Membership
magazine of the IoD
in Northern Ireland

# DirectorNI

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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


Claire Greenwood, Oxford Instruments PLC


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

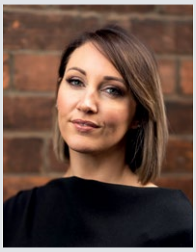

Emer Hinphey, AAB People


Richard Johnston CDir, Northern Ireland Civil Service


Joanne Mallon, Queen's University Belfast


Lorna McAdoo, Version 1


Cathy McClean, KPMG


Sarah Orange, Artemis Human Capital


Mark Osmer CDir, Translink & Intelligent Buyer Ltd


Seamus McGuckin, AIB


Lucy Mitchell, Ulster Farmers' Union


David Smith, Firmus Energy


Philip Smyth, Danske Bank UK


Sarah-Jayne Hunniford, Mount Charles Group


Gráinne Walsh, Stratagem NI


Jonathan Williamson CDir, EY Northern Ireland

# 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/**

## 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.

## Directors' Advisory Service and Information & Advisory Services (IAS):

Providing free independent and confidential business advice from specialists, and business information.

## DirectorNI Magazine:

Interested in sharing member news or providing a thought leadership article for our local directorNI magazine? Please email: **aoife.mccreesh@IoD.com**

## Mentor Connect platform:

This platform connects members looking for support and guidance on their leadership journey with those wishing to share the benefit of their experience.

Access to the platform is free to all members.

## 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 Clockwise.

## 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** for more information.

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INSIGHTS

# Energy price gap threatens investment

## and NI's economic infrastructure

Dwayne Nixon, Finance Director, Encirc

**Energy price disparities are increasingly reshaping the competitive landscape for manufacturing, with significant implications for investment, economic growth and regional prosperity.**

For Northern Ireland, where manufacturing underpins regional balance and economic resilience, persistently higher electricity costs are influencing investment decisions, operational viability and long-term business planning. This is not simply a challenge for individual companies. It affects supply chains, inward investment and the region's ability to compete internationally.

Manufacturing should therefore be recognised not simply as another sector of the economy, but as critical economic infrastructure. Like transport, digital connectivity and utilities, a competitive manufacturing base anchors regional prosperity, creates high-value employment, drives exports and provides the foundation for sustainable economic growth. Protecting that infrastructure requires strategic leadership from government as well as industry.

The figures are stark. Energy-intensive manufacturers in Northern Ireland pay around 40 per cent more for electricity than comparable businesses in Great Britain. As Great Britain already faces higher industrial electricity costs than many European competitors, Northern Ireland is operating from an even greater disadvantage.

This disparity is driven by two principal factors: the absence of key support schemes available in Great Britain, including the British Industry Supercharger, and structural costs within the Single Electricity Market. Recent UK Government measures increasing relief for eligible manufacturers in Great Britain to 90 per cent risk widening that competitive gap still further.

> **"Addressing energy cost disparities would strengthen competitiveness, unlock investment and protect a sector that delivers real economic value."**

The prospect of Northern Ireland benefiting from the British Industrial Competitiveness Scheme (BICS) is therefore a welcome development. By removing policy costs such as the Renewables Obligation and Capacity Market charges, the scheme could reduce electricity prices for eligible manufacturers by around 20–25 per cent.


However, good intentions must now be matched by delivery. We now need to work at pace. We need certainty on how the scheme will operate locally, including eligibility, implementation and interaction with the Single Electricity Market. Businesses making investment decisions cannot afford prolonged uncertainty.

Dwayne Nixon, Finance Director at Fermanagh-based glass manufacturer Encirc, said: "When energy costs are persistently higher than in neighbouring markets, investors simply look elsewhere. Northern Ireland becomes a harder sell despite its skilled workforce and strong manufacturing heritage."

Energy costs are only one part of the competitiveness challenge. Additional policy costs, including the Packaging Tax and Extended Producer Responsibility, are placing further pressure on energy-intensive sectors such as glass, weakening the business case for expansion and reinvestment.

Dwayne added: "If this differential continues, we could see companies scaling back or relocating production. That has knock-on effects for supply chains, employment and overall economic growth."

Encirc's parent company, Vidrala, made an ambitious long-term commitment to Fermanagh when it invested in the business in 2015. That confidence has helped create one of Northern Ireland's leading manufacturing businesses.

The ambition now is to see that investment continue over the next decade, supporting jobs, innovation and economic growth in the region. But that will only happen if Northern Ireland remains internationally competitive.

Dwayne concluded: "There is still an opportunity to act. Addressing energy cost disparities would strengthen competitiveness, unlock investment and protect a sector that delivers real economic value."

The challenge now extends beyond one policy or one company. It is about creating the conditions for manufacturing to thrive. That requires coordinated leadership from industry, the Executive, Westminster and cooperation with decision-makers in Dublin to ensure Northern Ireland can fully realise the opportunities presented by its unique trading position and integrated electricity market.

If Northern Ireland is to be a great place to live, work and invest, manufacturing must be treated as the strategic economic infrastructure that it is.

Delivering a genuinely level playing field on energy costs would not simply support manufacturers; it would strengthen regional competitiveness, attract investment and secure the long-term economic resilience of Northern Ireland.

*For more information, visit: www.encirc360.com*

# Opportunity on the Horizon

Dr Theresa Donaldson CDir, Chair of Belfast Harbour Commissioners

**For nearly two centuries, Belfast Harbour has been at the heart of the region's economy serving as a trust port to enable trade and growth.**

Our role has evolved over the years as trade has grown and the region has changed, and now the Board and Executive Team are looking to the future with the launch of the Belfast Harbour 2050 Masterplan: Horizons of Opportunity.

Setting out a 25-year framework for continued growth, the Masterplan will deliver an estimated £1.3bn investment in port infrastructure to secure the future of trade on the island of Ireland. The opportunity, as we see it, is to become the principal maritime gateway on the Dublin–Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC), strengthening its role as a critical hub for Irish Sea trade and a primary link with Great Britain.

Today, we handle 70% of Northern Ireland's seaborne trade and a quarter of all seaborne trade across the island of Ireland. We provide a base for more than 760 businesses and 27,000 jobs and have secured our position as a cornerstone of Northern Ireland economy, contributing £8.8bn in Gross Value Added (GVA) from the trade facilitated through the port.

Spanning across 2,000 acres of land and 1,000 acres of water, our scale is what sets us apart from other ports. It allows us to integrate all our activities – trade, logistics, clean energy and developing new communities – in a single, connected environment. We are an innovative organisation, and over the years, we've found many ways to diversify.

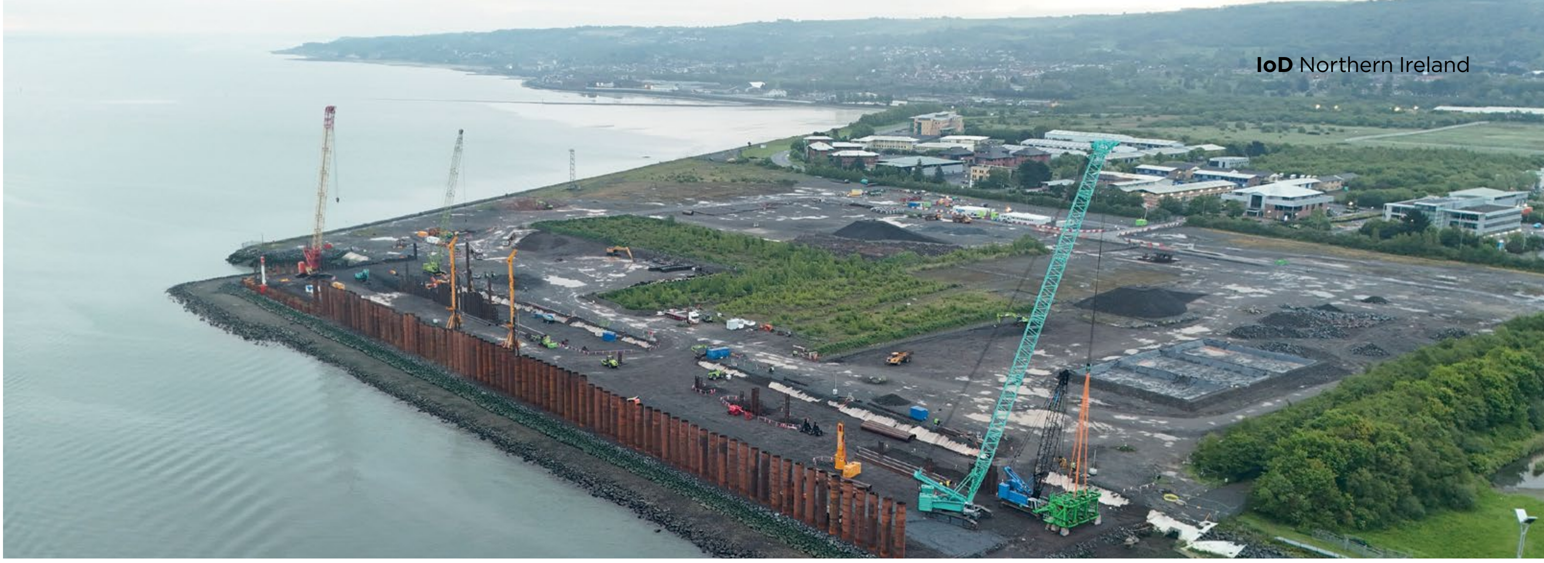
However, first and foremost, Belfast Harbour is a working port. Everything else we do is built around our port operations, and that is why throughout the Masterplan period, we are investing £1.3bn in critical infrastructure projects to secure the future of Irish Sea trade.

