is that a strong NED should act as both a mirror and a compass, reflecting reality while helping steer direction. This is particularly valuable for owner-managed or founder-led businesses, where independence is prized but strategic objectivity is needed.

## Why more SMEs should think about board strength

Despite the strategic importance of board leadership, many SMEs still deprioritise board appointments in favour of operational hires. However, a well-chosen NED can be instrumental in preparing for future growth, leadership continuity, or exit planning. Strengthening the board is not about bureaucracy. It is about unlocking sharper thinking and broader networks.

Whether supporting succession planning, advising on M&A activity, or guiding culture evolution, a commercially minded NED brings both challenge and support. They can spot risks before they materialise and help build leadership confidence in volatile markets.

At G1 Search, we regularly partner with businesses at pivotal moments of change, whether entering new markets, digitalising operations, or rethinking organisational design. In these moments, strategic board appointments can accelerate alignment, unlock funding conversations, or provide credibility with investors and stakeholders.

## Choosing the right fit

Successful NED appointments begin with clarity. What are the outcomes you need from the role? Where are the gaps in your current board? We work with clients to shape these briefs and define not just the professional experience required, but also the mindset, values, and cultural alignment needed for success.

It is important to look beyond high-profile CVs. The most effective NEDs are not always the most visible or vocal. They are thoughtful, well-networked, commercially fluent, and unafraid to ask the hard questions. Trust, humility and resilience often mark the strongest candidates.

## Board composition and diversity

Another overlooked dimension is the power of diversity around the board table. Diverse boards make better decisions. They mitigate groupthink, bring alternative perspectives and better reflect the complexity of today's operating environments. Diversity, in this context, refers not only to gender or ethnicity, but to experience, thinking styles, and leadership temperament.

Appointing a NED from a different sector can often yield unexpected value. For example, someone from a regulated environment might



bring rigour to a scaling tech firm, while a leader from a commercial background might offer growth insight to a not-for-profit board.

#### Common misconceptions about NEDs

Too often, businesses view NEDs as either ceremonial or compliance-led. Others assume they are only relevant for large corporates. In reality, SMEs and growth-stage businesses may benefit most from NED input, precisely because they face such concentrated risk and opportunity.

Misconceptions we often encounter include:

- “NEDs must come from the same sector”
- “NEDs are for governance, not growth”
- “We are not big enough to need a board adviser”

These assumptions can limit the very conversations that unlock opportunity.

**“ In reality, SMEs and growth-stage businesses may benefit most from NED input, precisely because they face such concentrated risk and opportunity. ”**

#### How to start the process

For business owners or executive boards considering their first NED appointment, it is important to start with purpose. Are you preparing for growth? Managing succession? Exploring a sale or investment? Once intent is clear, the next step is defining the role and identifying a search partner who understands the brief in strategic terms, not just transactional ones.

At G1 Search, we adopt a research-led, advisory-driven model to identify and engage high-calibre NEDs who are motivated by impact, not profile. Our process includes strategic planning, candidate briefing, values-based assessment and onboarding support to ensure long-term success.

#### Final thought

Board expectations are changing. So too are the needs of ambitious businesses navigating complexity and change. In this context, the Non-Executive Director should no longer be seen as a formality or figurehead, but as a strategic lever. For businesses intent on scaling with resilience, the right NED can offer clarity, challenge, and continuity.

If you are starting to think about board composition or NED appointments, we would welcome a confidential conversation.

Visit us at: [G1Search.com](http://G1Search.com), email: [info@g1search.com](mailto:info@g1search.com) or tel: 028 9621 8990





# 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 engage with our IOD Northern Ireland community.

To have your profile featured contact:  
[chelsea.brennan@iod.com](mailto:chelsea.brennan@iod.com)

## MEMBER PROFILE

### Paula Leathem

#### NIE Networks

Paula is a Chartered Fellow Member of CIPD who has worked in the electricity industry for 37 years – the past 13 of which have been in HR senior leadership roles. As Head of HR, Paula leads a team of HR and Payroll professionals. Key strategic areas of focus include change management; talent management and organisational training and development; employee engagement and communication at all levels internally and externally; and diversity and inclusion. These roles all highlight her personal and professional dedication to fostering a positive and productive work environment.

In addition to her role in NIE Networks, Paula is a board member of the WIB Group and previously



held the role of Chair for the Halifax Foundation NI. Highly motivated by challenge, she is driven, ambitious and focussed on achieving quality outcomes.