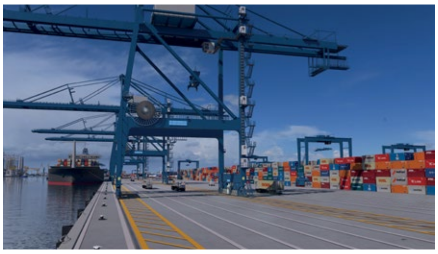
Port Master Planning experts Haskoning estimate that trade volumes through Belfast Harbour could increase from around 24 million tonnes today to 30 million by 2050 under steady growth scenarios and could exceed 40 million tonnes under higher growth scenarios. We believe that Belfast Harbour is uniquely positioned to facilitate the expected growth, and as capacity tightens at other ports, we plan to put the scale of the Harbour Estate to work.

Decisions that we make now will still be felt 100 years down the line, so we are planning the decisions that must be taken today to ensure that existing infrastructure can keep pace with capacity requirements.

A key priority remains the reclassification of Belfast Harbour's accounting status, which would allow us to borrow prudently to fund critical investment.

Our Masterplan is laid out in three horizons. Horizon 1 is based on the five-year Advance Regional Prosperity strategy that we launched last year, and is currently being executed. It includes the development of the new £90 million deepwater berth at D3, which will support growth in the offshore wind and cruise sectors.






From 2030, we will see the redevelopment of the longest deepwater quay on the island of Ireland, Stormont Wharf, as well as a new logistics park near Belfast City Airport and the expansion of Belfast Harbour Marina.

During Horizon 3, we have a range of large-scale projects including our first land reclamation project in 25 years to create space for either a new container terminal or ferry operations, on West Bank Road beyond Victoria Terminal 4. We also plan to develop a new clean energy hub.

While the port remains our primary focus, this Masterplan also identifies housing and regeneration opportunities for the wider Harbour Estate, and we are committed to investing in our communities. These developments will require additional investment of between £500 million and £750 million and we are actively exploring the delivery models and commercial partnerships needed to bring these projects to fruition.

Partnership will be critical as we take the Masterplan forward. There are factors beyond the Harbour Estate that will affect delivery. Energy grid capacity, water infrastructure, transport connections and wider planning policy are not within our direct control. These issues will require coordinated action across government, regulators and infrastructure providers. We will work with these partners to deliver the full potential of the Masterplan for the benefit of our customers, tenants, residents and the wider regional economy.

> **“Setting out a 25-year framework for continued growth, the Masterplan will deliver an estimated £1.3bn investment in port infrastructure to secure the future of trade on the island of Ireland.”**

Our commitment to investing in infrastructure would be fruitless if we didn’t also invest in the skills of the future to support the port’s development and daily operations. Our people are what keep the business driving forward. The proposed Maritime Skills Academy will help ensure that the jobs this plan creates are accessible to people across Belfast and beyond – connecting our infrastructure investment to workforce development and inclusive growth.

As a business, Belfast Harbour has always planned proactively to keep pace with changes in trade, technology and the city itself. The Masterplan continues that approach, and is realistic in what we can deliver alone, and what we will require from others. It is not a fixed blueprint, or a planning application. It is a flexible vision that will adapt as trade, policy and technology evolve.

The ethos of Belfast Harbour Commissioners is to leave behind something better than they inherited, and this is what has driven the Board’s ambition. It is our responsibility to build on Belfast Harbour’s strong foundations, to plan for the long-term and create a realistic roadmap to secure the port’s future.

HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS KRAMER

IoD NI Women's Leadership Conference 2026

# Learn more about our Pitch Perfect Finalists

We hear from our 2026 Pitch Perfect Finalists from this year's Women's Leadership Conference. First up is Sarah Scullion, Co- Founder & COO of CAST Planning Ltd.

## When knowledge walks out the door

Sarah Scullion, Co-Founder and COO, CAST Planning Ltd

**The next challenge for infrastructure—and every organisation that depends on expertise—isn't collecting more data. It's preserving judgement.**

Every organisation has people whose value is almost impossible to quantify. They're the ones colleagues turn to when something doesn't look right. The ones who ask the question no one else thought to ask. When they leave, something leaves with them—and it rarely appears on any balance sheet.

The infrastructure sector knows this challenge particularly well.

For much of the past decade, the sector has invested heavily in solving the data problem. Better mapping, richer asset records, connected systems and collaborative initiatives have transformed the information available to those planning and delivering work.

Yet despite those advances, accidental utility strikes continue to happen. Projects are delayed. Costs escalate. Critical services are disrupted. Most importantly, people are put at risk.

When Chris and I founded CAST, we assumed many of the industry's biggest conversations would revolve around missing information. Instead, through hundreds of discussions with infrastructure owners, contractors, planners and engineers, one theme surfaced again and again.

The challenge wasn't simply access to data.

It was confidence in the decisions being made from it.

Every day, thousands of planning decisions are made long before the first excavator arrives on site. A planner reviews utility records, permit conditions, environmental constraints, previous works and traffic management requirements. Each piece of information is valuable, but none of it, in isolation, determines whether work can proceed safely.

That decision comes from interpretation.

It comes from experience.

A planner may have every available record in front of them, yet still pause because something doesn't quite add up. That moment of professional judgement—knowing when to question the information rather than simply accept it—is often where risk is avoided.

The best planners don't simply follow a checklist. They instinctively recognise when something doesn't quite look right, when another question needs to be asked or when one additional check could prevent a costly mistake. Their judgement has been built over years of experience, yet much of that expertise exists only in their heads.

That observation fundamentally changed how we viewed innovation.

Over the past decade, enormous progress has been made in making infrastructure data more accessible. Initiatives such as digital mapping, shared asset records and increasingly connected platforms such as LSBUD and NUAR are creating an unprecedented level of visibility across the sector. Those investments are essential, and they are laying the foundations for the future.

But better visibility alone doesn't guarantee better decisions.

> **“That reinforced something we've come to believe strongly as founders. The answer always lies in the market.”**

As organisations become increasingly data-rich, the next challenge is helping people consistently interpret that information, understand what matters most and make confident, defensible decisions from it.

***Information creates visibility. Judgement creates action.***

For Chris, this insight came from nearly twenty years working in telecommunications infrastructure, where every planning decision carried operational, financial and safety implications. The more we discussed those experiences, the more we realised that organisations weren't struggling because they lacked systems. They were struggling because so much of their best decision-making lived with a relatively small number of highly experienced people.

It's a pattern that leaders in almost every sector will recognise.

Organisations don't just lose experience when people leave.

They lose judgement: the instinct to ask one more question, spot one subtle risk or recognise when something simply doesn't feel right. And that knowledge is rarely written down.

That raised a simple but powerful question.

***How do you preserve and scale your best planner's judgement?***

It's a question that has shaped everything we've built since.

One of the greatest privileges of building an early-stage company has been the opportunity to listen. Over the past year we've spent hundreds of hours speaking with organisations across the UK, Ireland and the United States, deliberately testing our assumptions rather than looking for people to confirm them.

The conversations were remarkably consistent.

Regardless of organisation, technology stack or geography, people spoke less about needing another platform and more about retaining expertise, improving consistency, reducing avoidable risk and understanding not only what decisions were made, but why they were made.

That reinforced something we've come to believe strongly as founders. ***The answer always lies in the market.***

Those conversations have also given us confidence that the industry's next opportunity isn't replacing professional judgement with artificial intelligence. It's preserving expertise, making it more accessible and helping organisations apply it more consistently. Importantly, they changed our own thinking. We didn't simply validate an idea; we fundamentally refined it.

Selection for Techstars Founder Catalyst, recognition as finalists in the National LSBUD Awards for Safety Innovation, and the opportunity to begin early pilot collaborations with infrastructure organisations have all reinforced our belief that this is a challenge the industry is ready to solve.

Perhaps that's because the pressures facing infrastructure have never been greater. Ageing assets, increasing demand, tighter regulation and growing expectations around resilience all mean that the quality of decision-making matters more than ever.

Technology will undoubtedly continue to transform the industry. We will have richer datasets, more connected systems and increasingly sophisticated analytical tools.

But none of those replace judgement.

They should strengthen it.

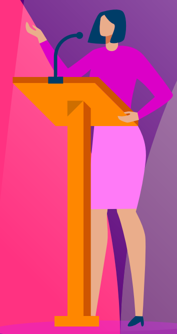
Building CAST has taught us that meaningful innovation rarely starts with technology. It starts with understanding how people actually make decisions, where experience creates value and how that knowledge can be preserved before it's lost.

When we think about the organisations that endure—in infrastructure, in manufacturing, in professional services, in any sector built on expertise—they share something in common. They found ways to preserve what their best people knew, not just what they did.

Behind every successful organisation are thousands of decisions that most people will never see—decisions shaped by judgement that was never written down, never transferred and, in too many cases, never preserved.

If we can help organisations preserve the judgement behind those decisions—not replace it, but preserve and scale it—we'll have created something far more valuable than another software platform.

We'll have helped protect one of every organisation's greatest competitive advantages: its collective judgement.



# The business of what we don't talk about

Gillian Noble &
Helen Todd, LastSay

**As business leaders, we plan for almost every eventuality in our organisations. We build continuity plans, manage risk, and decide who steps in if a key person becomes unavailable. We document processes, protect assets and keep things moving when the unexpected happens.**

But do we apply the same thinking to our own lives?

When Gillian Noble spoke at the recent IoD Women's Conference, she asked a direct question: what would happen if someone else suddenly had to step in and manage your personal affairs?

In business, colleagues would know where to find essential information, access key systems and keep things moving. In our personal lives, the reality is often very different.

Gretel's Lost Assets Index estimates around £82 billion in lost assets across pensions, bank accounts, life insurance, shares and investments. Will Aid reports that around two-thirds of UK adults either do not have a will or have one that is out of date. When someone dies, the practical administration can take many months. The Probate Bureau reports that straightforward estates in England and Wales typically take around 9 to 12 months to administer, while more complex cases can take 18 months or longer.

These are not edge cases. They are the norm, and behind every statistic is a person trying to cope at the worst possible moment.

### Introducing LastSay

LastSay is a secure digital platform co-founded by Gillian Noble and Helen Todd to help users organise important information and end-of-life wishes in one secure place, before a crisis makes doing so urgent.

Users build a personal vault that can hold their will, financial accounts, insurance policies, pensions, property documents, healthcare preferences, funeral wishes, passwords, digital assets and personal messages. It captures what the person wants and who needs to know.

When the time comes, whether that is serious illness, loss of capacity or death, a trusted person is given structured access. For families, it means knowing where to begin. For a solicitor or professional executor, LastSay becomes a command centre: what exists, what has been decided and what needs to happen next. The administrative burden is significant.

Research by the UK Commission on Bereavement found that 61% of adults experienced difficulty with at least one practical or administrative task following a bereavement. LastSay is designed to complement, not replace, the professionals people already rely on.

### Two founders, one purpose

LastSay has been shaped by two women with different but complementary experience, and a shared refusal to look away from a problem that will affect almost every one of us.

Gillian brings over twenty years in software development and engineering leadership, guided by the conviction that technology should solve real, practical problems.

Helen brings expertise in people strategy, HR, partnership and advocacy, plus personal experience. In 2017, Helen's husband was diagnosed with an incurable brain tumour and severe acquired brain injury. Helen became an unpaid carer while continuing to work and supporting their young son. Alongside the grief came appointments, legal documents, financial decisions, caring arrangements and administration that did not pause because the family was in crisis.

For Gillian and Helen, LastSay is a practical response to a problem many people recognise but struggle to address.

### A problem hiding in plain sight

People plan for careers, businesses, holidays, finances and retirement. Organisations develop succession plans and risk registers. Yet planning for serious illness, incapacity or death is frequently delayed or avoided.

Important information is often scattered across filing cabinets, devices, online accounts and professional advisers. Some details exist only in one person's memory, leaving others unsure where to begin.

> **"Practical support around caring, bereavement and life administration is a natural and overdue extension of wellbeing work."**

Where is the will? Is there a Power of Attorney? Which accounts and policies exist? Where are passwords stored? What did the person want?

When these questions remain unanswered, they add stress at the exact moment people are least equipped to deal with it. Grief cannot be removed, but avoidable confusion can be reduced.

### Why this matters to business

Although end-of-life planning is deeply personal, its impact is also felt directly in the workplace.

Employees do not leave caring responsibilities, bereavement or personal crises at the door. Someone dealing with bereavement may also be locating documents, closing accounts, arranging a funeral and navigating unfamiliar processes, often during working hours and often alone. A carer may be balancing work with appointments, paperwork and decisions about another person's care.

Sue Ryder's research on grief in the workplace has highlighted the scale of this impact, with grief-related absence and reduced productivity often cited as costing the UK economy around £23 billion a year.

Practical support around caring, bereavement and life administration is a natural and overdue extension of wellbeing work.

### Changing the conversation

Talking about death does not make it happen. Planning for serious illness does not mean expecting the worst. It means accepting that life can change unexpectedly, and preparing so others are not left to work everything out alone.

For directors and business leaders, there are two questions worth considering. If something unexpected happened, how easily could someone else find the information needed to manage your affairs? If an employee faced a similar situation, how well would your organisation support them through the emotional and practical reality of it?

To learn more about LastSay, or discuss how your organisation could work with Gillian and Helen, visit lastsay.co.uk

LastSay is a secure digital platform that helps users organise important information, assets and end-of-life wishes in one place.

When needed, it becomes an executor's command centre, helping a trusted person locate information and navigate what happens next.

If your organisation supports clients, families or communities through significant life events, LastSay would welcome a conversation about working together.

Visit www.lastsay.co.uk or email hello@lastsay.co.uk.

# From grief to the boardroom: Leadership lessons from building a mental health charity

Yasmin Geddis, Founder & CEO, Zachary Geddis Trust

**When I founded the Zachary Geddis Trust in 2017, I was not thinking about leadership. I was thinking about survival, about honouring the memory of my brother Zachary, about filling a void I could see so clearly in the mental health support available to people in our community and about making something meaningful from unimaginable loss.**

Nearly nine years later, the charity supports more than 200 clients every week across Coleraine and the wider region with plans of expansion in late 2026. We have a community-based centre, four service strands, and a growing team I am immensely proud of. And in March, I had the privilege of winning the IoD Northern Ireland Pitch Perfect competition for International Women's Day - an experience that has given me more than a trophy. It has given me clarity.

> **"Purpose does not solve problems, but it ensures you keep solving the right ones."**

Here is what I have learned about leadership from building something out of grief.

Purpose is not a strategy, but it is a foundation.

Every decision I have made since founding the Zachary Geddis Trust has been filtered through one question: does this serve the people we exist for? That instinct has kept the organisation grounded through funding pressures, through the pandemic, and through the relentless demands of running a grassroots organisation with limited resources. Purpose does not solve problems, but it ensures you keep solving the right ones.

Vulnerability is a leadership skill.

As women in leadership, we are often told to project confidence, authority, certainty. My experience has been the opposite. The most powerful thing I have done in every room – from community halls to boardrooms – is to tell the truth about why this work matters to me personally. People do not follow titles. They follow honesty.


### Knowing your numbers is an act of advocacy

In the charity sector, passion is never enough. You must be able to demonstrate impact – the Zachary Geddis Trust supported 1,355 people in 2025 alone, generating £1.7 million in social value. For every £1 donated, we generate £4.23. Learning to speak that language fluently, and to translate lived experience into the metrics that decision-makers understand, has been one of the steepest and most important learning curves of my leadership journey.


### On winning Pitch Perfect

Standing in front of a panel for IoD NI's International Women's Day competition and distilling eight years of purpose, impact, and ambition into a few minutes was both terrifying and clarifying. The process of preparing forced me to articulate something I had been living rather than naming, that community-led mental health support is not a nice-to-have but an economic and social necessity.

Winning has opened doors. It has led to new conversations, new partnerships, and, perhaps most importantly, a renewed confidence that the story I am telling on behalf of the people we serve deserves to be heard in every room.