Paula is passionate about continuous learning and has invested consistently in her own professional development, ensuring that she is always equipped with the most relevant and timely skills and experience that are aligned to strategic requirements and emerging trends within the HR profession. She is an Ulster University graduate, having achieved a Post Graduate Diploma in HRM, and in recent years, an ILM Level 5 in Executive Coaching and Certificate in Coaching & Mentoring from QUB.

**MEMBER PROFILE****Jacqueline Canning**  
**Andras House Hotels**

With over 20 years of experience in Human Resources spanning both public and private sectors, Jacqueline is currently Associate Director - Culture and Talent for a leading hotel group, where she oversees strategic HR initiatives across a diverse and dynamic portfolio.

Her career has been shaped by a passion for developing inclusive cultures, enabling leadership capability, and unlocking the full potential of people through forward-thinking talent strategies.

Holding a BA (Hons) in Business Studies Specialising in Human Resource Management, and Chartered Membership of the CIPD.

Jacqueline brings a blend of strategic insight and operational expertise to her role, delivering impactful solutions that drive business performance and employee engagement.

She is deeply committed to continuous professional development and to elevating the influence of HR as a critical driver of organisational success.

As the world of work continues to evolve, she believes HR leaders must act as catalysts for change—shaping resilient cultures, supporting



agile leadership, and embedding purpose-led talent practices that prepare businesses for the future.

Jacqueline is proud to join the Institute of Directors and looks forward to contributing to the wider business community through collaboration, innovation, and thought leadership in the field of culture and talent.

**MEMBER PROFILE****Neal Shanks**  
**Grant Thornton**

Neal has 23 years of financial services experience - 12 years in banking and 11 years in corporate finance, the last nine years as a renewable

energy specialist. He is currently a Director in Corporate Finance and Head of Energy and Infrastructure at Grant Thornton Ireland, having joined the firm in April 2020.

Neal has previously worked for AIB, Ulster Bank and Deloitte, as well as a period working for ANZ Bank in New Zealand. During a spell of eight years at Ulster Bank, Neal managed a corporate restructuring team and was responsible for a debt portfolio of approximately £1.2bn, including some of NI's largest property companies.

Over the last nine years, Neal has advised on a wide range of renewable energy and infrastructure investments covering wind, solar, battery storage, bioenergy and waste/recycling. He has advised investment funds, project developers, PLCs, banks and government agencies.

Neal has provided lead advisory services for 47 renewable energy and infrastructure transactions with an aggregate value over £1.3bn. His work covers acquisitions, disposals, project finance and a range of general advisory services.

He is also Chair at Action Renewables Energy Trading Ltd (ARET), a Trustee of the Action Renewables Charity, member of the Group Investment Committee and Chair of the Group Strategy Committee. Neal first joined the board of ARET in November 2020, taking the role of Chair in August 2023.

Neal is a Chartered Accountant, Certified Banker and holds both a Masters in Finance and Degree in Economics from Queen's University Belfast, where he also lectured for four years in the School of Economics & Management.

**MEMBER PROFILE****Richard Greenwood**  
**Verus Search**

Richard Greenwood is the Director and Founder of Verus Search, an executive and management search firm dedicated to supporting organisations find the leadership and management talent they need to grow and thrive.

With almost a decade of experience in recruitment and executive search, Richard's approach is built on strong relationships, real understanding and a focus on creating lasting success for clients and candidates alike.

Having worked with a wide range of organisations across Northern Ireland and beyond, Richard set up Verus Search to offer a personalised, partnership-led service where quality, insight, and integrity come first. He believes that finding the right leaders and managers is about matching ambition, culture and vision.

Richard is passionate about working closely with people, whether that's helping an organisation hire its next senior leader or supporting an individual to take the next step in their career.





## MEMBER PROFILE

## Cathy Hawthorne

### KPMG Ireland

Cathy is an accomplished Director with over two decades of experience in Retail, Business and Corporate Banking. She specialises in business development and growth, defining sales and service strategy, delivering operational excellence, building successful multi-discipline teams and leading client-centric transformation.

Cathy is currently a Senior Leader at KPMG Ireland, Managed Solutions and Services business. She joined the firm in 2022, where she develops and delivers sector-specific solutions, tailored to meet client's industries across Northern Ireland and ROI. Prior to joining KPMG, Cathy held various UK Director roles at Santander Bank and Abbey National Building Society. In her early career, Cathy was a Senior Sales Leader at British Airways plc.