My advice to any woman considering stepping forward, whether into a pitch competition, a board role, or simply speaking up in a room where she has previously stayed quiet: your lived experience is not a liability. It is your most credible qualification.

The Zachary Geddis Trust exists because I refused to be silent about loss. Everything that has followed has been built on that same refusal.

**The Zachary Geddis Trust is seeking three voluntary Advisory Board Members to join our growing charity.**

We are specifically looking for professionals with expertise in:

- Medicine/General Practice
- Social Media and Digital Communications
- Mental Health (Clinical or Practitioner)

We also have a Treasurer's slot available on the main board. The Zachary Geddis Trust is seeking a voluntary Trustee to join our Board as Honorary Treasurer. We are looking for someone with a background in finance, accountancy, or financial management who can provide oversight of the Trust's accounts, budgets, and financial reporting - ensuring we remain compliant, sustainable, and focused on impact.

**Email:** yasmin@zgbtst.org

# NI entrepreneur's plans to take on global tech giants with world-first wellbeing platform for children

Laura King, Founder, BloomBand

**An entrepreneur from County Down is building a world-first technology platform to help parents better understand their children following support from the IoD.**

Laura King, a 36-year-old mother of two, has launched BloomBand, a technology and hardware platform that brings wellness wearables to children.

BloomBand is a children's welltech platform for parents and caregivers of children aged 2-12. Phase 1 is the AI companion app, translating parent-reported and (eventually) sensor data into plain-language insights and personalised guidance. Phase 2, a future hardware layer, will introduce a soft, child-safe wearable band, monitoring heart rate variability, sleep cycles, and activity, feeding richer data into the same AI engine.

With the BloomBand app in active development, strong demand validation from parents across Ireland and the UK, and winner of 'Rising Star Award' at the UK Start Up Awards this June, BloomBand.io is fast becoming one of Northern Ireland's most watched emerging businesses.

When Laura King pitched at the IoD NI Pitch Perfect Competition earlier this year, she made a room full of seasoned business leaders feel the gap in the market.

"Over a third of adults wear a wellness wearable," she told the IoD delegates. "We track our sleep, our stress, our recovery. But for our children, there is nothing."

Six months on, Laura has transformed BloomBand from a compelling pitch into a business with genuine momentum, built deliberately, and in a sequence she believes most hardware-led startups get wrong, with early support from AwakenHub. AwakenHub is an all-island social enterprise in Ireland dedicated to removing barriers to investment, scaling, and success for women founders.

"We made a strategic decision early on to build software first," says Laura.

"Too many wearable startups burn their entire runway and credibility trying to manufacture hardware before they've proven anyone wants what's underneath it. We flipped that. We're validating the insight layer, the thing that actually matters to parents and caregivers, before the hardware goes into production."

An open customer validation survey, completed by parents across Ireland and the UK - has returned data Laura describes as "beyond what we hoped for."

"We went directly to parents and caregivers, mothers in particular, and asked them to tell us honestly whether this solved a real problem in their lives. The response was astounding. Parents don't just want this product. They feel the absence of it."

That demand is now shaping a parent-facing AI companion app, Phase 1 of the BloomBand platform, currently in active development. The app offers daily check-ins, weekly insight reports, a developmental journey view, giving parents a way to understand their child's wellbeing patterns without any hardware required.

"The app comes first because the insight is the product. Parents can start building a picture of their child's sleep, mood, and stress patterns today, through check-ins and guided reflection. The wearable, when it arrives, simply makes that picture richer and more automatic. It's an enhancement to something that already works, not a precondition for it."

"It gets more valuable the longer you use it."

"We're not claiming to be a medical device. We're building the children's equivalent of what Fitbit and Oura did for adults - something trusted, useful, and genuinely woven into daily life. The AI layer is what makes it different. It learns your child's individual patterns over time and gets more accurate, more personalised, and more valuable the longer you use it."

Rather than rushing to hardware, the company has spent the early months of 2026 stress-testing every assumption – the market, the regulatory pathway, the technology approach, the unit economics – and concluded that proving the AI insight layer first was the only credible path.

**The bigger picture**

The market context is hard to ignore. One in five children aged five to sixteen in the UK has a probable mental health problem, according to NHS data. Childhood anxiety referrals have risen more than fifty per cent since the pandemic in 2020. The average wait for CAMHS support in Northern Ireland currently exceeds two years.

BloomBand is not positioning itself as a clinical solution to those challenges, but the company is candid about the role they believe that early, accessible insight can play in closing the gap between a parent or caregiver noticing something is wrong and getting meaningful support.

**"Right now, the focus is on the app, a pre-seed raise, and a consumer launch on track for early 2027."**

"If a parent can see, over six weeks, that their child's mood or stress patterns spike every Sunday evening, or shift during term time – that's actionable information. That's a conversation with a teacher, or a GP, or just a change in routine. We give parents something they've never had before: a clearer picture, built from their own observations and, in time, from real physiological data too."

Right now, the focus is on the app, a pre-seed raise, and a consumer launch on track for early 2027.

**A Northern Ireland success story in the making**

For the IoD NI community, BloomBand represents something beyond a promising product. It is a demonstration of what is possible when commercial rigour, lived experience, and genuine innovation align.

"Every child deserves to be understood. It's the reason this business exists. We're proving the demand first, building the product parents actually need, and we're doing it properly. I think that matters."


# Closing the Gap:

## Why productivity must be Northern Ireland manufacturing's next frontier

Mark Huddleston,
Director,
jheSOLUTIONS
Limited

**In 2021, a group of Northern Ireland manufacturers came together under the chairmanship of Sir Michael Ryan CBE to speak with one voice.**

Makers Alliance formed at a moment of real instability. Global supply chains were under strain. Energy costs were climbing.

The sector's contribution to the Northern Ireland economy was not matched by its voice in shaping policy. As joint CEOs, Mark Nodder and Mark Huddleston, supported by the Makers Panel of industrialists, saw what that collective effort produced: a Strategic Plan in 2022, then a Delivery Plan in 2024, both built on direct engagement between industry, government and academia, and both grounded in the everyday realities facing manufacturers from Newry to the Derry / Londonderry and from Enniskillen to Bangor.

That work has concluded. Its evidence base has not gone stale. The case for action is stronger now than it was five years ago.

### *Why manufacturing matters*

Manufacturing contributes around fourteen per cent of Northern Ireland's GDP and supports a quarter of a million jobs across the wider economy, seventy per cent of them outside Belfast. It is one of the few sectors that is genuinely regional in its impact and one of the few still delivering a trade surplus for the UK. Between 2011 and 2021, output per hour in Northern Ireland manufacturing grew faster than in any other UK region. This is core economic infrastructure. What happens to its productivity has consequences for every director in every sector. A region's overall competitiveness rests on the strength of its tradeable industries.

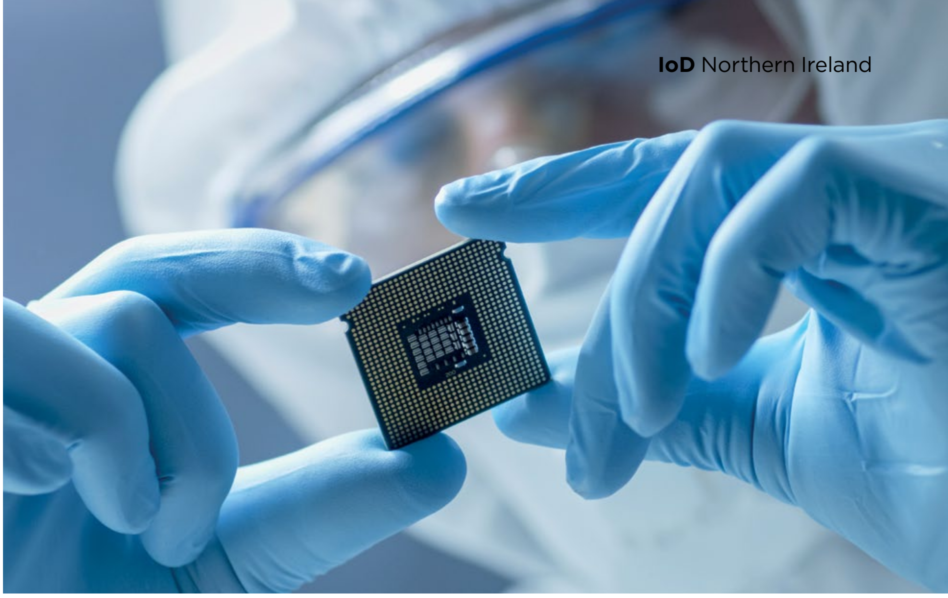
### *The challenge: too much activity, not enough impact*