As a passionate advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion, Cathy serves as the Co-Chair for Women in Banking and Finance Northern Ireland and is an Ambassador for Women in Business Northern Ireland. Cathy is a Mentor for both networks.



## MEMBER PROFILE

## Conor Houston

### Vulcan Consulting

Conor is Northern Ireland Director of Vulcan Consulting and Founder & MD of private client firm, Conor Houston Associates Ltd.

Vulcan Consulting is a global government affairs company with offices in Belfast, Dublin, Brussels and part of an international network across EU, US and beyond. Vulcan supports companies in NI to impact regulatory and policy challenges and support growth plans with access to new global markets and opportunities.

His expansive career has included roles as Chief Executive of a political party, holding directorships on major boards, running his own management consulting business and practising as a lawyer.

Conor was previously a Governor of The Irish Times Trust and inaugural Chair of The Ireland Funds Young Leaders in Belfast. He was also on the Board of the Federation of Small Businesses NI and was elected to serve on the Law Society NI Council and European Young Bar Association.

Previously, as a solicitor advocate he represented clients to the Supreme Court of both the UK and Ireland and was involved in many high profile and pioneering cases.

Conor is Visiting Chair Emeritus of Irish Studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles.



## MEMBER PROFILE

## Darren Niven

### Defence Relationship Management (DRM)

Darren Niven is the Regional Employer Engagement Director for Defence Relationship Management (DRM) in Northern Ireland, acting on behalf of the Ministry of Defence to lead strategic partnerships between Defence and employers. His work supports the integration of reservists into the civilian workforce and promotes the Armed Forces Covenant across Northern Ireland.

With over two decades of leadership experience at JD Wetherspoon, Darren brings deep operational and people management expertise. He has a strong track record in talent development, performance management and building inclusive, high-performing teams across multi-site operations.

In his current role, Darren delivers employer-facing engagement activity, advises on Defence-friendly HR practices, and leads regional initiatives that support reservists and Defence people. He is passionate about civic responsibility, diversity and helping organisations unlock the potential of Defence talent.

As a new member of the Institute of Directors, Darren looks forward to connecting with fellow leaders, sharing best practice and contributing to Northern Ireland's thriving business network.

## MEMBER PROFILE

## Ciara Fulton

### Lewis Silkin

Ciara Fulton has advised employers on issues affecting their people for over 25 years. Having grown up as the daughter of a publican, she understands the reality of business and adopts a practical, commercial approach to her work.

Ciara is dual qualified in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, specialising in cross-border

and comparative work, providing a "one-stop shop" for businesses that operate beyond borders.

She advises on the full range of employment issues, including complex disciplinary and grievance processes, equality and equal pay matters, whistleblowing, large-scale redundancies and TUPE, as well as executive severances and restrictive covenants.

In 2021, Ciara led the merger with Jones Cassidy Brett to create Lewis Silkin's Belfast office. She now heads up the office and manages its rapidly growing team.





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# Member news

## nijobfinder enters three year strategic partnership with Madgex

nijobfinder, Northern Ireland's leading job board and part of the Mediahuis Group alongside the Belfast Telegraph, has announced a new three year partnership with Madgex, a globally respected provider of job board technology.

This collaboration will support the launch of a redesigned and enhanced recruitment platform. BBuilt on Madgex's cutting-edge

technology, trusted by major players like Guardian Jobs, the upgraded nijobfinder platform will deliver a faster, more intuitive experience for job seekers and employers. Key improvements include streamlined job postings, simplified application processes, and more innovative tools to connect talent with the right roles.

"This partnership with Madgex marks a major step forward for nijobfinder," said Connor Diamond, Head of nijobfinder. "Our new platform is designed to make job hunting easier and more effective while equipping employers with smarter tools to attract and engage top talent."

"We are thrilled to be working with nijobfinder on this exciting project" said Richard Green, Commercial Director of Madgex. "nijobfinder has long been a trusted platform

with impressive reach and user-friendly features, helping people across Northern Ireland connect with meaningful career opportunities. At Madgex, we're proud to bring our world-class technology to the table to help further solidify nijobfinder's leadership in the market. Together, we're creating a faster, more dynamic way for talent to find jobs and for employers to connect with the right candidates through an active, engaged talent marketplace."