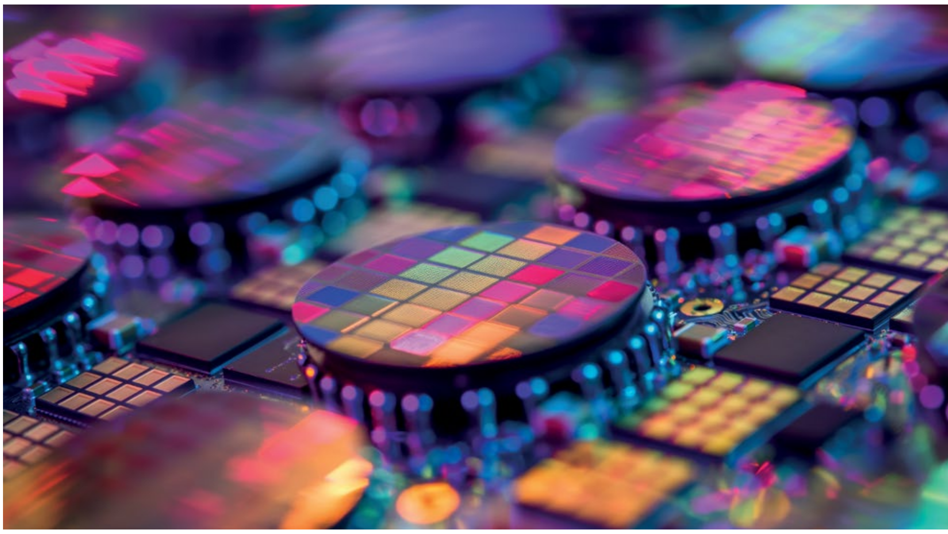
The biggest obstacle Makers Alliance identified was not a lack of support. It was the opposite. An SME looking for help today is confronted with well over a hundred different programmes, spread across local councils, Invest NI, InterTrade Ireland, Innovate UK, further education colleges and universities. Each may be well intentioned. Collectively they confuse rather than help. Smaller manufacturers do not have the time or the cash to evaluate a hundred options. So they often engage with none.

Skills compound the problem. Stephen Kelly, CEO of Manufacturing NI, put it plainly during the consultation that shaped the Delivery Plan: there are not any more people, so the sector has to do better with the people it has. Annual demand sits at around six thousand roles across technical and supervisory levels. The Apprenticeship / Skills Levy still acts as a payroll tax rather than a genuine skills investment.

### *The solution: a Productivity Escalator*

The most practical answer Makers Alliance proposed is also the





simplest to explain. Rather than adding another scheme, the Delivery Plan called for pulling existing activity into a five-step Productivity Escalator: assessment and benchmarking, data capture, adoption of digital and productivity tools, technology and process improvement, and large-scale development and deployment. Each step already has a credible delivery partner attached to it. The Smart Industry Readiness Index handle benchmarking. The Smart Manufacturing Data Hub or the new programmes like E-Data handle data capture. Made Smarter and the excellent Knowledge Transfer activity of the universities handles adoption. The new Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre and CADRIC handle large-scale deployment.

The value of the Escalator is not novelty. It is order. A business can see where it sits, what the next step looks like, and who delivers it, instead of guessing which of a hundred schemes might apply to them. The model only works if government support stays in place long enough for productivity gains to embed. A previous round of business improvement investment was so successful after the financial crisis that funding was withdrawn in 2010, just as the gains were taking hold. That mistake should not be repeated.

> **“The test for these investments is not how impressive the facilities look. It is how many ordinary manufacturers walk through the door and come out more productive.”**

***The opportunity***

Northern Ireland now has real assets to put behind this approach. The City and Regional Growth Deals will bring tens of millions of investment into advanced manufacturing, robotics, digital twinning and clean technology. The UK Government's Made Smarter Adoption Programme is due to extend to Northern Ireland in 2026-27. None of this will matter if SMEs cannot access it simply and confidently. The test for these investments is not how impressive the facilities look. It is how many ordinary manufacturers walk through the door and come out more productive.

For IoD members, the lesson travels well beyond manufacturing. Wherever a sector is awash with well-meaning but uncoordinated support, the answer is rarely more initiatives. It is a clear, sequenced pathway that respects how little time business leaders actually have. Northern Ireland's manufacturers have done the hard work of mapping that pathway. The task now, for government, industry bodies and directors across every sector, is delivery.

MAKERS ALLIANCE

# Our members

As a member of the UK's leading business network, our members have access to a wide range of support and services.

In every edition, we introduce you to some of our members through these profiles and encourage you to network and engage with our IoD Northern Ireland community.

MEMBER PROFILE

## Charlene Brooks

### Belfast Healthy Cities

Charlene Brooks is Chief Executive of Belfast Healthy Cities, a WHO-designated Healthy City, driving health equity through sustainable urban development. Since April 2024, she has led strategic programmes embedding health in city planning; influencing policy on green infrastructure, active travel, and community resilience.

With over 25 years' leadership in the voluntary and community sector, she previously served as CEO of Parenting NI, advancing early intervention and system reform for families. Charlene was Chair of NICVA until March 2025 and Independent Chair of the Charity Commission NI Stakeholder Forum (2021–2025). Appointed by the Minister for Health, she has served as a Lay Member of the Patient and Client Council since December 2025 and contributes to Belfast's VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel.

MEMBER PROFILE

## Christopher Moffet

### Citi's Enterprise

Christopher is a Vice President in Citi's Enterprise Data Office, specialising in master and reference data strategy across global markets. Based in Belfast, Christopher has more than 12 years' experience in financial services, spanning permanent and consulting roles across banking, brokerage and capital markets transformation. His work focuses on data governance, regulatory alignment, operating model change and the delivery of strategic technology and data initiatives. Alongside his professional role, Christopher is an MBA student at Queen's University Belfast and an IoD Student Member, with a strong interest in leadership, entrepreneurship and director development. He is particularly focused on building commercially scalable businesses that combine technology, property and social impact.

By the end of this year, Christopher plans to launch MyMedRoom, an AI-enabled PropTech venture delivering co-living accommodation for healthcare professionals, starting with junior doctors in the UK and overseas. The business aims to reduce relocation friction, housing instability and affordability pressures through compliant HMO accommodation near NHS Trusts, supported by a digital platform for tenant matching, commute efficiency, customer experience and occupancy forecasting. Outside work and study, Christopher enjoys travel, football and golf. He is passionate about Northern Ireland's business community and hopes to contribute to its next generation of growth-focused entrepreneurs.

MEMBER PROFILE

## Gail Kinkead

### Construction Employers Federation

Gail Kinkead is Head of Membership at the Construction Employers Federation (CEF), representing an organisation whose members account for more than 70% of Northern Ireland's construction sector. She leads the development of member services, drives membership growth and engagement, and works closely with existing and prospective members to ensure CEF continues to deliver value, influence and support across the industry. A key part of her role is building and strengthening corporate relationships, creating strategic partnerships and fostering collaboration between businesses, policymakers and industry stakeholders to support the sector's long-term success

With a career spanning senior business development and stakeholder engagement roles across agendaNi, Energy Ireland and Environment Ireland, Gail has built a reputation for connecting people, organisations and ideas to create lasting value. Her expertise lies in relationship building, corporate engagement, membership development and identifying opportunities that drive sustainable growth.

Passionate about leadership, mentoring and collaboration, Gail is committed to supporting businesses and individuals to realise their potential. As an IoD member, she values the opportunity to learn from fellow leaders, share experiences and contribute to shaping a resilient and prosperous future for Northern Ireland.

MEMBER PROFILE

## Peter McGowan

### Tetra Tech Europe
### Peter McGowan Consulting
### Men's Advisory Project

Peter is a Chartered Electrical Engineer MIET, FCIBSE, FIHEEM, with over 30 years of experience in design, project management and team leadership. He has worked on local and international construction projects across multiple sectors and in recent years his focus has been on healthcare and pharma projects, including two new national hospitals.

He has recently joined Tetra Tech, one of the world's largest science and engineering consultancies and is currently managing the engineering systems on a major new hospital project in Belfast.

Peter has multiple interests which he is passionate about and is a Leadership and Organisational Coach and an Accredited Clinical Psychotherapist MUKCP, MBACP.

Peter also sits on the board of local charity MAP NI, which offers support to male victims of partner and family domestic abuse.