Employers will continue to benefit from nijobfinder's established suite of branding and promotional solutions, including cross-channel visibility through the Belfast Telegraph's print and digital platforms. These solutions are designed to showcase company culture and increase reach to quality candidates.





## A&L Goodbody raise vital funds in support of Cancer Fund for Children

Over three days in June, A&L Goodbody's Peter Stafford, Mark Thompson and Matthew Nesbitt successfully completed a 300km journey from Daisy Lodge in Newcastle, Co. Down to the future site of the new Daisy Lodge in Cong, Co. Mayo, raising vital funds in support of Cancer Fund for Children.

Donations are still coming in, but the team are delighted to announce that they are currently just shy of their ambitious £10k fundraising target, marking an incredible effort for a truly worthy cause.

## A&L Goodbody announces senior appointment in Northern Ireland

**Kevin Murphy has been appointed as a new Partner and Head of Department in our market-leading Real Estate team in Belfast.**

Kevin brings over 18 years of experience advising on all aspects of commercial property, with particular expertise in land acquisition and disposals, particularly in renewable energy developments, as well as a focus on investment and development property. Kevin has built a strong reputation for dealing with complex transactions, leasing arrangements and property finance matters.

This appointment takes ALG's partner team in Northern Ireland to 21, charged with leading a team of over 130 lawyers and business support professionals in its Belfast office.

Congratulating Kevin on his appointment, Michael Neill, Head



of Office in Belfast, commented: "We're thrilled to have Kevin return to ALG to join the partnership. His deep sector knowledge and commercial approach are a great fit for our team and our clients.

Kevin's expertise, particularly in renewable energy, adds real strength to our growing Real Estate offering and reflects both the continued growth of our Real Estate practice

and our commitment to supporting clients in this evolving sector.

Kevin's appointment comes at a time of significant activity for our Real Estate team, with a number of high-profile transactions currently underway including acting for NewRiver on the largest commercial property deal in Northern Ireland this year, with the recent £58.8m sale of the Abbey Centre to a local private investor."



## Deloitte: 500 new technology-focused jobs for NI

**Deloitte reaffirmed its commitment to Northern Ireland by announcing plans to create 500 new technology-focused jobs in Belfast over the next three years, at the recent opening of their new building.**

The announcement was made as Northern Ireland's First Minister,

Michelle O'Neill, Deputy First Minister, Emma Little-Pengelly and Economy Minister, Dr Caoimhe Archibald officially opened Deloitte's new Belfast office at The Ewart, alongside Deloitte's senior leaders from the UK and Ireland.

Deloitte Northern Ireland has a long track record of technology expertise and has grown a large team of highly skilled technologists over the past decade. The firm is now creating 500 additional technology focused jobs, tapping into the rich vein of talent in the region.

The investment is in response to increased client demand for UK-based delivery capabilities and specialist technology expertise.

Deloitte is establishing dedicated technology centres across the UK and Northern Ireland that will create new roles and career opportunities for local talent and will make Deloitte's Belfast-based technology centre the largest of the firm's four UK centres - also announced today in Cardiff, Manchester, and Newcastle.

Operational from June 1, the centres will see Deloitte's highly skilled technologists design, build and run technology solutions that address the evolving needs of UK and Northern Irish businesses, from designing apps to embedding artificial intelligence into software, devices or systems such as SAP, helping clients transform their businesses.

## WIDI: A new executive network for female leaders in deals and investment

**A new private network aimed at senior female professionals working across mergers and acquisitions, investment and corporate strategy has officially launched in Northern Ireland.**

WIDI - Women in Deals and Investments - is an invitation-only platform created to connect and support experienced women operating at the forefront of the region's dealmaking landscape.

WIDI has been launched by Artemis Human Capital, BGF, HNH Partners, and Davidson McDonnell, bringing together professionals from corporate finance, private equity, legal advisory, and executive leadership—including CEOs, CFOs, and founders.



The idea emerged during a conversation between Sarah Orange (Artemis), Gemma Hamilton (BGF), Vicky Dummigan (Davidson McDonnell), and Pam Gillies (HNH Partners), who identified a clear need for a senior-level, female-focused forum in Northern Ireland's investment and business advisory ecosystem.

"We're thrilled to have launched this new network for women working in corporate transactions

across Northern Ireland. Our inaugural gathering was a real success—offering a space where talented professionals connected, shared their journeys and enjoyed meaningful conversations.

"This momentum is incredibly energising and we look forward to nurturing a strong, collaborative community that will support and inspire growth and transactions," said Pam Gillies, Partner, HNH.

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## Oliver Jeffers unveils artwork as NI Children's Hospice celebrates "filling every day with colour and care"

**Northern Ireland Children's Hospice had some VIP visitors as internationally renowned artist and author Oliver Jeffers dropped in to unveil a specially created mural at the charity's site in Newtownabbey.**

Oliver Jeffers' mural features the iconic Crayons characters from his acclaimed series of books, with the unique artwork installed for all to see when arriving at Horizon House.

Also attending were the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Councillors Leah Kirkpatrick and Julie Gilmour respectively. The visit coincides with the start of Children's Hospice Week (16th to 22nd June), the annual awareness week for children's hospices and palliative care services.

After the VIPs received a guided tour of NI Children's Hospice facilities, Oliver also met some of the Hospice families, before delighting the audience by reading from his books *Stuck* and *Here We Are* to the enraptured Little Stars children, their siblings and nursing staff.

Oliver Jeffers said: "It is an honour to unveil this mural, as a gift dedicated to the patients and families of the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice, who I am very proud to support. The artwork is inspired by our shared belief in filling every day with colour and care, and it stands as a celebration of hope, imagination, and love.

"Horizon House is an amazing place, and it is wonderful to see first-hand how the hard-working nurses help the children and their families to make the most of every moment. It has been fabulously inspiring and so moving to hear their positive stories of how Hospice care has truly made a difference in their lives."

Trevor McCartney, Chief Executive of NI Hospice, said: "A huge thank you to Oliver for taking time out of his busy schedule today. The entire Hospice family is overjoyed to have him here, sharing precious moments with the children and unveiling this fabulous new mural.

"We are the only children's hospice in Northern Ireland, providing specialist palliative care for babies and children with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions. We support children and their families

with specialist clinical care, practical nursing care, and emotional and psychological support, both in our In-Patient Unit in Horizon House and in family homes across Northern Ireland. From supported short breaks including physio, music, art and hydrotherapy, our essential services are there every step of the way for our Little Stars and local families.

"It costs over £5m every year to run our children's hospice, and we rely on the generosity of our local community and businesses to provide the majority of that through continued fundraising. This high-profile support from Oliver Jeffers is most welcome in helping us raise awareness of the incredible work, to improve understanding about children's palliative care, and to raise much-needed funds so that the service can continue."

As well as the mural unveiling, there are many other local events being organised to celebrate Children's Hospice Week. These include a Teddy Bears picnic for the Hospice families at Horizon House with the public being asked to organise their own picnics. Local civic buildings across the country will also be lit up in the Children's Hospice's purple branding and various schools are organising activities to 'Go Purple for Hospice'. Some NI Hospice's corporate partners are undertaking their own fundraising challenges, with regional street collections in your area.

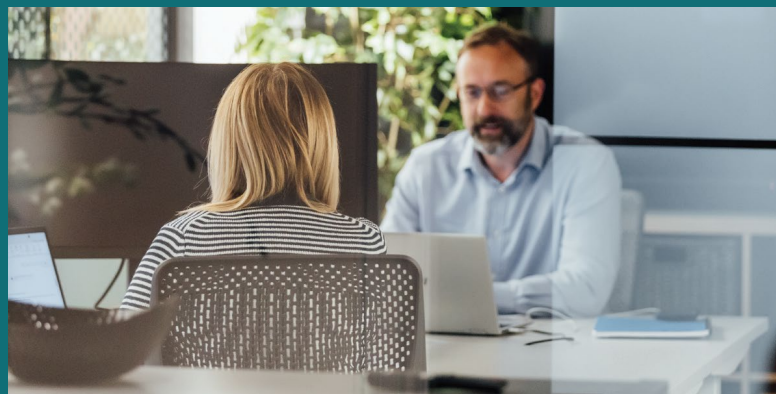
*You can support NI Hospice with a donation during Children's Hospice Week via [www.nihospice.org/chw](http://www.nihospice.org/chw)*

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# Directors' duties

avoiding personal liability for health and safety breaches



Jodie Rankin,  
Associate,  
Pinsent Masons

**F**rom a legal standpoint, one of the advantages of forming a limited liability company is the separation between the company's legal personality and the personal identities of its shareholders, company directors and senior management.

Whilst this concept, known as the "corporate veil", can offer protection to directors from liabilities arising from company debts and obligations, it does not necessarily protect directors from personal consequences following breaches of health and safety law.