MEMBER PROFILE

## Peter Winter

**Winter Strategies**

Peter Winter leads Winter Strategies, bringing seasoned diplomatic expertise to Northern Ireland's business community.

A former senior U.S. diplomat, he now advises corporates, governments, and non-profits on international expansion, policy and public affairs, stakeholder engagement, and risk mitigation to clients on both sides of the Atlantic.

His diplomatic postings included China, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Washington and most recently as Spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy in Egypt, overseeing strategic communications for 15+ agencies at one of the largest embassies in the world.

Winter is also the UK and Ireland representative for EDGE Partners, a cross-border advisory and investment firm with deep connections to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

To have your profile featured email: aoife.mccreesh@IoD.com



# Inside the Balmoral buzz:

## Why the show matters to Queen's, and to Northern Ireland's future

Dr Ryan Feeney, Vice-President and Registrar, Queen's University Belfast

**The Balmoral Show was back with a bang for 2026, bringing together farmers, families, business leaders and policymakers from across Northern Ireland.**

It's one of the most important fixtures in our calendar and a celebration of the innovation, resilience and ambition that exists across our agricultural and rural sectors.

For Queen's University Belfast, it is also an important opportunity to demonstrate how research, innovation and collaboration can deliver tangible results for business.

This year, more than 260 Queen's staff and students took part in the show, engaging directly with businesses, industry partners and members of the public. Across four days, our teams showcased research and innovation that's helping organisations improve productivity, manage risk, respond to changing regulatory requirements and identify new opportunities for growth.

Visitors to our stand got a front-row seat to some eye-opening discoveries. Queen's researchers are tackling everything from the spread of the deadly bluetongue virus in livestock, to why women are less likely to receive CPR due to bias and hesitation, and to groundbreaking work showing how what we eat could lower the risk of dementia. There was also a powerful visual display shining a light on radon gas, the invisible killer linked to cancer, bringing a hidden danger into sharp focus.

One particularly exciting innovation was Vibrotect, a wearable technology developed by Queen's students, preventing the painful, disabling, and entirely preventable harm caused by prolonged use of vibrating tools on construction sites. The project demonstrates the commercial potential of student-led innovation and shows how research and creativity can be applied to improve workplace safety.

The Balmoral Show provides an important opportunity to bring this type of critical research to life. It creates opportunities for meaningful conversations between researchers and those working at the frontline of industry, helping us better understand the challenges businesses face.

Here at Queen's, we are proud of our role in society. For more than 180 years, the university has been educating generations of students, advancing discovery, contributing to civic life and acting as an anchor institution for Northern Ireland.

Today, Queen's is ranked among the world's top 175 universities, is a member of the Russell Group of leading UK research-intensive universities and one of the top three universities on the island of Ireland. We were recently named UK University of the Year in the WhatUni Student Choice Awards,


while Queen's Students' Union was ranked number one in the UK for the second consecutive year, voted entirely by students. These achievements matter because they reflect the experiences and ambitions of the people we serve.

However, our role as a university extends far beyond education and skills. We have a significant influence on the economy through research, innovation and collaboration with industry. A recent report by London Economics estimated Queen's annual economic impact at more than £3.35 billion, while the average Queen's degree delivers more than £120,000 in lifetime value to our graduates.

Northern Ireland's future prosperity will be shaped by our ability to innovate, attract investment and compete internationally. That requires highly skilled graduates working alongside talented people from a wide range of educational and professional backgrounds.

Universities have a vital role to play in that ecosystem, helping individuals realise their potential while providing employers with the talent they need to grow and succeed.

**“The Balmoral Show provides an important opportunity to bring this type of critical research to life..”**

For me, that is the real significance of events like the Balmoral Show. They provide a visible reminder that universities are not separate from society or business. They are part of the ecosystem that helps drive economic growth, supports innovation and creates new and better jobs for future generations.

The conversations started at Balmoral do not end when the show closes. They continue through partnerships, research collaborations and shared ambitions that help shape Northern Ireland's future. Through initiatives such as the Chief Executives' Club, innovation partnerships and our Access the Expert programme of business events, Queen's helps organisations connect directly with world-class expertise, research capability and graduate talent.

After this year's success, Queen's is already planning to be even more ambitious at Balmoral 2027, exploring new ways to work more closely with industry, accelerate innovation and support economic growth across Northern Ireland.

To collaborate with Queen's University Belfast or to express an interest in joining the Chief Executives Club, please contact businessengagement@qub.ac.uk

# Career Conversations:

## Leadership insights with Richard Greenwood

Richard Greenwood, Director and Founder, Verus Search

**Over the course of the first three episodes of Career Conversations, I have had the privilege of speaking with three leaders who have shaped organisations in very different sectors: Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce; Roger Johnston, Chief Executive of Axial3D; and Dominic Kearns, Chief Executive and Founder of Fibrus.**

Their careers span local government, healthcare technology, telecommunications and entrepreneurship. Their journeys are different. Their personalities are different. Their experiences are different.

Yet there was a striking consistency in what they said about leadership.

The first lesson was that leadership is rarely a straight line.

Suzanne Wylie openly reflected on leaving school without a clear career plan. What followed was a career built on curiosity, learning and a willingness to embrace opportunities that sat outside her comfort zone. Whether moving into unfamiliar areas of Belfast City Council or later becoming Chief Executive, she repeatedly demonstrated that leadership is often less about having all the answers and more about having the confidence to rely on others, and move forward on both judgement and instinct.

Roger Johnston's career followed a similarly unconventional path. While he now leads a global healthcare technology business, he describes himself not as an operator, but as a builder. His focus has always been on growth, creating momentum, scaling organisations and helping teams navigate uncertainty. What stood out was his honesty about mistakes. Rather than viewing setbacks as failures, he sees them as experience gained. The scars accumulated throughout a career become the foundation for better decisions in the future.

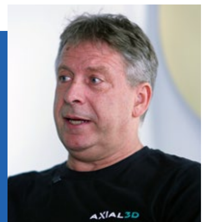
For Dominic Kearns, entrepreneurship was never a destination, it was simply part of who he was. From an early ambition to build businesses, he has gone on to create and scale multiple organisations. Yet one of the most powerful observations from our conversation was his reflection on how his understanding of leadership has changed. What he once believed leadership to be, directing everything, controlling detail and making every decision, he now sees very differently. Leadership today, in his words, is about creating the conditions for others to succeed.

The second lesson was that great leadership is fundamentally about people.

> **"You can certainly set out what your vision is and what your direction of travel is. My job as a leader is to get people to believe in that."**
>
> *Suzanne Wylie*

All three guests spoke extensively about culture, trust and building teams.

Suzanne highlighted the importance of understanding what motivates people, recognising strengths and weaknesses, and creating a shared mission that individuals can rally behind. Her experience leading large and complex organisations reinforced the importance of communication and clarity. People need to understand where an organisation is going and why it matters.



> **"One of my biggest strengths is how often I've put my hand in the fire and found out. That's really sore."**
>
> *Roger Johnston*

Roger's perspective centred on purpose. At Axial3D, every product ultimately impacts a patient. That sense of purpose creates alignment and meaning for employees. His belief is simple, when people understand the purpose behind their work, performance follows.

Without that connection, organisations risk becoming places where people simply turn up, collect a salary and leave.

Dominic echoed similar themes through the growth of Fibrus. He spoke about the importance of culture being deliberately created rather than accidentally inherited. One of the earliest functions established within the business was its People and Culture team, reflecting a belief that


people are not simply part of the business, they are the business.

The third lesson was resilience.

Leadership often looks glamorous from the outside. The reality described by all three guests was very different.

Suzanne spoke about navigating criticism, political complexity and significant setbacks. Whether pursuing major regeneration projects or responding to disappointments, she highlighted the importance of staying focused on the bigger picture and maintaining belief when others doubt the vision.

Roger reflected on building businesses through economic downturns, periods of uncertainty and difficult commercial decisions. His approach is grounded in perspective, not getting too high during successes and not getting too low during setbacks.

Dominic discussed the difficult decisions that come with scaling organisations, particularly those that affect people. His view was clear, leadership sometimes requires uncomfortable decisions but avoiding them rarely serves the wider organisation.

**“What I thought was leadership was micromanaging people. What I’ve learned is that leadership is giving people responsibility and letting them get on with it.”**

*Dominic Kearns*

Perhaps the strongest theme running through all three conversations was self-awareness.

None of these leaders claimed to have all the answers. Instead, they demonstrated an understanding of their strengths, an appreciation of their weaknesses and a willingness to surround themselves with people who complemented them.

They recognised that leadership is not about being the smartest person in the room. It is about creating an environment where talented people can perform at their best.