## The law

In Northern Ireland, the primary legislation governing health and safety in the workplace is the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 (The 1978 Order). This key legislation imposes duties and responsibilities on "employers" to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of their employees.

However, when the 1978 Order is read in conjunction with Section 20(2) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 (The Interpretation

Act), the definition of "employer" is, in essence, considerably widened. The Interpretation Act specifically states that where an offence has been committed by a limited liability company, any person who at the time of the offence was a director, general manager, secretary or other similar officer, shall be liable to be prosecuted as if they had personally committed the offence. Such individuals can therefore be personally subject to criminal prosecution and conviction if it is proven that they consented to, connived at, or – perhaps most surprisingly – did not exercise all such reasonable diligence to prevent the offence.

**“ Directors should ensure that the board has a clear response plan in place so that if an incident occurs, it is clear which stakeholders should be contacted, and how any investigation, or interaction with the authorities should be managed. ”**

As a result, directors, general managers or company secretaries who have failed to take reasonable steps to ensure compliance with health and safety laws, ignored reports from employees regarding potential safety risks, or been involved in a decision-making process leading to unsafe working conditions, may face personal criminal convictions.

The enforcing authorities recommend the criminal prosecution of individuals if they consider that the test for prosecution is met. It is noted in the guidance published by the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) that inspectors should consider recommending to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) that personal action is taken against a director where the investigation reveals that the offence was committed with their consent, knowledge or connivance, or where the offence is attributable to lack of reasonable diligence on their part.

## Consequences

Health and safety investigations and subsequent convictions are not only disruptive to the operation of the day-to-day running of a company, but the prosecution of directors can have significant personal consequences. The relevant health and safety legislation provides the courts with substantial scope to punish offenders, and a director convicted of an offence can face



unlimited fines, disqualification or imprisonment, depending on the particular wrongdoing.

Aside from the legal penalties, a health and safety investigation and conviction can cause long-lasting reputational harm not only to the company, but to the director personally. Within their Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, the HSENI publishes the names of all companies and individuals who have been convicted in the previous 12 months of breaking health and safety law. A public register of convictions is maintained on the HSENI's website, and enforcing authorities may also notify media outlets of convictions, which alerts the public on a wider scale. In turn, the public and relevant stakeholders may lose trust in a company and its directors, who have been found to have neglected health and safety responsibilities, leading to a decline in business, loss of client base, and difficulty in attracting new employees or investors.

#### Practical tips

Whilst health and safety in the workplace is a shared and collective responsibility, company directors and other senior management should lead by example. In many ways, it is often too late to act after the incident has occurred. It is therefore imperative that preventative measures are implemented by directors from the outset, to avoid, or at least mitigate the risk of being held personally liable for health and safety breaches.

Consequently, directors should understand their legal obligations, and aim to familiarise themselves with relevant laws and industry-specific regulations. This will ensure that where day-to-day management is delegated to health and safety managers and teams, there is a suitable knowledge and oversight to guarantee that policies and safe systems of work are implemented and reviewed regularly, whilst directors and the board demonstrate commitment at board level.

These policies should cover all aspects of operations, from risk assessments and hazard controls, to emergency procedures and employee training. By modelling impressive health and safety behaviour, encouraging open communication, and engaging staff in the promotion and achievement of safe working conditions, directors are able to create a positive and vigilant safety culture.

Directors should also certify that there is a system in place whereby all company employees complete health and safety training (including both regular and refresher training) and ensure compliance with policies and procedures within the company. Similarly, those with supervisory roles should reinforce that policies and procedures are followed in practice.

In addition, directors should promote a positive, open culture where accidents and near-misses are reported and acted on appropriately, so that any corrective or remedial action, or amendments to risk assessments, policies and procedures

can be implemented. Directors should make sure that accurate records of all health and safety activities, including risk assessments, training, audits and incident reports are maintained. In the unfortunate event that an incident does arise, such records can serve as evidence that the company and director have taken reasonable steps to foster a safe working environment, thereby reducing the risk of liability.

Directors should ensure that the board has a clear response plan in place so that if an incident occurs, it is clear which stakeholders should be contacted, and how any investigation or interaction with the authorities should be managed. Directors may also have the personal benefit of holding Directors & Officers insurance cover, and in the event that both the company and director are subject to criminal investigation, both will require legal advice in relation to their respective liabilities.

To remain up to date with changes to health and safety laws and regulations, directors can consult with legal, human resources, and industry-specific experts. A director, general manager, company secretary or other similar officer, who finds themselves in the unfortunate situation of facing criminal prosecution for health and safety breaches, should seek legal advice immediately.



# Spotlight on events

**IoD NI & Artemis Human  
Capital HR Leaders Dinner with  
Mike Dawson, Belfast Harbour**

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2025 [^](#) [v](#) [>](#)





**IoD NI & Investec  
Business Dinner  
with Bill Wolsey,  
The Beannchor  
Group**

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025

^ v >





**IoD NI & EY Finance Director Forum with Martin McKay, Chair, Everway** Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2025 ^ v >



# IoD NI & RSM Power of Networking at McConnell's Distillery

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> June  
2025 ^ v >



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

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2025 **v >**





Monique Silva,  
Progressive Building Society



Gavan Walsh, ESB



Brian Cummings CDir,  
Clarendon Fund Managers



Ronan McKeown, NIE Networks



Michael Boyd CDir,  
Progressive Building Society



Peter Stafford CDir, A&L Goodbody



Niall McGill CDir



Mark Osmer CDir,  
Intelligent Buyer & Translink

  
**CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!**  
Find out more about our Professional Development programme on pg10.

# Nothing ‘casual’ about proposed changes to zero-hours contracts



Emma Grossmith & Emmie Ellison, Lewis Silkin

**T**he Department for the Economy published its official response to the ‘Good Jobs’ consultation on 25 April following a 13-week public consultation between July and September 2024.

Whilst it’s clear that the Department is proposing to make significant changes to the law on zero-hours contracts in Northern Ireland, it does not plan to ban zero-hours contracts altogether.

In its response paper, the Department says it intends to legislate to clamp down on what it calls ‘exploitive’ zero-hour contracts, with a view to striking a fairer balance between genuine flexibility for employers, and certainty for workers who are engaged on a ‘casual’ basis.

Below, we outline the proposals being taken forward by the Minister for Economy, Dr Caoimhe Archibald, for Executive approval, and how these may ultimately impact employers in NI.

## What are the proposed changes to zero-hours contracts?

A combination of factors, including the pandemic, advances in technology and the cost-of-living crisis, have led to a significant increase in the use of zero-hours or ‘casual’ contracts in recent years. According to the Office for National Statistics, it was estimated that in early 2024, around 16,000 people in Northern Ireland were engaged on this type of contract. They were especially prevalent within certain minority groups, particularly women and immigrants.

“..the Department says it intends to legislate to clamp down on what it calls ‘exploitive’ zero-hour contracts, with a view to striking a fairer balance between genuine flexibility for employers, and certainty for workers who are engaged on a ‘casual’ basis.”

This type of contract provides significant flexibility for both parties, enabling employers to manage fluctuating demand and enabling individuals to fit work around other commitments. However, in recent years they have been the subject of scrutiny and debate. The reasons for this are wide-ranging but largely boil down to the potential for uncertainty and insecurity for the individual worker. The Department’s response to the consultation outlines various key proposals to stamp out abusive practices, whilst also maintaining a level of flexibility for workers who benefit from these arrangements. The key proposals include:

- **Allowing workers to request ‘banded hours’ contracts:** some zero and low hours workers who ‘consistently and regularly’ work more than their zero-hours contract suggests, would be able to request a contract more accurately reflecting their real hours after a certain period of work.
- **A requirement for employers to inform workers of their right to request this** on day one of their appointment.

- **A requirement for employers to give reasonable notice of shift patterns** to those on low or zero-hours contracts. What ‘reasonable notice’ means isn’t yet clear.
- **Compensating low or zero-hours workers** if a shift is cancelled or shortened at short notice. Again, the rate of compensation and circumstances need to be clarified.
- **Banning exclusivity clauses** in contracts that do not guarantee income above the Lower Earnings Limit (currently £125 per week).

## How might ‘banded hours’ contracts work in practice?

The proposal to allow staff to request ‘banded hours’ contracts is quite a significant departure from the approach taken by Westminster, which focuses more on minimum levels of ‘guaranteed hours’ for casual workers. The Department’s NI proposal aligns more closely with the existing legislative framework in the Republic of Ireland (ROI), where staff already have a right to move to a contract which more accurately reflects their true working pattern in some circumstances.

Interestingly, in our stakeholder survey on the proposals for reform, only 15% of respondents were in favour of this approach, with more predictable hours being the preferred option. However, the Department reports that 51% of the respondents supported it.