On reflection, hosting these conversations has reinforced something I see every day through my work at Verus Search.

There is no single blueprint for leadership.

The most effective leaders come from different sectors, backgrounds and experiences. Some are natural visionaries. Others are operators. Some lead large, established organisations. Others build businesses from nothing.

What unites them is their ability to bring people with them, make difficult decisions when required and continue learning regardless of how much experience they have accumulated.

# Member news

## Dr Terry Cross OBE delivers specialist, sight saving equipment to the Northern Ireland Regional Children's Eye Unit at the Belfast Trust Royal Victoria Hospital

**A £110,000 investment is set to enhance care for 4,000 children annually, including sight-saving treatment for premature infants and children with complex needs.**

The equipment will play a life-changing role for children of all ages, including premature babies, while offering reassurance to their families. The purchase was facilitated by the David Cross Foundation for Peace and Reconciliation and funded by a donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

Explaining how the equipment will assist, Eibhlín McLoone, Consultant Paediatric Ophthalmic Surgeon and Regional Lead of the Paediatric Ophthalmology Network Northern Ireland, said:

"Each year, approximately 4,000 children are referred to the Northern Ireland Regional Children's Eye Service, with specialist care delivered at the Children's Eye Unit in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

"Thanks to a recent generous donation, facilitated by the David Cross Foundation for Peace and Reconciliation and funded by a donor who wishes to remain anonymous, clinicians at the Children's Eye Unit now have access to state-of-the-art equipment worth approximately £110,000. This investment enables the team to provide the highest standard of eye care to children across Northern Ireland.

"The IXanner Handheld Portable Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) Scanner—a highly compact, device, only recently available on the market—allows clinicians to examine the retinas of premature infants and older children with complex needs who cannot use standard table-mounted OCT machines. It is particularly valuable for the early diagnosis of conditions such as retinal dystrophies and albinism, which will become increasingly important as gene therapy treatments continue to advance."

"A new portable fundal camera with fluorescein angiography capability has also been procured. This technology allows clinicians to perform fluorescein angiography at the bedside or in theatre, guiding treatment for premature infants with retinopathy of prematurity (ROP). ROP affects the most vulnerable babies born before 32 weeks' gestation, with around 300 infants screened annually in Northern Ireland. Approximately 5% of these require urgent, sight-saving treatment."

Highlighting the importance of this support, Eibhlín McLoone added:

"The Children's Eye Service team is committed to delivering high-quality eye care for every child in Northern Ireland. This generous donation, facilitated by the David Cross Foundation for Peace and Reconciliation, with support from a donor who wishes to remain anonymous, means we can now offer advanced diagnostics on par with the best centres worldwide. We are deeply grateful to Dr Terry Cross OBE for his continued support."


# Weev EV charging network now available to Radius One customers across Ireland

**Radius has announced a new partnership with Weev, enabling Radius One customers to access Weev's growing network of EV chargers and services across the island of Ireland.**

The partnership also includes collaboration on workplace, depot and home-charging installations, with Weev and Radius working together to deliver a complete EV solution for businesses across Ireland.

The collaboration strengthens Radius One product offering as Ireland's largest combined fuel and EV network. Businesses can access to over 2,000 fuel stations (via the DCI fuel network) and more than 4,000 charge points nationwide.

Businesses can now access a simple EV solution which the Weev and Radius partnership delivers. Clients can access reliable charging at home, at work and across the extensive public network, all with clear visibility of the EV charging ecosystem using InSite by Weev CPMS.

Peter Brown, Country Director, Radius advised: "Our partnership with Weev is another major step in strengthening Ireland's EV infrastructure for business. By bringing Weev onto the Radius One network, we're giving fleets greater certainty, better coverage, and a seamless way to power every vehicle, whether that's fuel, electric or both. Our goal is simple: to keep businesses moving today while supporting their transition to the fleets of tomorrow."

Thomas O'Hagan of Weev said: "As part of the collaboration, Weev are now working with Radius to install workplace and domestic chargers for Radius customers, providing a complete EV charging solution."

The partnership reinforces Radius' commitment to supporting businesses across Ireland with practical, scalable solutions as fleets move towards electric mobility.

*Pictured: Christine Adams, Head of Marketing, Radius; Peter Brown, Country Director, Radius: Thomas O'Hagan, CEO, Weev.*

NEWS

# Titanic Quarter launches Northern Ireland's first bespoke community-focused app

**Titanic Quarter has launched Northern Ireland's first community-focused app, embracing technology designed to enhance how people Live, Work, Visit and Stay in the city's iconic waterfront district.**

The free-to-use app is designed to enhance everyday life across Titanic Quarter. It brings together a range of useful services and information including active and sustainable travel options alongside the latest event listings, retail and leisure discounts, general updates and more in just a few taps.

Titanic Quarter attracts more than 3.5 million visitors each year, is used by around 20,000 people daily and is home to major visitor attractions, including Titanic Belfast, SS Nomadic and Titanic Distillers to name a few.

The launch comes as Titanic Quarter continues to grow as a mixed-use district, with increasing numbers of people living, working, visiting and staying in the area.

This app initiative has been developed jointly by Titanic Quarter Limited and Belfast Harbour.

James Eyre, Chief Executive of Titanic Quarter Ltd. said:

"This app is a first for Northern Ireland and reflects how Titanic Quarter continues to lead the way on innovation and transformation.

"It has been developed using the best practices adopted in other world-leading regeneration sites, and will be a useful communication tool as we continue to grow a district that tens of thousands of people use every day, whether they Live, Work, Visit or Stay."

Tim Boyle, Development Manager at Belfast Harbour said:

"This app reflects the continued evolution of Titanic Quarter as a connected, modern waterfront destination.

"By embracing digital innovation, we are making it easier for residents, workers and visitors to access services, discover what's happening in the area and enjoy everything this iconic site has to offer."

With a residential community already established in Titanic Quarter, including The ARC which is home to around 1,000 residents, the number of people living in the area is set to increase to over 2,700 by the end of 2026.

Built on the Equiem platform, used in major developments including London's Canary Wharf, the Titanic Quarter app is information rich, encouraging health and wellbeing through the promotion of active and public transport options along with connecting users to all that is available and happening in Titanic Quarter.

Ben Wilson, Regional Director - EU at Equiem said:

"Titanic Quarter is more than a development, it's a destination. Our platform is uniquely suited to bring this vision to life by connecting every group within the estate through a seamless, intelligent experience. We're proud to support Titanic Quarter's 'Live, Work, Visit, Stay' strategy and play a role in its continued regeneration."

The Titanic Quarter app is available to download now on iOS and Android.

# Utility Regulator publishes fourth Non-domestic Consumer Insight Tracker Survey

**The Utility Regulator has published its 2026 Non-domestic Consumer Insight Tracker Survey, providing an insight into the experiences of businesses across Northern Ireland's electricity and gas markets.**

The survey, conducted by Perceptive Insight on behalf of the Utility Regulator, gathered responses from 500 non-domestic electricity and gas consumers between November and December 2025.*

The survey measures consumer engagement, experiences and attitudes in Northern Ireland's non-domestic energy retail market. It also identifies the issues affecting this consumer group and monitors how these have changed over time, since the baseline survey began in 2020.**

The 2026 survey highlights that fewer non-domestic consumers are reporting concerns about, and difficulty with, paying their energy bills. However, energy costs remain high compared to pre pandemic levels, which may partly explain why a significant proportion of non-domestic consumers continue to express concern around their bills.

**Key findings**

The 2026 survey highlights signs of improvement for non-domestic consumers, alongside ongoing pressures:

- **Fewer concerns about energy bills:** The proportion of respondents concerned about their energy bills fell from 30 per cent in 2025 to 22 per cent in 2026.
- **Reduced financial strain:** More respondents reported never struggling to pay their energy bills in comparison to 2025 levels, with 90 per cent of electricity consumers and 96 per cent of gas consumers indicating this.
- **Greater awareness of choice:** Awareness of market options continues to improve:
  - 80 per cent of respondents are aware that they can choose between suppliers (up from 74 per cent in 2025).
  - 79 per cent are aware that they can choose between tariff types (up from 71 per cent in 2025).
- **Improved satisfaction and trust:** Perceptions of suppliers have increased significantly:
  - Satisfaction rose to 80 per cent for electricity consumers (from 62 per cent in 2025) and 77 per cent for gas consumers (from 65 per cent in 2025).
  - Trust in receiving clear information and a fair price increased to 57 per cent (electricity) and 59 per cent (gas), up from 47 per cent and 39 per cent respectively in 2025.
  - Likelihood to recommend suppliers rose to 57 per cent (electricity) and 52 per cent (gas), up from 44 per cent and 42 per cent in 2025.
- **Limited switching activity**: Most respondents have not changed suppliers in the past five years:
  - 27 per cent of electricity consumers reported switching (31 per cent in 2025).
  - 20 per cent of gas consumers reported switching at least once (17 per cent in 2025).
  - The main reason cited for not switching was satisfaction with current suppliers (90 per cent electricity; 85 per cent gas).