If and when the ‘banded hours’ approach is adopted, it will allow staff to request to work a fixed, average weekly workload within a specified band of hours instead of a zero-hour contract with potentially fluctuating hours. The response does not go into detail about what the proposed ‘bands’ might look like, but in ROI, there are eight bands, ranging from 3-6 hours to 36 or more hours per week. It is possible we may adopt a similar approach.

### Qualifying period

There is no clarity over what the qualifying period will be before a worker can make a request, but the Department response suggests it 'may' be 26 weeks. This would make sense, given that a worker will need to demonstrate that they are regularly working above a certain level of hours for a relatively sustained period.

Exceptions - In its response, the Department acknowledges that some employers have a real and legitimate need to flex staffing arrangements, such as those with fluctuating seasonal work or with short-term events. The response refers to the framework in ROI as an example of a system which allows 'a series of exceptions to the norm in very specific circumstances'.

For example, a bar worker starting on a zero-hour contract in July might expect to have a busy summer period and then a further busy period between November and December. Under the proposals, by January, that worker might have acquired the right to request a banded hour contract, but this might still not be a desirable result for employers as January tends to be a quieter period.

### Right to request

Workers won't be under any obligation to request a banded hours contract and, of course, more casual arrangements do serve certain groups of workers particularly well, including students and parents or carers. It is therefore anticipated that employers will receive requests for banded hour contracts from employees who would benefit from more regular guaranteed hours, and we expect that there will be a requirement for employers to respond to such requests within a specified timeframe. In ROI, employers are afforded four weeks to respond.

### How might reasonable notice of shifts and compensation work in practice?

Although the introduction of banded hour contracts would diverge from the GB approach to 'guaranteed hours', granting reasonable notice of shift patterns and compensation for cancelled or curtailed shifts at short notice, is more closely aligned with other changes to zero-hours contracts in GB. Further consultation will be

needed before we know how much notice must be given, how compensation will be calculated, and what exceptions may apply. If the NI approach mirrors GB, then this is likely to mean a specific minimum amount of time before the shift is due to start.

### Compensation

It also seems likely that compensation will need to be proportionate to the cancellation or curtailment, as per GB. The level of compensation may also vary depending on how much notice is given. The maximum payment should not exceed the pay the worker would have earned if they had worked the cancelled or curtailed shift, and any payment due under the contract can be counted towards the statutory payment and vice versa.

We don't know if there are exceptions for last-minute changes, but compensation is unlikely to be payable if the changes are outside the employer's control. For example, an employer may consider it necessary to close a workplace because of health and safety concerns. There may also be variety of commercial reasons why employers may need to cancel a shift. Regulations may set out further exceptions, perhaps including an exception for those earning above a certain salary.

### Exclusivity clauses

Unsurprisingly, the Department plans to ban exclusivity clauses in zero and low hours contracts which do not guarantee an income above the Lower Earnings Limit and have long been banned in other parts of the UK. This would help to protect more vulnerable workers in NI.

### What might these changes mean for NI employers?

This development may have the biggest impact in the events and hospitality sector in Northern Ireland, which has also been particularly challenged by the additional costs involved in rises to the National Minimum Wage and to Employer's National Insurance Contributions.

Whilst further detail is awaited, and a draft bill is anticipated in January 2026 at the earliest, employers can take a number of steps to prepare for the changes:

- **Contract review:** Review how zero or low hours contracts are operating in practice in your

business. If some workers are regularly working over their contracted hours, think about whether you need to change your approach as these may be open to challenge.

- **Shift management:** Consider auditing shift patterns to see how much notice of changes staff tend to receive at present and to identify where the main challenges are likely to be in terms of changes.
- **Communication:** Explore whether you need to alter how you communicate with staff (especially in areas where changes may be needed at short notice). A tech solution might enable you to contact or reschedule staff shifts quickly.
- **Exclusivity clauses:** Consider removing exclusivity clauses in any contracts that fall below the Lower Earnings Limit.
- **Record keeping:** Keep accurate records of hours worked in advance, to allow you to support or respond to any banded hours requests and demonstrate compliance.

Finally, monitor future developments in this space. The Department for the Economy's proposals represent a significant step towards greater protection and certainty for zero and low hours workers in Northern Ireland. Whilst these changes (if agreed) will not be happening quickly, further guidance and regulatory detail will start to flow as the Department consults on the specifics of these reforms.



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