Colin Magee, Non-domestic Consumer Protection Manager at the Utility Regulator says, "The findings of this year's tracker survey are encouraging and suggest that many non-domestic consumers have experienced improved outcomes, expressing increased satisfaction and trust in their suppliers, and lower levels of concern about energy bills.

"At the same time, we recognise that around one in five businesses remain concerned about their energy costs. It is also important to note that this research was undertaken before the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East earlier this year and the associated volatility in wholesale energy markets.

"While the survey provides a snapshot of consumer sentiment at that time, it is important to remember that business experiences and concerns may have evolved since the research was carried out.

"Later this summer, we will also publish qualitative research exploring the experiences of small businesses facing energy-related hardship. Together with the findings published today, the research will help inform our non-domestic consumer protection work programme and priorities over the next few years.

"This will include a consultation later this year on a new Code of Practice to implement additional protections for non-domestic consumers."

*Full results from the 2026 Non-domestic Consumer Insight Tracker Survey are available on the Utility Regulator's website: www.uregni.gov.uk*


**Data for the 2026 Non domestic Consumer Insight Tracker Survey was collected before the recent escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, which may have altered perceptions of energy affordability. The results of the survey should be considered in this context.*

***The Non domestic Consumer Insight Tracker Survey was previously conducted in 2020, 2023 and 2025.*

# Your fleet is already hybrid.
# Is your fuel card?

Christine Adams,
Head of Marketing,
Radius.

**As Northern Ireland businesses navigate the complex crossover between diesel and electric fleets, the real risk is not the technology, it's the operational fragmentation that comes with it. Radius believes it has built the solution directors have been waiting for.**

For any director with fleet responsibility on their agenda, the past three years have introduced a new category of strategic risk. It is not the cost of fuel, though that remains significant. It is the creeping complexity of managing a fleet in transition; diesel vehicles running alongside electric ones, multiple charge networks, mismatched invoicing systems, and the ever-present pressure to demonstrate ESG progress without compromising operational reliability.

The traditional response has been to add layers: another fuel card for EV charging, another app for route planning, another account for reconciliation. For finance directors and operations leads, this fragmentation creates real costs; in management time, in compliance exposure, and in the sheer difficulty of getting a clean picture of fleet spend.

Radius, one of Ireland's most established fleet mobility providers and trusted by over 450,000 businesses globally, has launched a product designed to address exactly this problem. The Radius One card is a single payment solution covering both traditional fuel and electric vehicle charging, backed by the largest combined fuel and EV network available to businesses on the island of Ireland and beyond.

### The case for consolidation

The business case for a unified fleet account is not complicated. Complexity costs money. Multiple supplier relationships mean multiple points of failure, multiple invoice reconciliation processes, and multiple exposures when audit time comes around.

Radius One offers one card, one HMRC/Revenue compliant paperless invoice, and one account managed through its Velocity platform – which gives fleet managers real time visibility of spend, the ability to set custom alerts, and access to Fleet Control and Insights reporting that can flag suspicious transactions or fuel inefficiencies before they become a problem.

> **"Businesses here operate across two jurisdictions as a matter of course, into GB and into the Republic, and need a fuel and charging solution that works seamlessly on both sides of the border."**

The network behind the card is substantial: over 2,000 fuel stations and 4,700 EV charge points across the island of Ireland, with full access to Great Britain and European networks – particularly valuable for Northern Ireland businesses that trade and operate on both sides of the border and into GB.

Offering businesses discounted or weekly commercial fuel prices and fixed EV charging rates, without additional transaction or connection fees addresses one of the most common objections fleet managers raise about electrification: the unpredictability of public charging costs.

Radius One was born from genuinely listening to our customers. Fleet operators told us they didn't want another card or another app, they wanted simplicity. One card, one account, one invoice. What we've built removes the friction of running a modern fleet, whether that's all diesel today or a mixed fleet moving towards electrification.

## The Northern Ireland context

For Northern Ireland businesses, the timing of this kind of product matters. Any business with a fleet is navigating accelerating pressure from UK government fleet decarbonisation targets, rising fuel costs, and the practical challenge of managing an EV fleet outside major urban centres. For directors in logistics, professional services, or any sector with a significant mobile workforce, the question is no longer whether to electrify; it is how to manage the crossover without disrupting the business.

Northern Ireland's unique trading position adds another dimension. Businesses here operate across two jurisdictions as a matter of course, into GB and into the Republic, and need a fuel and charging solution that works seamlessly on both sides of the border. That is a practical requirement few cards are genuinely built to meet.

That crossover period is where many fleet solutions fall short. Products designed for either diesel or EV fleets struggle to serve businesses that are, by necessity, running both. The Radius One proposition is built around that in-between state, and around the recognition that most businesses will be in it for some time yet.

What we hear from our customers and the sector time and again is that they're not opposed to electrification, they're opposed to disruption. They need to keep their fleets moving today while preparing for tomorrow. Radius One gives them exactly that: the confidence to run a diesel or mixed fleet now, and the infrastructure to transition to EV without changing how they manage their accounts or their spend.

## What directors should be asking

For any board or senior leadership team reviewing fleet arrangements in 2026, the Radius One launch raises a useful set of questions beyond the product itself. How many suppliers does your business currently use for fleet fuel and charging? What does your finance team spend reconciling those accounts each month? Can you easily identify fraud and fleet inefficiencies?

The shift to a single-supplier model is not simply a procurement decision. It is a governance one. Businesses that consolidate fleet management under a unified platform maximise fuel efficiency, increase driver safety, lower risk and reduce costs, giving their finance and operations teams back the time currently spent managing avoidable complexity.

Radius One is designed to be scalable regardless of fleet size; from an SME running two company cars to a logistics operator managing heavy goods vehicles across multiple jurisdictions. For the director who has been putting off a review of fleet arrangements because the landscape felt too fragmented and fast-moving, that may be the most persuasive thing about Radius One: it is a product built specifically for the moment Northern Ireland businesses are in right now.

*Visit www.radius.com/en-ie/ to find out how Radius can help.*


# Spotlight on **events**

**IoD NI & Arthur Cox Family Business & Locally Owner Managed Network with guest speaker William Barnett CBE, Chief Executive, W&R Barnett Ltd**

30 April, MrDeanes ∧ ∨ >

## IoD NI & NIE Networks: Roundtable with Claire Hanna MP & Matthew O'Toole MLA, SDLP

7 May, Regency House ∧ ∨ >


## IoD NI & Rathbones: Business Dinner with Naoimh & Conleth McConville, MJM Group

20 May, James Street South v >


**IoD NI Talk & Tour: Encirc Ltd**

27 May, Derrylin, Fermanagh v >

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

5 June, The Merchant Hotel Belfast

∧ ∨ >


## IoD NI & RSM: Passport to Leadership - Summer Social with Rory King, Rory's Travel Club

17 June, The Merchant Hotel Belfast

∧ ∨ >


## IoD NI & Carson McDowell Director Bootcamp

18 June, Room2 Belfast v >



# IoD NI & Artemis Human Capital HR Breakfast with TeamFeePay

30 June, The Merchant Hotel Belfast v >

**IoD Northern Ireland**
2026 Professional development

# Start your journey to becoming an IoD Chartered Director

## Stage 1 Certificate in Company Direction

**Option 1**

**Role of the Director and the Board**
8-9 September
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

**Leadership for Directors**
20-21 October
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

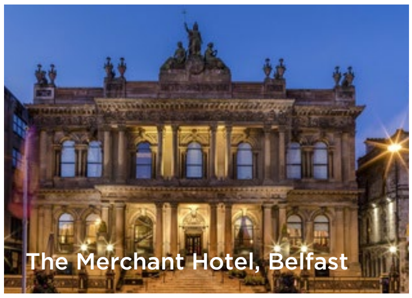
**Finance for Non-Finance Directors**
29 September - 1 October
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

**Strategy for Directors**
17-19 November
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

**Option 2**

**Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction available based in the UK or in the Culloden Estate, Belfast next May.**

**Online options also available for each module.**


The Merchant Hotel, Belfast


Culloden Estate

## Stage 2 Diploma in Company Direction

3-5 November
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast