

imagine

issue fourteen 2017

INSIGHT INTO THE REGIONAL RECRUITMENT MARKETPLACE



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The Lakes Distillery set for first malt yield

Chairman, Nigel Mills, anticipates big year for the Cumbria distillery.

Rules of a rewarding career

Seasoned HR Director, Jules Smith, outlines five principles for progression.

Making luxury furniture

Operations Director, Keith Elsey, reveals George Smith Ltd's upskilling & professionalising product development successes.

Featured interview

Peter Rush,
President and CEO at
Formica Group Europe

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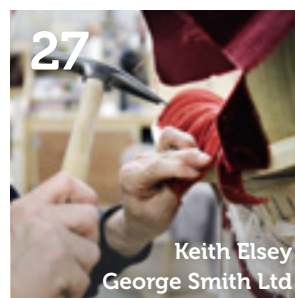
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INSIGHT INTO THE REGIONAL RECRUITMENT MARKETPLACE

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Welcome

Welcome to the fourteenth edition of Imagine, Nigel Wright's annual in-house magazine for regional markets across the North East, Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

Despite nervousness surrounding the votes for Brexit and Trump, the last six months of 2016 saw the UK economy perform solidly, achieving growth of 0.5% in the last quarter. Unemployment also fell to record levels. This was, of course, impressive and unexpected. Our region, too, enjoyed a buoyant period with overall business activity increasing to its highest levels in more than a year.

Complacency, or the avoidance of, is a key message though at the start of the year. The predicted shocks which never materialised will likely start impacting markets mid-year. National growth estimates have been set at 2% for 2017 and businesses must remain vigilant as we approach year end. Furthermore, as unemployment falls, the market for talent becomes fiercer. Candidate availability is tight across all disciplines and with an increase in demand for talent, employers must work harder to attract the best.

Nigel Wright's regional business continues to grow. Our investment in Teesside, via our Wynyard office, has also enabled us to better assist clients in Tees Valley and North Yorkshire.

In addition to Wynyard, Nigel Wright Group re-established its Amsterdam (Netherlands) site last year and opened a third Swedish office, in Gothenburg. We now employ nearly 140 people across 13 European offices, bringing extensive experience and knowledge from a variety of industries.

Consequently, we've seen an increase in regional clients using us to hire roles across the UK and Europe. Nigel Wright is now recognised as a preferred partner for many larger businesses that want the same high-quality service and control across a wider business geography.

I'm also pleased to tell you that our business collectively raised over £12,500 for its charity of choice, Cancer Research, in 2016. An incredible effort by the teams from across Europe.

In this edition of Imagine Formica CEO, Peter Rush reveals their plans to invest £30 million in manufacturing over the next three years. The Lakes Distillery's Nigel Mills gives an update on the Cumbrian whisky maker's first malt due to mature in December, and DigitalCity's Rob Earnshaw outlines his vision for Teesside's digital economy. Also included are analyses of the latest trends in talent acquisition and management, executive career perspective and interviews with leaders from businesses including PwC, George Smith Ltd, Home Group and Arriva.

Thank you for your continued support and as ever, we welcome feedback on any of the content.

Mark Simpson
Group Executive Director

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FEEDBACK

We would be delighted to hear your comments on this edition of **imagine**.

Alternatively if you would like to contribute to the next edition, please contact us on 0191 222 0770.





Nigel Wright raises £12,500 for Cancer Research UK

Nigel Wright Group has been fundraising throughout 2016 for Cancer Research UK. Employees throughout our 13 European offices have been involved in activities that have raised £12,500. >>

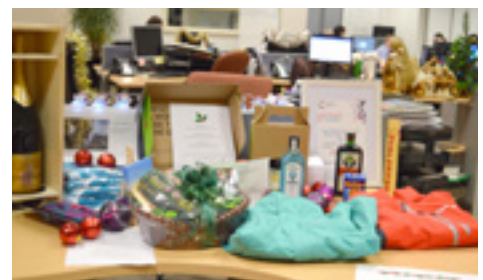
Fundraising has been ongoing during the year and has included regular initiatives such as a tuck shop, raffles, dress-down days, as well as one-off challenges.

The biggest fundraising event took place during a weekend on 11 - 12 June, when Nigel Wright employees took up the challenge of collectively raising £9,500 by completing The Yorkshire Three Peaks. Over 30 employees from across seven international offices participated in the walk. The group completed the challenge of walking more than 24 miles over the peaks of Pen-y-Ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough in under 12 hours. Some

employees upped the stakes this year by running the route.

Representatives from Nigel Wright's offices in Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg who took part gained the support of Swedish confectionary brand Cloetta, who kindly supported their efforts by supplying the team with chocolate bars.

Nigel Wright's Marketing Director, Justin Barlow, commented: "We were delighted to complete this challenging event and other activities to raise £12,500 this year. We have now raised well over £30,000



Raffle prizes were kindly donated by some of our clients

for Cancer Research UK over the last three years. If any employee has an idea for raising money for this worthwhile cause, then we'll happily support them."

A further initiative raised an additional £200 for the pot. Following the launch of the new plastic five pound note in September, Nigel Wright acted quickly to leverage the Twitter led #fivergiver fundraising campaign, which encouraged people to donate their first new plastic fiver to charity. Forty Nigel Wright UK employees happily gave up their new polymer fivers.

Fundraising activities for 2016 finished with a raffle that raised over £600, largely thanks to the jackets that were very kindly donated by Barbour and Berghaus.

Cancer Research UK's Carolyn Reynolds praised the Nigel Wright team saying: "Nigel Wright staff are brilliant supporters of Cancer Research UK, who spend £5million each year in Newcastle at our Cancer Research Centre. We are making research breakthroughs in adult and children's cancers, and that means that we get closer to beating cancer, whilst also developing therapies that have fewer side effects, are less toxic and are kinder to patients. One in two of us will receive a cancer diagnosis in our lifetime, so this work touches everyone. We receive no government funding for our vital research, so companies like Nigel Wright are the backbone of the work we do."





Featured interview:

CEO and President, Formica Group

Peter Rush

Back to basics

New Formica Group President outlines his plans to return the business to growth. >>



“You won’t find another North East business making the level of investment in manufacturing as Formica Group is over the next two years.”

The reputation of Formica Group, the only global laminate brand for supplying high-quality durable work surfaces is unsurpassed. Although invented in Ohio in 1913, the world-famous decorative Formica® laminate has been manufactured in the North East, at the business’ iconic North Shields factory, for over 70 years. In 2007, following the acquisition of Formica Corporation by Fletcher Building, the new owners recognised Newcastle upon Tyne as the obvious choice to locate the European headquarters. Support functions, from IT to marketing and business development, were centralised and moved to the new site at Cobalt Business Park in early 2008.

Almost ten years later, the European headquarters office is returning to its original location. This move is part of the company’s overall strategy of bringing previously disjointed parts of the organisation back together and simplifying processes within the business. Over the years Formica Group had different leaders, and each of them brought their own ideas, strategies and ways of running the business. Inevitably, this created a very complex structure, with focus directed towards commercial solutions rather than operational improvements at North Shields.

It was clear that in order to turn the business around, providing a great overall service proposition to customers was key. To deliver service improvement required modernisation and refurbishment of the factory, together with clear new service models. This is when Fletcher Building stepped in to support the turnaround, and the US President of Formica Group, Mitch Quint, arrived to lead the business in providing a clear set of priorities.

The issue of operational complexity was identified as requiring a solution as this had a major impact on the service provided to customers. Mitch acted quickly in providing focus to the organisation. Multiple organisational changes including several new hires were made to the manufacturing team. The key task for 2016 was the implementation of a new Enterprise resource planning (ERP) system together with a new business service model. This took a huge amount of resource and time but the business now believes that it has a proposition that is market leading.

With a major change program now underway, Fletcher Building’s interim President, Mitch Quint, needed to complete one more task before returning to his business unit overseas. A review of operations had raised the question ‘What does Formica Group Europe fundamentally do next?’ It was a question which only a new leader could answer. Following a thorough recruitment process, Peter Rush became Formica Group Europe’s new CEO and President in May 2016.

He brought with him an intimate knowledge of the building products industry, gained from a thirty-year career in branded manufacturing businesses across the UK and Europe. Leadership roles at Hozelock, William Sinclair, Baxi and Rawlplug, focused on operational transformation and sales growth, also made Peter the perfect fit for the job.

Attracted by the challenge as well as the huge planned investment from Fletcher Building - around £30 million over three years - Peter is clear about his vision for the business. “Formica Group Europe has tried to do too many things at once in the past and failed. There are two basic components to this business: make and sell products. Our products need to be the best possible quality, made at the lowest possible cost for our customers. We then need a competent commercial team to go out and sell our proposition into the marketplace.”

Peter’s first priority is to address the UK. Not addressing prevalent issues in the home market, in his view, is a mistake many businesses make when domestic sales are falling. They believe that the answer is to sell products overseas where they have little or no experience. This is a very difficult task and few companies succeed. The bulk of Fletcher’s investment will, therefore, happen in the UK, and in the main be on improvements to its manufacturing capability supported by a significant investment in commercial resources and activities.

Peter believes that his manufacturing insight positioned him well for the role. “Formica Group is a manufacturing business, so a technical understanding of how our products are made is essential. Issues arose at the North Shields site because of a lack of manufacturing empathy within the business. That’s going to change now. If we get



“If we get manufacturing right, then we can get service right and then be competitive in Europe again.”



manufacturing right, then we can get service right and then be competitive in Europe again.”

With significant investment taking place in North Shields, money will be spent on new phenolic and melamine treating lines, both integral to laminate production. A new Continuous Pressed Laminate (CPL) line, replacing an older model, will also give Formica Group a significant increase in capacity and open new segments of the market. Peter noted that around 75% of the overall UK manufacturing process will change within the next two years, yet this change is necessary to ensure Formica Group has a “state of the art laminate manufacturing plant.” He added, “You won’t find another North-East business making the level of investment in manufacturing as Formica Group is over the next two years.”

On top of the operational investment was a need to bring the team closer together. With the current headquarters location a few miles from the main operational site, direct contact between the sites has declined. A decision was made, therefore, to relocate all the support functions to a newly refurbished office complex at the North Shields facility in March 2017.

As well as finalising the development plan for UK operations, restructuring and hiring across manufacturing, sales, and marketing, Formica Group has been running a large-scale employee

engagement program since the end of 2015, preparing and motivating people for the changes ahead. Simple messages have been communicated with the intention of clarifying goals and getting people excited about the vision and where the business is going. The factory is now visited by Peter and the leadership team on a regular basis. They meet with the team to provide updates and make sure there is a forum for employees to ask questions in an open and honest environment. “You can’t make change happen without collaborating and working to bring your teams with you; and get them to buy into your vision for the business.”

While providing Formica Group with significant financial clout, Fletcher Building is also supporting the business with people and leadership development initiatives. Developing talent in-house, Peter informed me, is essential to future growth. During his first six months, he was delighted to promote three individuals to his executive team - UK Sales Director, European Marketing Director and HR Director for People & Performance - and ideally wants the business to be in a position where it can fill some vacancies through its existing employees.

With great people already on board, Formica Group is still in the market for talent. With all functional disciplines based at the new European Head Quarters in North Shields site, the message Peter was keen to communicate is that opportunities are

abundant at the business. "If you want to work in finance, sales, marketing, supply chain, finance, IT, people & performance or be involved in a state of the art manufacturing facility, we offer excellent careers." Hiring graduates and apprentices will also be a priority for the next three years and the business wants to continue strengthening its sales, marketing and customer service teams while supporting the wider Formica Group's digital transformation.

A refurbished factory and planned asset upgrade combined with a new service model is already making a difference. A larger commercial team and robust talent acquisition and development is helping the business regain its market leading position and win back customers. So, what's next?

Peter believes that Formica Group Europe would never be the lowest cost producer in the world:

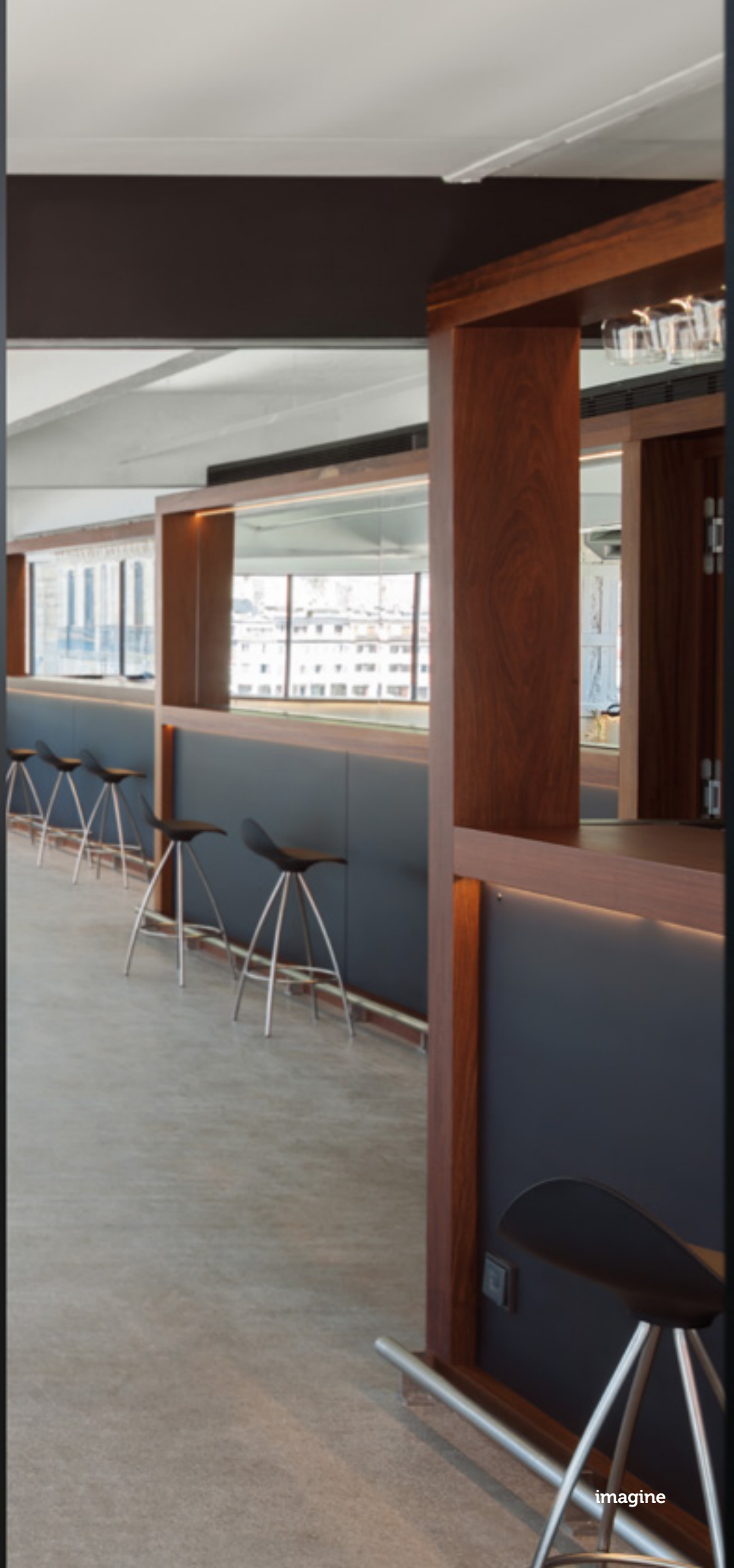
"In fact we have a very different proposition for our customers based on service, products and investment in our brand. Despite all its issues, the business has maintained a reputation for supplying high-quality laminate; however, to become competitive again, we must focus on innovation and take the lead in introducing new materials to the industry."

Formica Group Europe has recently launched a new product range called Formica Infiniti™, a surfacing material like no other with anti-fingerprint and post-forming capabilities. Peter sees this as indicative of what's to come from the business. "We've had some great feedback from the market so far. By bringing in the right talent to design, develop and market new products, we expect to do more innovation like this soon."



"With great people already on board, Formica Group is still in the market for talent."





Case Study



About the client

Formica Group designs surfacing solutions for commercial and residential customers worldwide. In 2007 it was acquired by Fletcher Building, creating the world's largest manufacturer of laminate and decorative surfaces. The European division, Formica Group Europe, operates in all major European markets and manages Group activities in the Middle East, Russia and Africa. Headquartered in Newcastle upon Tyne, it employs 1000+ people in manufacturing plants, distribution centres and sales offices across those territories.

Background

In October 2015, Formica Group Europe began a large-scale business transformation project. The project's aim was to make investments in talent acquisition and development, as well as realign the Group structure to establish a more customer-centric business model. Multiple disciplines and countries were impacted by the project, with a particular emphasis on Sales and Procurement in the UK and Spain.

The challenge

An estimated 40+ people were to be recruited within the agreed timeframes at all levels. Talent gaps in Finance, Marketing and HR were also identified requiring multi-discipline expertise. During the project additional unforeseen vacancies emerged, many of which were in Manufacturing.

Beyond the UK and Spain talent acquisition took place in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and France requiring cross-country collaboration and language skills. Many of the vacancies were confidential, adding to the complexity.

Nigel Wright solution

Using the Nigel Wright 'no silos' approach as the foundation for this project, we established a cross-country /cross-discipline team of consultants to deliver each assignment.

The project was managed by the Nigel Wright Key Client Coordinator who provided ongoing support, ensuring communication with Formica was regular and deadlines were maintained. Depending on the seniority of the role, shortlist deadlines varied but typically were set at between one and four weeks. Executive and database search methods were complemented by a proactive marketing and advertising campaign. All roles were advertised using branded adverts unless they were confidential - senior roles were promoted using candidate packs. In addition, a microsite was used which included a 'work for us' section with employee testimonials and an option to connect with Formica's leadership and HR team via LinkedIn.

For multiple assignments in one country (i.e. UK sales roles), we implemented a talent mapping process to create a pool of potential candidates. A significant factor in the success of this project was Nigel Wright's marketing campaign. This aided candidate engagement by articulating the Formica story, enabling us to sell the opportunities and extend their reach beyond our own networks.

Our marketing campaign was also successful in persuading individuals that Formica was a business worth considering at a time of change and perceived upheaval.

Nigel Wright's partnership with Formica continues and to date 50+ placements have been made across the UK, France, Spain and Scandinavia.



"Lobbying Government to increase the number of tech-visas, ... is also on the agenda for Rob and his team."

Uniting digital and world-class manufacturing with Teesside's revamped DigitalCity



Teesside's thriving digital sector - worth £87 million to the local economy - wouldn't exist to the extent that it does today without input and investment from DigitalCity. >>

A project led by Teesside University and the Tees Valley Combined Authority, DigitalCity has helped launch over 200 businesses and created over 220 jobs since 2008. An achievement which has contributed to Teesside becoming one of the most innovative regions in the UK according to the Enterprise Research Centre (ERC). In June 2016, however, following the appointment of new Director Rob Earnshaw, the project was put on hold. Rob explained: "DigitalCity has offered fantastic support to the region's digital sector during the last ten years, but still not enough people know who we are or what support we offer. It was important to review our products

and services and look to re-launch the DigitalCity proposition in 2017."

Rob, founder of Creative North and an entrepreneur since leaving school in 2008, described himself as "overwhelmed" by the number of "unbelievable" innovators he'd met in Teesside since taking on the DigitalCity directorship. He is adamant that the region has all the right ingredients to be a "go-to place" for rewarding careers working in the UK's growing digital sector. But Rob recognises that perceptions of Teesside as a 'failing industrial region' still deter investment and talent. 'Industry', Rob argues, should be at the centre of any regional promotional campaign, and Teesside's industrial heritage will play a key role in DigitalCity's plans to change negative perceptions of the region in 2017. He explained; "Teesside's association with heavy industry has been turned into a stigma over the years. DigitalCity wants to help change this by uniting the region's digital expertise and with its world-class capabilities in advanced manufacturing, across multiple industries."

Industry 4.0, the 'buzz-phrase' used to describe a hypothetical fourth industrial revolution, influenced the decision to reposition DigitalCity. The idea behind Industry 4.0 is that the evolutionary cycle which began with mechanical production in the 1700s and moved on to mass production and later automated production has now reached its natural end. A new cycle is now beginning with the rise of digitised production. Technologies associated with Big data and the Internet of Things are enabling machines and factories to talk to each other, thus improving efficiencies and reducing costs. Germany and France are already making progress in digitalising traditional industries and Government has acknowledged the UK is at risk of falling behind if it doesn't follow their example. With Teesside being so dependent on the success of its industrial sector, Rob believes it's essential that Government industrial strategy has Teesside at the heart of it. "The area is home to Europe's second-largest chemical processing plant; we have a huge automotive industry and one of the largest ports in the UK. The University also has researchers

working on Industry 4.0 solutions. It's the best place in Europe to innovate, pilot and excel in these technologies."

When people think about businesses offering digital products and services, they usually imagine web, app or game developers. While Rob acknowledges that these firms played a vital role in establishing Teesside's digital sector, he believes it's time for the region's stakeholders to be more strategic in their approach to helping accelerate growth. DigitalCity, therefore, will take the lead in moving away from supporting what he called "typical digital entrepreneurs" and instead invest more in product-led innovation aimed at future-proofing Teesside's factories. "SSI failed because its factory wasn't efficient enough. Yes, we may have a competitive edge in other manufacturing areas, but risk further failures if our manufacturers don't become early adopters of Industry 4.0 technologies."

Promoting innovation in Industry 4.0 technology, he hopes, will also raise the profile of DigitalCity's services to a wider North East and UK audience. He likened the opportunity to the era following the discovery of iron ore in Cleveland in 1850, which led to the founding of Middlesbrough and a subsequent economic boom for the region. "It was an exciting time to be in Teesside. Iron and steel produced in the area became integral to the second industrial revolution, used to build bridges all over the world. We want to recreate that excitement around the digital sector. Our message is simple: If you want to develop technologies that will play a vital role in the fourth industrial revolution, come to Teesside."

It's an inspiring call to action, but one which has its obstacles. Rob notes how many manufacturers haven't yet realised the potential of Industry 4.0 technologies, and part of DigitalCity's challenge will be convincing traditional industry to pay attention. A specific problem is an inherent fear that new technologies are 'disruptive.' Disruptive technology is a phrase Rob thinks should be banned, arguing that 'enabling technology' would be a better term as "innovative technologies help businesses grow."

On the question of jobs, Rob said it would be naïve to think 'smart machines' wouldn't replace some functional roles. However, improving efficiencies within factories through using 4.0 technologies won't lead to the scale of job losses experienced, for example, at SSI. He added that only by refusing to adapt does the technology become disruptive, with early adopters likely to grow quickly ahead of their competitors.

Another barrier to achieving this vision for Teesside, in Rob's view, is that technical programming skills are still largely focused on web, app and game development. "Lots of talented people are coming out of universities and then working for these types of companies, or they're working for these companies and getting upskilled within the context of these professions. They don't realise their skills can be used in different areas outside of these traditional settings; i.e. to digitise a factory." Industry 4.0, rather, provides opportunities for talented people to innovate in different markets. "Being a programmer shouldn't narrow your career options, but allow you to choose to work across a breadth of different types of organisations and sectors."

A shortage of digital talent is stifling growth in Teesside anyway. This is another problem DigitalCity wants to address and help to resolve moving forward. Rob contends that there has been too much focus on encouraging and investing in start-ups. "The consequence of this is that sought-after programmers and developers have removed themselves from the job market, disadvantaging established businesses who desperately need the talent to grow." Investment, he claims, should instead be aimed at upscaling established businesses, as well as those entrepreneurs that have taken a risk and hit their three-year 'pinch-point'. Studies, such as Sherry Coutu's 2014 'scale-up report on UK economic growth', show how investing in scaling up companies and helping them to accelerate their growth leads to better GVA; with the digital and chemical processing sectors demonstrating the best overall results. "This reinforces how important upscaling is to our region."



"Our message is simple: If you want to develop technologies that will play a vital role in the fourth industrial revolution, come to Teesside."



“In a fast-paced constantly changing industry the importance of upskilling should be paramount.”

Successful scale-ups can only happen, though, if businesses are willing to take a risk and hire people with potential. Rob highlighted how employers complain that graduates leaving universities don't have the right skills, but the issue is that technology changes so fast the curriculums can't keep up.

“That's why businesses also need encouragement and support in upskilling employees to meet demands, rather than waiting for the right graduates to come onto the market. In a fast-paced constantly changing industry the importance of upskilling should be paramount.”

Lobbying Government to increase the number of tech-visas, which enable experts from outside of the EU to come and work in the UK, is also on the agenda for Rob and his team. “The current quota of 200 per year isn't enough when an estimated 1.2 million programmers, for example, are needed between now and 2020 to meet demand.” Inaction here could lead to the UK outsourcing its digital sector to Eastern Europe or China. He reiterated how anyone seeking a rewarding career working with cutting-edge digital technology should consider moving to Teesside; although admitted the UK, in general, may not be the most appealing for foreign workers due to the low value of the pound.

How will DigitalCity take on these challenges as it embarks on a new era?

Rob says several events are planned in 2017 to strengthen the brand. They will focus on raising awareness of the potential of Teesside's digital sector and highlighting the “commercial sense” of locating a business here. Furthermore, DigitalCity is launching the Tees Valley Digital Strategy Board aimed at giving a voice to the region's most

successful digital companies. “The board will be made up of representatives from those companies contributing £87 million GVA to the local economy, who will have more say in how the sector operates and dictate the sort of events, advice etc. available.”

Three products will be accessible to innovators via DigitalCity this year, reflecting different needs. A Fellowship Grant worth up to £7,500 is intended to help kick-start a business or product; an Investment Programme will enable businesses with an innovative digital product or idea to be able to attract investment, and an Innovation Programme will involve DigitalCity sending consultants into companies to analyse business models and recommend digital solutions. Rob added how they want to encourage people with no digital expertise to approach them with great ideas. “We can then help those people get their ideas off the ground by introducing them to experts and funding, therefore supporting the wider Tees Valley economy through enabling routes to market for digital products.”

As well as the “tight-knit” cluster of innovators who will make up the Digital Strategy Board, Rob is enthusiastic about the general coherence in the region amongst other key stakeholders. DigitalCity together with the Combined Authority, Teesside University and other organisations such as Innovate Tees Valley are all “on the same page” regarding what needs to happen to bolster growth. “We have a group of people here with the potential to create something really special in the Tees Valley. I expect some amazing ideas and products to come out of the region in the next few years. It's going to happen; we won't stop trying until it does.”





North East of England CIPD HR&D Awards 2016



For the fourth year running, we were proud to be the main sponsors of the North East of England CIPD HR&D Awards 2016 which celebrate the region's best HR and Development practitioners and companies. >>

Nearly 400 professionals from across the North East gathered at the Newcastle Marriott Hotel in June 2016 to celebrate the 10th annual North East CIPD HR&D Awards. Nigel Wright was associate sponsor of the event, which recognised the achievements of some of the region's brightest and best employers.

Among the employers recognised were Sage (UK) Ltd, LSL Property Services, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust, Komatsu UK and Hitachi Rail.

Nigel Wright's Sue O'Donovan said: "This year's awards were bigger than ever with a record number of applications, even more support from sponsors. The quality of applications was superb, giving our judges a fantastic challenge deciding this year's winners."

The winners:

SME HR&D:

Connect Health

Employability and Diversity:

Sage (UK) Limited

Reward and Benefits:

LSL Property Services plc

People Development

Komatsu UK Limited

Employee Engagement

Northumberland, Tyne and Wear

NHS Foundation Trust

Health and Wellness

Muckle LLP

HR&D Team of the Year

Hitachi Rail

Nigel Wright commits to associate sponsorship 2017 – 2019

We are delighted to have been awarded with the lead sponsorship position for the CIPD HR&D Awards for the next three years. >>

We encourage HR professionals in all organisations to consider entering their company and teams for an award. The 2017 Award Categories, which are available for individual sponsorship, are:

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HR&D Excellence in SMEs

Excellence in Organisational Development

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HR&D Team of the Year



To discuss becoming a sponsor please contact sarah@cipdne.co.uk

Exploring the Changing Role of the CIO

A report following a CIO Roundtable at the Nigel Wright IT Directors' Forum. >>

NEW WORLD – NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In a world characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity the CIO has massive challenges and opportunities. There have been major shifts in the role of the CIO and IT function in the last decade. In particular managing 'tin and wires' is much less important. A few years ago one application might have required the purchase, installation and management of 60 or more servers. Now Cloud based infrastructure is flexible, secure and robust and available on a pay as you go basis. The Cloud also provides flexible enterprise applications, again available on a pay as you go basis at short notice. In many ways it's a new world.

There is an opportunity for very rapid change and innovation. How does the CIO help the organisation capture the strategic potential of this new world?

RESEARCH PROJECT: EXPLORING THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE CIO

The overall aim for this project is to contribute to the ability of organisations to deliver value to customers and other stakeholders through the successful exploitation of IT. This remains a major challenge for many organisations and is regularly on lists of top issues from CEOs.

The challenges of benefits realisation from IT can be approached from many perspectives, not least: strategic alignment; governance; innovation; evaluation; and the role of the IT function including sourcing. In this project we focus primarily on the role and competences of the CIO and their contribution to business value from IT.

The aims of the project were to:

- Explore how current social, business & technology trends are impacting on the role of the CIO and the IT function;
- Consider the implications for the skills and organisational competences required to deliver value from IT;
- Make recommendations for practical steps to develop the next generation of business savvy IT leaders and IT savvy business leaders.

Initial exploration of academic and non-academic literature as well as a brief survey was followed by a CIO Roundtable at the Nigel Wright IT Directors' Forum.

FOUNDATIONS: ENABLING THE ORGANISATION TO ACHIEVE THE STRATEGIC POTENTIAL OF IT

Practical experience and research over the last 30 years suggests that a number of principles underpin the ability of an organisation to realise the strategic potential of IT.

A brief summary is as follows.

1. THE BIGGEST GAINS COME FROM DOING THE RIGHT THINGS

Strategic alignment of the overall investment portfolio is crucial;

Different views of priorities and of how the world is changing make this a challenge. It is also important to balance business and technical perspectives, as well as long and short term;

2. BENEFITS ARISE WHEN PEOPLE DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Benefits Management is a well-established but not widely adopted body of knowledge that tackles IT investment and business change from the perspective of creating value for stakeholders;

3. MANAGE BENEFITS OVER THE LIFECYCLE OF AN INVESTMENT

Post project harvesting of benefits from information and systems is often neglected. Continuous adaptation and improvement need resourcing;

4. WORK CREATIVELY AND COLLABORATIVELY BUILDING COMMITMENT FOR CHANGE

People are the key. Engaged and motivated teams working creatively and collaboratively is one element. A second is active engagement with stakeholders;

5. INVEST IN DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES

Sustained advantage, coming from continued innovation and change will only come from investing in developing change savvy leaders and an organisation with strong, dynamic capabilities. These capabilities need investment and leadership to develop and are best achieved alongside investments in specific business changes;

6. THE IT LEADER IS PART OF THE TOP MANAGEMENT TEAM

Having a Chief Information Officer (CIO) who is a full member of the top management is a crucial step. A big win comes from having IT issues considered from the very beginning of a major initiative, rather than being brought in when opportunities have been missed and the direction is set.

The full report can be downloaded at nigelwright.com.





“Established in 2004 the Nigel Wright NE IT Directors' Forum meets every quarter to discuss topical issues affecting their discipline.”



About the report author, Colin Ashurst

My working life has been a journey of learning how to help individuals and organisations succeed with innovation and change. My teaching, research and practice all align around this goal. I emphasise getting stuck in and learning by doing.

MY EXPERIENCE

The first stage of my career was qualifying as a Chartered Accountant (Ernst & Whinney). I then moved into IT consulting and management (Deloitte Haskins & Sells, Asda, Microsoft). After 25 years in this variety of roles I moved into higher education to teach and research.

Alongside my own teaching and research I've been Director of Learning and Teaching at both Durham University Business School and Newcastle University Business School. My aim has been to bring innovation to management education and leadership development to better prepare students for a complex world. My goal was to enable students to develop new perspectives and 'know how' so they can make a positive contribution in the workplace and the world.

Along the way, in addition to the ACA, I picked up an MBA, PhD and professional qualifications including CEng with the British Computer Society. I now value being a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA).

About the Nigel Wright IT Directors' Forum

Established in 2004 the Nigel Wright NE IT Directors' Forum meets every quarter to discuss topical issues affecting their discipline. With Directors from many different industry sectors, the subjects covered have been varied and take a top level view of issues so they are appropriate to a wide section of the forum members.

Members of the forum include Directors from Professional Services, Higher Education, Local Council, Manufacturing, Software Services, Financial organisations and Media companies.

Whilst the topics are generated by the members, Nigel Wright organise the meetings and provide speakers. Nigel Wright are supported by Newcastle University Business School who work in collaboration with Nigel Wright.

Newcastle University Business School have continued to support the forum and provided access and resources to research topics involved in the successful management of technology within organisations. One of the first piece of research explored Business Transformation and resulted in workshop events covering Managing the Investment Portfolio: Exploring Best Practices: IT Attention Deficit and most recently, Competing with IT.

Nigel Wright expands its public sector focus

Nigel Wright Recruitment has worked closely with public and third sector clients, providing both permanent and interim placements for many years. >>

We have many long-standing arrangements through building a track record of successful appointments as part of ongoing relationships as well as formal panel appointments. We have been helping organisations such as Gentoo Group, Home Group, North Star Housing, Northumbria University and The Percy Hedley Foundation secure the best talent.

In October 2016, Nigel Wright announced the appointment of Charlotte Owen to its Newcastle headquarters. Charlotte joined as Managing Consultant to lead the public sector and not-for-profit recruitment business across the region. She brings over 12 years of expertise and networks with her.

Experienced in providing expert consultation and high-quality resource solutions within charities and not-for-profit, social housing, education, local government, and health organisations, Charlotte

has worked on interim and permanent recruitment solutions throughout her career.

Associate Director, Richard Morgan commented on the appointment: "I'm delighted to welcome Charlotte Owen to our business. Her appointment will help us consolidate our status in the public and third sectors, and grow market share in this vital area of the economy. Charlotte has an excellent reputation in the region for finding and placing high quality candidates so I'm confident she'll be a huge asset to our business."

Charlotte commented on her new role, saying: "Nigel Wright has always been a recruitment brand I've admired from afar and I'm pleased to have joined the business at an exciting time. We have big plans to expand our service offering across my specialist sectors and with a great team behind me, I'm sure it will be a success."



"Nigel Wright has always been a recruitment brand I've admired from afar"





Nigel Wright enjoying rapid growth in Teesside following 2015 office launch

As part of a wider expansion strategy, Nigel Wright Recruitment opened its first ever office in Teesside, at Wynyard Park House, in 2015. Eighteen months since the office launch, Associate Director, Richard Morgan, and Managing Consultant, Sarah Dargue, give their views on how the business has grown its reputation, as well as its size. >>



Firstly, why did you decide to launch in Teesside?

Richard

The Tees Valley business community is optimistic. The area will receive an extra £13.9m investment between 2016 and 2021 as part of Government's growth deal. Tees Valley LEP has already helped Teesside companies secure more than £1.3bn of private sector investment since its creation and the NECC hopes to see 25,000 private sector jobs created in Teesside over the next 10 years. Also, Teesside is an under serviced area. It's in-between Newcastle and Leeds and we recognised an opportunity to offer a higher-level service there.

Sarah

Nigel Wright has always worked with clients in Teesside but serviced them from Newcastle. Our reputation wasn't known as well in the south of the

region because we didn't have an office presence there. We'd also learned from firms that had used our services that the quality of candidates supplied by local recruiters wasn't always great. Clients' recommended that for us to become more embedded in the local market, and so more likely recognised ahead of other suppliers, we needed to establish an office there. Wynyard Park is on the A19 and ten minutes away from the A1, so we have great access to County Durham, Teesside and North Yorkshire. It's also free parking!

If reputation (or lack of) was an issue for you in Teesside, what was your initial approach to the market?

Sarah

I would say, during 2015, the focus between developing new business and reigniting existing



relationships was around 50/50. We proactively hit the market during the first three months, meeting a high number of clients and candidates. We targeted all levels of the market too. From junior, through to mid and up to executive level. Our reputation within the south of the region was largely at the mid-level. Having resources on the ground and the momentum to get out there and show clients how we could help them right across their organisations made a big impact.

Richard

We made our current aware we were there, then we identified companies and sectors we wanted to target and arranged lots meetings. We launched in March 2015 and spent the rest of that year focused mainly on business development activities. The initial team of consultants installed at Wynyard each had at least ten years' recruitment and sales experience; we believed 'experience' would drive our success. Nigel Wright also adopts a cross-discipline team approach. Regardless of location, any of our specialist' consultants in finance, IT, HR, sales & marketing, engineering & manufacturing and supply chain feed market and candidate knowledge into each assignment. Other 'multilocation' recruiters with operations in Teesside don't operate like this. Their siloed set-up means they guard intelligence rather than share it. This tactic, again, gave us momentum in those first few months.

What were your key learnings at the end of 2015?

Sarah

Price was an issue at first. Nigel Wright is a premium brand with a premium service offering, but we experienced push-back from companies that had become used to paying low fees for a 'transactional' service and less than ideal candidates. It took time to prove the quality of our service in the market, as well as the effectiveness of our 'partnership' approach. Now clients have acknowledged that when it comes to service, you get what you pay for.

Richard

It's a competitive market, there's as much variety of recruitment providers here as in Newcastle. An existing level of expectation within the market about what a recruitment service is, has also often been difficult to persuade companies that they needed to try a fresh approach. We've had to learn to persevere and keep pushing our message. Another major factor that we've sought to improve is selecting the right people for our business. Launching in Teesside coincided with broader investment in internal recruitment and I now state, with confidence, that it's not easy to get a job at Nigel Wright. We're experts in talent attraction, so as you would expect, we have a thorough and detailed process and are confident that we only hire the best people.



“Nigel Wright is a premium brand with a premium service offering, but we experienced push-back ... It took time to prove the quality of our service in the market, as well as the effectiveness of our 'partnership' approach.”





What's the situation now?

Sarah

We've established our reputation, so client meetings to discuss active assignments, rather than trying to sell our proposition, have increased. The 'footfall' of candidates has also gone up because there's a willingness to travel to a local office, rather than to Newcastle. We've grown our team too and now have a nice blend of experienced and junior consultants with expertise across different disciplines and sectors. It's a supportive environment. We want to see each other succeed and there's lots of 'cross-selling' in the office. People from our Newcastle site visit every day too. With capacity for ten people, on occasion some consultants use the interview rooms due to a lack of space in the main area. It's a busy and high-energy place to work.

Richard

Recognition of our brand is strong. We're a part of the business community here, hosting regular seminars and other networking events. Several assignments completed during the first 18 months were existing roles, where clients had failed to find the right people through other providers, and passed the work to us instead. In completing those assignments, we've proved our capability and clients are noticing a difference in the market. I also believe we've retained everything good about the Newcastle office and replicated it at Wynyard. We have a joined-up business across two high performing sites. Candidates and clients benefit, not just from a six-person office in Wynyard, but a 35+ person north east firm.

What are the plans moving forward?

Sarah

Currently, consultants permanently based at Wynyard cover finance, IT, sales and marketing. Those with expertise in HR, manufacturing, engineering and supply chain operate out of Newcastle and travel here for client and candidate meetings. We plan to expand our team next year to ensure consultants based in Teesside cover all our specialist disciplines.

Richard

We've got good momentum and plan to continue building our team and supporting the growth of clients in the south of the region. It's a positive place to do business and, I believe, a well-kept secret. There more potential to grow here than we first anticipated. The business community has responded well to the SSI closure; companies have diversified and become more agile and resourceful. Petrochemicals and digital are strong sectors. Teesside is also home to world-leading innovation, driven by spin-offs from the sale of ICI. PD Ports 'rule the river', Hitachi is a major investment for the area, there's even a cluster of major care home organisations in Darlington. We're unearthing new businesses all the time, businesses that we hadn't previously known. We plan to push further south to, into North Yorkshire and west towards Cumbria. Again, those are territories where we believe we will offer something different.



Luxury furniture maker strengthens for future success

On the outskirts of Cramlington is a North-East gem. George Smith Ltd creates beautifully crafted, luxury upholstered furniture. Bought by discerning individuals and interior designers for top end residential and hospitality projects; its bespoke sofas, chairs and beds leave the factory at Nelson Park Industrial Estate and travel all over the world. >>

They are laid in and sat upon by a variety of wealthy patrons: ranging from business leaders and property moguls to pop stars and movie legends.

Its well-earned reputation with the rich and famous isn't all that surprising, as from the very beginning, George Smith Ltd set out to make the highest quality handmade products. To do so, it hired the best craftsmen from the local talent pool. Today, George Smith's priorities remain unchanged

and the talent has stayed; with many of the 85 employees at the site exceeding twenty years' service.

Locating its UK showroom on Kings Road in Chelsea and its North American stores in affluent areas of Los Angeles and Chicago, in addition to two in New York, helped consolidate its premium image early on.

The changing dynamics of the luxury goods market, however, has led George Smith Ltd

to reassess how it operates. An increasing demand for unique, personalised pieces has greatly reduced the opportunity to produce a limited range of standard items, sold through its own showrooms in the UK and USA, being replaced instead by a B2B business model, focused on promoting customer loyalty with key interior designers.

It was clear that operational capability would need to be enhanced in order to effectively and efficiently service the changing market.



“With over fifty percent of orders now for bespoke or customised items, our product development process had to evolve in order to meet the changing challenges. It had to be spot-on, to continue being a real differentiator between us and our competitors.”

Cue Operations Director, Keith Elsey, who joined the firm in June 2015, bringing with him over 30 years of business and operational leadership and expertise. From the outset, Keith was clear about what he needed to do. “Every George Smith product, globally, is supplied from the Cramlington factory. With over fifty percent of orders now for bespoke or customised items, our product development process had to evolve in order to meet the changing challenges. It had to be spot-on, to continue being a real differentiator between us and our competitors.”

Upskilling and professionalising the product development process became Keith's priority.



Although impressed with the craftsmanship at George Smith, and recognising the “fantastic” technical skills it had at its disposal, he was conscious that the business must move with the times. It needed to “future-proof itself” through injecting essential generic business skills across design, engineering, lean manufacturing and supply chain to compliment the technical capability of the woodworkers, upholsterers and textile specialists.

Furthermore, with an ageing workforce, Keith was concerned that many tacit skills and knowledge were at risk of being lost.

His strategy, therefore, was twofold: “I wanted to bring in new talent, as well as develop skills for the future by creating an environment where our experienced staff could pass on their expertise to a new generation of George Smith craftsmen.”

With Nigel Wright's help, Keith made six “long term” appointments, as well as moving various people into different roles to fit a new, simplified operating structure. After securing a “brilliant” factory manager to head up the Factory Team and replace the outgoing interim solution, Keith turned his attention to establishing George Smith's dedicated product development team, introducing qualified engineers and designers with the latest software skills.

Candidates were attracted to the opportunity to gain “end-to-end” involvement and ownership of projects. Keith notes how most larger manufacturers aren't as joined up as this. “Roles tend to be pigeonholed either supporting sales or manufacturing. This was an exciting prospect for the new team to work with sales to help win orders, provide clear instructions to the factory and then make sure products met the agreed specifications.” As the new engineers and designers were brought in and trained in the product range and production processes, the business began moving away from traditional design methods, such as hand drawings, investing instead in 3D CAD facilities. “It now means we can utilise historical projects and product details, to satisfy new project requirements, more accurately, consistently and quicker.”

With the product development team taking shape, Keith then focused on optimising the supply chain. “Our supply chain provided us with an opportunity to deliver some real long-term business benefits, as well as some simple quick wins. With the introduction of a professionally qualified Supply Chain Manager to take responsibility for the bigger picture in terms of material technology, stock levels, lead times, terms and conditions, and negotiating cost savings.”

“A great example of this is when we asked the simple question ‘Why not source locally?’” Our current metalworker was based in Norfolk. We



“It was essential that we only recruited people who would integrate well with our long-serving workforce. Keith was adamant, therefore, about his requirement for hiring attitude as well as ability.”

sourced a new supplier, specialising in Architectural Metal Work, virtually next door in Cramlington. This has allowed queries to be addressed face to face, ensuring timely, accurate, cost-effective project completion.”

Alongside this “essential” talent acquisition project, in 2016 George Smith launched a new apprenticeship programme in association with Northumberland College. In the past, Upholstery Apprentices have had to be trained at a College in Nottingham. Five apprentices were hired in 2016 and Keith highlighted how each has been given a mentor within the business to assist with their technical development and support them in becoming “good employees.”

It was essential that we only recruited people who would integrate well with our long-serving workforce. Keith was adamant, therefore, about his requirement for hiring attitude as well as ability. “It makes a massive difference to an organisation if you’ve got people with a positive outlook, energy and enthusiasm.”

New Production Planner, Emma, is a good example of how this fresh approach to hiring has worked. A graduate with a 1st Class Honours in Maths, but with no prior permanent work experience; her positive, open, honest and approachable demeanour (along with amazing IT and maths skills), has ensured she is now a key member of the factory team.

Running alongside the recruitment strategy has been Keith’s ongoing project to simplify the operating structure and business processes employed at George Smith Ltd. Going live on 3rd January 2017, with the three UK business

units - Fabrics, Manufacturing and Sales - now consolidated and merged into one business and using the same database. Again, a simple change, but one which Keith hopes will make a big impact on how George Smith operates.

Keith and the project team will spend the rest of 2017 optimising the new system, targeting other basic process efficiencies across the business to better support management controls and lower running costs.

With the influx of new skills and so many positive developments being delivered, George Smith is now well placed to target exciting new opportunities and deal effectively with whatever the future may have to offer.

What Keith said about Nigel Wright:

“I used Nigel Wright in the past, so when I moved back to the region they were my first point of call. The consultants who I worked with during the talent acquisition project were excellent. Experts in Supply Chain, Engineering and Manufacturing, they took the time to get to know our business and its challenges. They visited the factory, met with myself and other employees and quickly demonstrated they understood the culture and the type of people who work here. They asked questions which challenged me to think about the type of people and skills we needed and offered market insight allowing me to consider what was available to me within my budget. It isn’t easy to recruit in this industry, but the calibre of the people we brought into our business in 2016 shows that the talent is out there if you can find it. Overall, a very positive experience.”

Susan Coulson

Director of People



Big changes are ahead in social housing following the introduction of the 2016 Housing and Planning Act. We caught up with Home Group's People Director Susan Coulson to discuss the impact of new policies and how the organisation has subsequently redesigned its delivery model to ensure customers would not be negatively impacted. Susan also discusses Home Group's employee engagement and talent acquisition strategies and shares her thoughts on what she thinks the sector will look like in 2020. >>



"We support the principle that those who earn more should pay more."

What are the 'Pay to Stay' and 'Right to Buy' policies?

Pay to Stay (formally known as 'HIST' – High Income Social Tenants) for social housing tenants is a new policy being introduced as part of the Housing and Planning Act. In effect, this states that households who earn over a certain level (£31,000 outside London and £40,000 in London) should pay more rent than those on lower income levels. Local authorities will be required to implement this policy, whereas for housing associations, it is optional. Right to Buy is being introduced to housing association properties as part of the Housing and Planning Act. This will entitle tenants who meet certain criteria to buy their home at a discount. Local authority tenants, as well as secure tenants whose properties have been transferred to housing associations from councils, have had the Right to Buy since the early 1980s. Like HIST, for housing associations, it is a voluntary approach.

How will these changes impact Home Group?

We support the principle that those who earn more should pay more, recognising that it could be a



route towards either moving into a private sector market rent property or ownership, thus freeing up an affordable rent property for those in greater need. With regards to Right to Buy, most of the housing association sector is implementing it, and we've already had interest from several customers. Home Group will make Right to Buy available to as many customers as possible who fit the criteria as set by Government. We feel comfortable embracing the policy, as we polled our customers a year ago, and found that 87% would like to buy their own home. We want to encourage them

to realise their aspirations. Right to Buy should be cost neutral as Government have committed to compensating housing associations for the discount, although the details of this have yet to be confirmed.

How has Home Group succeeded in maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction while adjusting to these developments?

In preparation for the changes ahead, there was a 'root and branch' review during which our customers were consulted and had a say on how they wanted services delivered. This informed the development of our recent Customer Service Organisational Design Project (CSOD) where we realigned the organisational model - changing the skills mix and supporting a 'digital first' approach through the contact centre - to ensure that the customer experience would not be negatively impacted. The result is that our services are enhanced through longer opening hours, a robust repairs and maintenance service and a more seamless approach to service delivery through increased use of technology. Repairs have proven to be the single most influential element in customer service delivery and we have made improvements in repairs reporting, appointment and job scheduling, customer contact and communications, contract management and standardisation of property components such as boilers.

What has been the impact on employees?

At Home Group, any actions taken following the impact of internal or external forces are done so with the involvement of colleagues. We have employee forums which include Union and non-Union representation, as well as various other communication channels used to consult and involve our people. This ensures that they all play a part in shaping how Home Group responds. Regarding the government changes, the colleague

consultations we undertook highlighted a number of things Home Group should stop doing, do less of or keep the same. The key thing here is that there was overwhelming support from employees and HR given to the maintenance of learning and development (L&D) budgets. Consequently, knowledge management and customer service training have been areas of significant investment, and colleagues continue to report improvements in the availability of information and their confidence in dealing with all types of enquiries as a result.

How have the values of Home Group helped to facilitate a change mind set and behaviours across the organisation?

Home Group began a major cultural program in 2012 called 'Living Our Values.' The impact of this process is that our values - Caring, Accountable, Energised, Commercial - are embedded across the organisation. They act as a foundation, a common language everyone understands, and provide Home Group with a strong platform from which to move forward with the government changes. For example, Home Group is always looking to provide value for money and a key part of the Customer Service Organisational design programme was to reduce costs and increase efficiency. This did mean a reduction in headcount impacting frontline roles. 'Commercial' was used to explain this, linked with the external challenges facing our (and other) organisations. Engaging with and involving employees in change consultations is linked to 'Caring' and making sure everyone understood the change and their role in supporting change was aligned with 'Accountability.' Because these values are reinforced at Home Group our people know, very quickly, what we're trying to achieve and why. There is also a strong social purpose and a strong sense of ownership about how actions can impact customers and a pride in making sure services aren't impacted.





“We had values ambassadors who acted as change agents to help facilitate the culture programme.”

What role has technology played in the change process?

There has been a major focus on technology at Home Group with the aim of giving our people better tools to do their jobs and provide a better service to customers. 'Digital First' is one of our strategic principles and we're also implementing Oracle (enterprise resource planning software). So far, back office improvements have been completed across HR, L&D and Payroll. In the Autumn, Finance and Procurement will also be upgraded. We're basically enhancing our channels, how we work with customers and how we operate as an organisation offering a great service, customer satisfaction and value for money.

What were the key elements of your talent attraction strategy following a recent recruitment freeze?

At the core of our strategy was making Home Group an attractive employer to people from a variety of different industries. We developed tailored advertising solutions and created a planned, focused and targeted approach, building on our values to establish Home Group as an employer of choice and great place to work. This has a positive impact on the CSOD project, where we had a fantastic response for vacancies within our contact centre. Home Group has a great brand and reputation and people want to be part of that.

What about talent management? What initiatives did you introduce to help employees step-up and try new skills to support the business?

This happened at various levels. Part of the process was, again, reinforcing our culture. We had values ambassadors who acted as change agents to help facilitate the culture programme. Another aspect was reviewing our L&D propositions and developing 'Learning Pathways' designed to assist people get to the 'next level' in their area. Effective communication was important as well as the role of managers stepping up and leading and supporting change. Although these are HR initiatives, everyone is accountable for ensuring success. All new ways of working are designed for the business by the business. Our refusal to not cut investment in people development has certainly paid off.

What learnings have you taken from this period of organisational change?

Change is becoming more complex and multifaceted, so we've had to evolve how we manage the process recognising the mobilisation, transition and transformation phases of change require different approaches. Our framework has become more mature and has included, for example, creating tool kits for operational, project and programme managers. This all helped win 'hearts and minds' and make the process a success.



Do you anticipate the government will change its approach and give well-run housing associations greater flexibility to meet house building targets?

We hope that the sector will prove it is embracing the new home ownership agenda and that it has the capacity and desire to deliver on housing supply targets. A greater deal of flexibility on tenure type being pushed through government funding programmes and issues around local planning requirements would be welcome. However, we generally feel positive about our capacity to deliver new properties, and are developing exciting new products to fill gaps in the market, e.g. our own 'flexi rent' product. There are also many opportunities emerging through, for example, the devolution agenda, where freedoms and flexibilities on a variety of areas including housing are being sought from Government.

How much collaboration takes places in the sector?

We are involved in a lot of networks, e.g. Northern Housing Consortium, NHF. Our CEO Mark Henderson chairs Homes for the North and co-chairs a government efficiency network with focused on developing new ways of benchmarking efficiency in the sector. Most business departments are involved in networking arrangement and practice sharing groups either within or outside the sector.

Does Home Group have a post-Brexit plan?

Like everyone else, we aren't sure what is going to happen once Article 50 is triggered, but we're doing our best to monitor what's happening and anticipate how it would impact upon us. So far, despite the uncertain environment we're operating in, we feel confident about delivering on our current development plans.



What other challenges lie ahead for Home Group?

We await the regulations for the Housing and Planning Act which will provide us with more details of what changes we need to make in some areas. I think this could present both opportunities and challenges to be managed. In addition, we wait to see what the new government's Industrial Strategy will mean for housing and construction as a sector. Home Group is also a big player in the social care market, and there are challenges ahead there in relation to changes to the way that supported housing is being funded (to reduce the Housing Benefit bill). We have worked closely with government to manage the potential impact of these changes and feel that we have influenced significantly, but the sector must find a way to respond effectively to remain viable. The fact is that we have an ageing population, and public spend is declining. This challenge for all of us is going to get tougher over time.

What does the social housing sector look like in 2020?

I like to be positive, and looking on the bright side, I'll characterise it as: a bigger supply of housing of a variety of tenures (realistically this will mainly be related to ownership); housing associations will be increasingly innovative in the way they communicate with customers and deliver services, through utilising new technology; and more people will be able to find the sort of home that they want to live in. It's difficult to anticipate, and it's likely that there will be a continued trend towards mergers and acquisitions, so the shape and the size of the housing sector will change. I view this as a good thing – change will refresh and renew organisations to make them more commercial and customer focused. We also believe Home Group and the sector in general will continue to work with brilliant people who want to make a difference.



The Lakes Distillery set for first malt yield in 2017

Nigel Wright's Andrew Openshaw chats to Nigel Mills from The Lakes Distillery to discuss preparations for the release of its flagship brand, The Lakes Malt. Nigel also reveals some of the challenges and successes the business has had since launching in 2012. >>

I met Nigel Mills, Chairman of The Lakes Distillery, on what was another milestone day for the Keswick-based luxury spirits maker. Nigel explained that Dhavall Gandhi had officially joined the business. Formerly of The Macallan and a Chartered Scientist in Whisky Distilling, Dhavall is one of the leading Master Blenders in the global industry. In Nigel's words: "With Dhavall on board, we're positive we can produce one of the great malt whiskies of the world."



That has been Nigel and business partner Paul Currie's ambition since the start of their journey in 2012, which has seen their impossible dream turn into a multi-award winning reality. Making the perfect Whisky, though, is a task that requires patience and perseverance. A mixture of Faith, Hope and Love perhaps, three of the four words engraved into the 33 quatrefoils dotted throughout the redeveloped old Victorian farm. And the team at The Lakes Distillery have those qualities in abundance.

It all began in earnest when Nigel read about a firm of architects in Carlisle that had secured planning consent to build a Whisky distillery in the Lake District National Park. Since selling Mills Group to Tesco in 2011, Nigel's focus had been running his luxury hotel, the Trout, in Cumbria. The planned distillery would be six miles from the award-winning hotel. Sensing a partnership opportunity, Nigel arranged to meet with Paul in April 2012.

Paul Currie is a whisky man. He set up the iconic Isle of Arran Distillers with his Dad, Harold, in 1995. Harold always dreamt of opening a

distillery in the Lake District, believing it an ideal place for such a venture with its charming scenery and access to abundant fresh spring water. Paul had pursued this dream, had even found the perfect venue in a disused Victorian cattle farm near Bassenthwaite Lake, but in 2012, was struggling to raise money to get the venture off the ground.

Nigel was impressed, though perceptive of the challenges ahead. Whisky spirit must lie in a cask for three years and a day before it's legally sold as whisky. It must then mature for a further seven years before it even comes close to reaching 'greatness.' Therefore, Nigel explained: "You need other income streams to at least cover the cost of producing the malt." Intrigued by the challenge, he offered to review the business plan. Together with Paul, they created seven routes to market.

With Nigel now on board, the focus turned to creating the best whisky distillery visiting experience in the world. This would include a tour, a bistro, a shop selling The Lakes Distillery Whisky, Gin and Vodka and other items linked to distilling and blending. In addition, Nigel and Paul planned to sell into the UK wholesale and retail





markets as well as export their brands to lucrative international spirit markets. The proposition also included an exclusive membership club and an e-commerce website.

The seven different businesses, Nigel noted, needed properly resourcing and managing: "Having a great plan isn't enough. You need a team of experts to drive a project forward. If the money isn't chasing you, then your plan or your team or both aren't good enough."

Via the Entrepreneurs Forum, an organisation he helped found in 2002, Nigel was introduced to Dr Alan Rutherford, ex-head of global whisky production at Diageo and professor at Heriot-Watt University, a European centre for excellence for distilling and blending. Nigel was keen to know



Alan's thoughts on the prospects of marketing an 'English whisky.' His answer: "Well, somebody has to be the best. Why not you?" Impressed and enthused with this response, Nigel asked Alan to join The Lakes Distillery as a non-executive director, and he did.

Through Alan's network, they quickly secured the services of a master stillman, Chris Anderson. A Cumbrian who used to manage Dewars' whisky distilleries in Scotland. Together with Paul and Alan, they now had a team with: "Huge credentials in the whisky industry." Nigel himself offered knowledge in wholesale, retail and tourism. The missing links were food and e-commerce.

Again, via the Entrepreneurs Forum, word of the project reached Eutechnyx founder Brian Jobling. He'd recently sold a majority share in the award-winning video games developer and was seeking new opportunities. Excited by the plan and the chance to join the team, he was appointed CTO to develop the distillery's online presence and e-commerce systems.

Raising cash was still a challenge. Nigel explained how they organised various fundraising events throughout 2012 to try and secure the support of investors. Some of these took place at Café 21, on Newcastle's Quayside. Seeing a chance to establish a bistro within a potentially world-leading tourism destination, Michelin star chef, Terry Laybourne, owner of Café 21, also gave the project his backing.

With experts in place in all the right areas, in 2013, The Lakes Distillery raised the required funds through the Enterprise Investment Scheme, to place a deposit on the stills and start renovating the farm and building the distillery. With a 12-18 month wait for the completion of the stills and distillery, the team set to work raising their reputation in the competitive £15 billion whisky industry. Global trends, however, were on their side.



"... although Scotch is still the benchmark for quality, in recent years the whisky market has opened to a variety of international competitors. New World Whisky is the label given to whisky produced outside of Scotland. This is where the real growth in the industry is taking place."



“When people think of the Lake District, a whisky distillery does not come to mind. So, we’re still educating the market about where we are and why people should visit.”

Nigel noted that although Scotch is still the benchmark for quality, in recent years the whisky market has opened to a variety of international competitors. “New World Whisky is the label given to whisky produced outside of Scotland. This is where the real growth in the industry is taking place. There are new whisky distilleries being built all over the world. Australia has 21, there are eight in Sweden.”

Emphasising location as the basis for a unique brand, The Lakes Distillery assembled whiskies from around the UK to create the first ever British Isles blend, which they named The One. It was launched in the Autumn of 2013 and achieved worldwide success. Just over a year later, on 15th December 2014, the Distillery opened.

Each area of the business performed strongly during the first year of trading, achieving over £3 million in turnover. A strong start, though, for Nigel, Paul and the team, it was the accolades they were most proud of. In addition to The One receiving recognition at various international tasting competitions, the distillery itself was highly commended by architectural awarding bodies. The Lakes Distillery is also now a ‘Cumbrian icon,’ as reported by Cumbria Magazine in its 2015 poll, alongside literary legends Alfred Wainwright and Beatrix Potter.

Nigel describes these honours as “Unbelievable” though told me the icing on the cake was winning the Global Distillery Masters award for overall visitor experience. “We were acknowledged as having the best distillery visitor experience in the world. Something we set out to achieve back in 2012 before the distillery was even built.” Over 21,000 people paid to do one of three tours at the site in 2015, one of which involves spending the whole day with the master stillman. An opportunity Nigel described as: “The ultimate experience for anybody interested in spirits.”

Now in their stride, though still waiting patiently for the Malt to mature, The Lakes Distillery started adding to its portfolio, developing a super-premium gin and triple distilled vodka. With 283 different gin varieties in the UK and 49 new gin distilleries built

in 2015 alone, I asked Nigel why they’d chosen to enter a difficult emerging market. His answer was simple: “The entire project has been about identifying the natural strengths of the area and then building a business around them.”

Cumbria, I discovered, is the home of British juniper, the backbone ingredient of gin. Producing gin in the natural home of juniper in the UK, Nigel highlighted, was: “An opportunity not to be missed.” Furthermore, seven of the fourteen Botanicals used in the distilling process are native to the Lake District National Park, where the distillery is located. The Lakes Gin, to use Nigel’s words, therefore has “Genuine provenance” which sets it apart of from its competitors.

Alongside the spirit brands, which have now won 15 medals between them at prestigious tasting competitions in the UK and overseas, Terry Laybourne’s Bistro has also had a promising start to business. “We sold over 70,000 meals in the bistro in 2015, which we upped to 80,000 in 2016. We’re in Michelin’s and Harden’s Good Food Guides and win Open Table Restaurant of the Month, every month, in Cumbria.”

While this is undoubtedly impressive for a restaurant located in the town of Setmurthy, population 93, Nigel is all too aware that location remains an obstacle. “When people think of the Lake District, a whisky distillery does not come to mind. So, we’re still educating the market about where we are and why people should visit.” Nigel added how, in Cumbria, more could be done to promote the area through public and private sector collaboration.

While Faith, Hope and Love have served the business well so far. Luck, the other word which forms The Lakes Distillery ‘mantra’, turned against them in December 2015. Severe flooding caused by Storm Desmond on 4th December 2015 effectively ended Christmas trading, for the tourism side of the business. This impact, which Nigel described as “Detrimental”, was felt for the first six months of 2016 due to subsequent works to raise the height of the main junction leading to the distillery.



“Everybody attached to this project has had a lot of faith to get us to where we are today. Hope is eternal. Yes, you need a bit of luck along the way, but if you don’t love what you do, then you drastically reduce your chance of success.”

Nigel is adamant that the team of 85 employees across the business achieved remarkable results regardless of these issues, with tour numbers going up by 5,000 and restaurant visits, by 10,000, at the end of 2016. “Think what we could have done if things had gone our way.”

2017 signals the final countdown to the launch of The Lakes Malt Genesis, which will ‘become’ whisky on 17th December 2017. The inaugural bottling will be sold from September 2017. With spirit drawn from the first 100 casks only available to members of The Founders Club, The Lakes Distillery exclusive online membership club, who receive a bottle of the malt and two miniatures each year for ten years. The Lakes Malt Genesis will then be launched to the public on 19th May 2018, to coincide with World Whisky Day.

The expected flavour? Nigel says they can only make educated guesses. Every distillery has unique stills in terms of their shape and the configuration, to give malts their distinctive characteristic. The Lakes’ casks, too, have a distinctive edge. Without restrictions like those in Scotland where whisky can only be made in casks of oak, The Lakes Distillery has experimented with woods like birch, acacia and maple used by producers of bourbon, sherry, wine and port. “It will be quite a light spirit with a depth of character. A little bit fruity, with perhaps a slightly

spicy aftertaste. It will be palatable, even for non-whisky drinkers.”

The wait continues, but while anticipation builds the business has plenty of other plans to occupy itself. As well as aiming for 90,000 visitors to its bistro in 2017, Nigel told me they want to double the number of people doing tours. “Yes, we may have been voted best visitor experience, but we want that to be reflected in our footfall as well.”

Continuing to build The Lakes Gin, Vodka, and The One brands are also vital. Majestic wines are the main UK stockists and Nigel said they plan to continue targeting major multiples and wholesalers, as well as the on trade and off trade, to bolster sales. The Lakes spirits are currently sold in various international markets too, including France, the world number one consumer of whisky, UAE and Taiwan. From April, a new distribution agreement has been established in Australia, and The One will be available in Auckland airport, in New Zealand, for the start of the British Lions tour in the Autumn.

The Lakes Malt, Nigel explained, will mostly be sold abroad. An 18 month wait for USA Food and Drink Association approval is now over and North American partners are being sought, in addition to partners in other markets outside of Europe. “The fall in the value of the pound, means the dollar based currencies such as Taiwan, the Far East and America are attractive because we have, in theory, a competitive advantage. Europe remains a target market, though, Nigel feels Brexit uncertainty is unlikely to facilitate any short-term wins.

With Dhavall on board and the bad luck of last year behind them, The Lakes’ team is optimistic about the future. Faith, Hope and Love have returned to the fore; in Nigel’s words: “Everybody attached to this project has had a lot of faith to get us to where we are today. Hope is eternal. Yes, you need a bit of luck along the way, but if you don’t Love what you do, then you drastically reduce your chance of success. Nobody works this hard, just for the money.”





Nigel Wright offers temp and interim solutions with a difference

The number of temporary and contract placements in the UK reached a five-month high in November 2016. The buoyancy of the temp market will not abate either, with UK employers indicating they will maintain or increase the number of temporary workers hired next year. >>



“Planning for the use of a temporary resource if managed correctly, can reduce cost in the long term.”

This is all part of a wider global workforce trend towards the 'gig economy', where temporary talent solutions become a strategic asset for businesses of all sizes. Nigel Wright Regional Director, Sue Ormerod, explained that two connected factors are at play. “There is an impending need for businesses to capitalise on positive market conditions and increase their capability by hiring more people. Yet, a sustained lack of workers with the necessary skills to enable firms to achieve long-term growth means they have to turn to interim staff to achieve short-term wins.”

Most businesses today retain a stable core team, which they complement with temporary resources to fill short term talent requirements. Ormerod highlighted how temporary employees make an immediate impact with little or no intervention. “Companies can generally expect higher standards of experience as well as the right qualifications and motivation, being that a temp or contractor will work for every hour.” Operating at a senior level, interim managers and specialist contractors are adept at assimilating into new environments, driving change, turning projects around and communicating with key stakeholders without

fear of raising sensitive issues. Ormerod added, “Hiring a temporary worker also involves less risk, with many businesses using it as an opportunity to assess the suitability of a candidate before hiring someone on a permanent basis.”

Nigel Wright believes that companies using temporary resource should always get excellent value for money, as Ormerod noted, “Planning for the use of a temporary resource if managed correctly, can reduce cost in the long term. Hiring a temporary candidate can also allow a business to afford someone that they wouldn't necessarily be able to hire permanently.” Yet, with the current high demand for temporary workers, there has been a tendency for companies to overpay to ensure they get the best resource available. This, in Ormerod's view, is one of the reasons why recruiters operating in the temporary market often get poor reputations. “Companies will pay recruiters high fees in the hope of securing great candidates, yet often end up disappointed with both the candidates and the service.” The problem lies with those providers who value short term wins, over long term relationships.



Ormerod explains. "The temporary recruitment market is fast paced. Company's seeking temporary staff usually want to make quick hires, which leads to the creation of transactional delivery models. Recruiters operating in this environment will bombard companies with CVs, hoping that one will match the client's need and generate a fee. Most assignments are contingent and competition between two or three agencies is common. Bad practices ensue such as sending CVs of unregistered workers; consultants also rarely make themselves available to answer enquiries and provide project updates, and there is no consistency in service due to high employee turnover." She added how firms will often bypass recruiters and instead use specialist temp recruitment portals. Ormerod noted, though, that as recruiting from portals doesn't involve meeting with and screening candidates, it could also generate poor results.

Nigel Wright's approach to temporary and interim recruitment

Nigel Wright's North East Division place temps, contractors and interim managers specialising in a variety of different disciplines and sectors. Interim appointments usually include CEOs, General Managers and Directors of SMEs; temporary placements consist of HR and Sales & Marketing professionals whereas Nigel Wright contractors tend to work in IT, Finance and Operations roles, across all levels. The business has been active in the temporary recruitment market for over fifteen years and services volume accounts, as well making senior interim board appointments. Ormerod, who joined Nigel Wright in 2002 to establishing its temporary recruitment division states that "We've always had a different approach to the market than other suppliers. While still providing a fast turnaround to temporary recruitment projects, we also offer a consultative service."



Partnership delivery models aren't common within temporary recruitment, but, as Ormerod explained, Nigel Wright believes their system is the only way to guarantee that clients get the candidates they need, the first time. "We meet with our clients and spend time understanding their business. This includes visiting the sites we are recruiting for and getting a sense of the culture as well as the personalities in the different teams. When assessing CVs, we're able to be discerning with whom to recommend for opportunities. Before we inform clients of our selection, we meet our preferred candidates first and qualify them in person. We want customers to see our candidate supply as special."

At the same time, Nigel Wright believes it's important that candidates feel appreciated too. A standard part of the service is for consultants to visit temporary placements while they're fulfilling a contract. In Ormerod's words, "They enjoy our interaction and look forward to it because it's different to their usual experience. We bring gifts like a tray of doughnuts, for example, which makes them feel extra special." Spending time with

candidates also means Nigel Wright gets to know them better, enabling them to make confident recommendations to clients. Ormerod continued, "Having these personal relationships gives us a distinct advantage, and elevates us above our competition."

At the senior end of the market, as well as relying on existing networks for interim professionals, Nigel Wright consultants liaise with colleagues dealing with permanent positions who inform them of candidates recently out of work, who may consider interim contracts while they consider their next permanent position. Ormerod noted how consultants spend a great deal of their time persuading people to try interim work. "Our temp consultants have extensive networks and are constantly talking to candidates. This enables them to know, quickly, those available or those who may consider a temporary contract. In persuading 'top talent' into interim positions, we have made some great appointments over the years. Many candidates have subsequently been hired permanently."



"Before we inform clients of our selection, we meet our preferred candidates first and qualify them in person."



Work is changing: what does it mean for talent attraction and management?

We're living through an era of constant change. It's a historical period the Hopi Indians refer to as *powaqqatsi* or 'life in transformation' - a time defined by endless socio-economic, geopolitical and demographic upheaval, underpinned by rapid technological advancement. >>

The mainstream media enjoy labelling this tumultuous epoch a new age of uncertainty and there are a range of opinions offered about 'where we're heading', which can be sifted into an abundance of micro and macro contexts.

Anyone surfing the web for information on the latest developments in HR and talent attraction over the last twelve months has certainly found themselves compelled to click on an array of links proclaiming revelations about what the future beholds – the future of work that is. The overarching theme of these digital scatterings is that traditional jobs are being replaced by machines. Myriad statistics have been offered by various reports, some more defined than others. In Europe, it's anticipated a third of jobs could be lost to robots, whereas in the US commentators are claiming potentially 47%. A more considered analysis is offered by McKinsey & Co's 2016 report which highlights that around 60% of occupations could experience 30% or more of their 'constituent activities' automated over the next ten years.

The types of roles we're told are under threat are mid-skill level administrative and technical ones in sectors such as law and accountancy as well as manufacturing and production - types of functions and areas where workers have historically (and rather cynically) been referred to as automatons, due to the mechanical nature of their remit. As it stands, according to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), there has been an overall net-loss of these types of jobs worldwide due to 'disruptive labour' changes – the number of which is expected to rise to 5.1 million by 2020. As with anything, however, there is a positive as well as a negative spin on these apparently irrevocable developments.

In economics, we often hear the Schumpeterian theory of 'creative destruction' bandied around and it definitely has credence in this area. Jobs are being lost at an alarming rate, but there have been some incremental gains in new types of employment. The hope is that we will eventually see a cascade of new professions emerging out of this transitional period. Indications of this hypothesised tipping point are good – a lot of today's most in-demand occupations, for example,

didn't exist ten years ago - and a recent London School of Economics (LSE) backed report added further weight to this hopeful outlook. In *100 Jobs of the Future*, researchers identified various anticipated roles, many of which sound implausible to us today, like *Mind Reading Specialist* and *Weather Modification Police Officer*. It's clear that as technology progresses and improves, new opportunities and specialisms emerge.

The essential ingredient to eradicating the net-loss gap is making sure workers have the right skills to succeed in this envisaged future. Technological change will result in a wide range of traditional 'core skills' becoming obsolete and all industries will be impacted by this. There will still be core skills, though, and according to the abovementioned report, those skills will probably be more multifaceted and specialised, hence the urgency for training. The WTO provides a useful insight into what some of these desirable qualities of the future will be. Its research gives particular importance to data analysis and technical sales skills, envisioning an age where organisations will need more in-depth knowledge of data, as well as experts who can understand and commercialise increasingly complex products and services.





In addition to those 'scarcity skills' we hear a lot about such as STEM (Science, Technology and Mathematics), programming and software development, academics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Center for Digital Business go a step further and argue how a demand for creative expertise like writing, NPd and even art will also rise. The Pew Research Center also states that creativity will be a major asset for workers during the next decade, but adds factors like critical thinking, teaching, persuasion, empathy and judgement to the mix too – basically any adroitness that is 'uniquely human' and therefore difficult to automate.

The emergence of new specialisms and jobs and the subsequent need for training in the key skills required to fulfil these imminent opportunities and disciplines is one of the ways in which society is adapting to technology. Another feature of our adaptability, however, can be seen in the way in which working life is changing too. There has already been a great deal of impact on a number of historically 'fixed' attributes associated with work – things such as hours (how long you work, when you start and when you finish), location (remote offices, home working) contracts (the rise of the freelancer) and career (a move away from the ladder to the web).

Working hours have been in incremental decline, across Europe, for over sixty years and a recent report by PwC highlighted growing demands from workers to be released from the 'constraints' on 9-5 employment. Similarly, research by Dell has revealed how remote or home working is on the rise, with over 50% of global employees now working remotely more than once per week. With regards to freelancers, in the UK for example, it is anticipated that as much as 20% of the workforce will be employed in a freelance capacity, within the next six years. This move towards specialist and portfolio work is also dismantling the traditional career path of moving 'up' through an organisation. Working life isn't what it used to be and working life will continue to evolve.

The implications of the seismic changes in jobs and skills, as well as working life, for recruitment and talent management, is far ranging. With regards to recruitment, there is already widespread competition for talent within the fields fed by STEM skills - a situation which will only get worse over the next five years - and with the prospect of jobs becoming more niche and specialist, firms across all industries will begin to struggle to fill current and emerging roles. To get ahead of competitors, companies will have to become more scientific in their approach to identifying talent – or indeed seek recruitment partners that can demonstrate rigorous search methodologies that give more emphasis to candidate 'attributes' over job experience.

This point ties in directly to one made earlier. To provide a more thorough investigation of specific candidate attributes, recruiters will also have to capitalise on emerging skills and technologies that will enable them to maximise their data and achieve these desired results. LinkedIn's Global Recruiting Trends 2016 report indicated

that recruitment in the future will utilise databases built on complex algorithms, together with data savvy researchers, to ensure all possible 'fit factors' are considered during a search.

Having robust 'smart data' capability, however, is only one aspect of how recruitment is changing. In today's digital economy, recruiters are also finding they must use multiple on and offline channels to promote their brand to attract new business, and their jobs to attract candidates. An interesting article by Recruitment Grapevine outlines a typical recruitment process involving predominantly content generating activities such as Email, SMS and social media, in addition to headhunting calls. There have been a few articles written over the last 18 months which have asked the question 'Is Recruitment turning into Marketing?' and with recruitment agencies and internal recruitment departments tending to stand out when they're publishing and sharing content, the answer would seem to be yes. Recruitment, like other professional sectors, therefore, will need to rely heavily on creative skills in the future.

The challenges for talent management are equally galling. We have already discussed how working life is rapidly changing. The rise of flexible hours and remote offices, facilitated by advances in technology, are factors increasingly demanded by workers who are realising how new technologies can release them from the associated 'constraints' of work. If their demands for greater freedoms are not granted, then they move elsewhere. Or, thanks to an abundance of new and emerging tools, may transition to a freelance career. Many professionals across different sectors and disciplines are now choosing this route.

It is well documented how modern organisations are adapting to the new world of work, by creating 'enriching environments' in an effort to make their talent want to stay. We cover this briefly on page 44, referencing initiatives such as those which support personal growth, health and wellbeing and the development of a workplace culture, as well as aligning the organisation with charitable or environmental bodies. There is also the acknowledgement, however, that not all businesses are the same, and different approaches are needed in different contexts. Thinkers in the field of work are emphasising the importance of 'people analytics' in helping HR departments design the best-fit 'employee experiences' and the need for companies to embrace change with an attitude of 'trial and error' rather than cautious distrust.

The director of the iconic 'Qatsi' trilogy of movies, Godfrey Reggio, said that "Technology has become as ubiquitous as the air we breathe... we are no longer conscious of its presence." Humans will continue to become ever more dependent and integrated with their technology. The impact this is having on work is already huge and work as we know it will continue to change. Organisations that refuse to adapt their tools, invest in the acquisition as well as training and development of skills, and completely rethink their environment, risk being left behind.

Are your employees brand advocates?

In his 1981 short story, *Johnny Mnemonic*, the Canadian author William Gibson first envisaged a near future where communication via computer networks has become the dominant form of human interaction. >>

Participation within a ubiquitous global net - an environment which Gibson later termed cyberspace - has made it '...impossible to move, to live, to operate at any level without leaving traces, bits, seemingly meaningless fragments of personal information.' Yet rather than creating a society of unconstrained corruption from the traditional centres of authority, this fictional cyberspace has led to a greater dispersion of power, where access to the infinitude of information held therein means that 'Fragments... can be retrieved, amplified' by anyone proficient in the tools of manipulation.

Sound familiar? Fast forward 35 years and Gibson's imaginary future seems very real. Mass online surveillance and data collection by powerful elites is commonplace, yet widespread knowledge of the questionable practices of governments and corporations exists due to the actions of a diversity of dissident voices - from whistleblowers and WikiLeaks to the more esoteric Anonymous - all of whom offer us free and unlimited access to confidential information which is regularly released into the multitudinous digital matrix, becoming part of our ever expanding encyclopaedia of awareness.

In today's information saturated world, power is intangible and can be wielded with great affect by anyone with the right skills and access to the global web. This new reality can prove to be very damaging. Individual crusades against products, services or employers can quickly spiral into international events thanks to a plethora of social media tools. And review sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp and Glassdoor have enabled disgruntled silver-tongued consumers and employees to harm long standing reputations with scathing non-deletable opinions. But... companies are slowly discovering that there is an easy defence against this march of unruly hostility - **use employees to spread positive messages about the brand.**

The 2013 Trust Barometer report, published by global PR firm Edelman, confirmed that public trust in the opinions of employees far outweighs that of a company's PR department, CEO, or Founder. Yet, despite this well publicised fact, the concept of employee advocacy - getting employees proactively engaged in the promotion of your business - is widely misunderstood and underutilised. According to various sources, there are essentially two core elements to any successful employee advocacy programme - engagement and empowerment.



imagine



First of all, employees can't be forced to say nice things about their employer. They have to want to. In order for that to happen, companies must work hard to instil a sense of pride in their personnel. While factors like attractive remuneration and benefits packages are sure to create a degree of contentment amongst workers; it is initiatives that support personal growth, health and wellbeing and workplace culture, for example, that encourage genuine feelings of respect and dignity among staff. Embedding company values and aligning the organisation with perceived 'positive impact' causes, such as those linked to charitable or environmental affairs, also helps to boost beneficial reciprocity through tying people into a larger common purpose.

Secondly, once people are engaged, the most successful employee advocacy programmes seek to empower employees by giving them the freedom and tools to participate in brand building online. An excellent piece of research by MSL Group, part of global advertising agency Publicis, attempted to demonstrate how powerful employee opinion can be, when directed online. Its 2014 study highlighted that social media posts by employees reached 561% further than company posts. This demonstrates that, alone, marketing departments can only do so much, but more impactful exposure can be achieved if multiple channels across the business are collectively utilised.

Education, therefore, is paramount. All employees should be confident in their use of social channels as well their knowledge of their company's history, products, services and plans. Nokia, for example, has a well-established employee advocacy

programme, at the heart of which is staff education. Every employee knows the history of the brand and where it's going and are given access to a tool called Socialcast, which enables them to freely share their workplace stories across social media. Software company, Adobe, actually goes a step further and tests their employees' company and product knowledge to ensure consistent and accurate messages. And at online fashion retailer, Zappos, staff are all given extensive Twitter training and also ranked and rewarded if they demonstrate expertise across different social channels.

Other companies utilise sophisticated intranets, appoint employee advocacy leaders and send weekly updates to all staff, highlighting the latest sharable marketing content. These activities again make employees feel like they're part of a bigger community and help facilitate active participation in the promotion of the business.

The late French philosopher Michael Foucault famously wrote: 'Where there is power, there is resistance' and this age-old dichotomy seems more acute in today's information economy, where battles for the world's myriad of truths undoubtedly manifest by the hour. At their disposal, businesses have an army of employees which they can easily tool-up and send forth into the fray to flood the information superhighways with a propulsion of positivity - whether it's promoting products and services, raising brand awareness or highlighting how much they enjoy their jobs - this all helps firms wrestle power back from potentially quarrelsome critics and offer some proactive resistance in today's never-ending info-wars.



“Embedding company values and aligning the organisation with perceived ‘positive impact’ causes... also helps to boost beneficial reciprocity through tying people into a larger common purpose.”

Executive Careers

Jules Smith

Head of People Services, Virgin Money

Jules Smith has followed her dream and risen to the top of her profession. In this interview, she shares with Nigel Wright what has driven her to succeed during her twenty-year career. She also discusses her passion for employee engagement and its direct link to positive customer outcomes. >>



What initially lead you to a career in HR?

I decided to pursue a career in HR when I was fifteen years old. My father worked in senior corporate roles at Greggs and I knew I wanted to follow in his footsteps somehow. He explained to me what each department at Greggs did, and personnel and training immediately piqued my interest. I did some research and subsequently chose a route through education, culminating in a CIPD qualification, that helped me enter the HR profession.

How has the role of the HR professional changed during the last 20 years?

Significant changes occurred within HR during that period. At the start of my career, it was a policy, procedure and administrative function. By the late 1990s, however, the HR business partner model had become more prominent. HR practitioners began driving business outcomes, rather than just employee outcomes, and became recognised as a key part of the senior leadership team. Basically, taking on a more commercial and strategic agenda. This expanded again in the mid to late 2000s with the emergence of HR 'centres of excellence.' Organisational development, reward and pay, resourcing and talent planning etc. started having more influence within the broad HR discipline. During the last few years, there has been an employee engagement revival. As HR evolved into a more strategic function, it perhaps neglected its role as 'supporter of the people.' HR practitioners have since realised that great employee engagement drives the best possible customer outcomes.

Jules Smith – CV >>

2016 - Present

Virgin Money
Head of People Services

2010 - 2016

GE Oil & Gas
Head of HR Europe
Head of HR - UK & Ireland
Global HR Manager
Wellstream
Global HR Director

2008 – 2010

Muckle LLP
HR Director

2004 - 2008

Orange
Head of HR

2003 - 2004

Johnson & Johnson
HR Manager

1999 - 2003

Provident Financial
HR Project Manager

1995 - 1999

PKF
HR Consultant

What have been the most important aspects of your career to date that have helped you to climb the ladder?

I have worked with and learned from some amazing people over the last twenty years, gaining new experiences that have challenged me. Right at the start of my career, for example, I learned that HR has a significant commercial role to play. That helped 'set the tone' for how I approached my various roles. After leaving university I joined PKF, a mid-tier accountancy firm, as a personnel and training officer. It was a generalist HR role where, for a few years, I got to develop a broad range of skills. PKF decided to expand its HR consultancy service, and my boss gave me the opportunity to move into a fee-earning consultancy role. This was a real stretch for me and an opportunity to see how to apply HR practices in different commercial environments. I've since always enjoyed 'getting under the skin' of the businesses I've worked for, finding ways where I can make a difference. When I first join a new company, I invest time to understand what 'makes the business tick.' The best way to do this is to get close to customers, as well as getting to know how the business is measured financially and what influences financial success.

Gender diversity at board level remains a big issue in the public and private sectors. What advice would you pass on to other aspiring female leaders?

My advice is to be confident, as well as forthright and explicit about what you want at work. I am reticent to generalise, but as a woman I know I have struggled to be those things and learned the hard way. I almost lost out on a role which ended up being pivotal in my career by not putting myself forward and saying 'I want this job.' It was only when my HR Manager took me to one side and told me I was in the frame for the role, that I felt confident putting myself forward. By not coming forward earlier, it appeared I didn't want the job and I very nearly lost out.



Which recruitment campaigns have stood out as being the most interesting or challenging in your career?

At Orange, we had high staff turnover in the call centre and it was challenging to fill vacancies. Shift patterns were the main issue. Orange designed working hours to suit its customers but the shifts were not necessarily convenient for employees. We created a campaign called Your Time which solved this issue. It involved building shifts based on different 'lifestyles' and then targeting people in those lifestyle groups. Targeting students, for example, to fill weekend shift vacancies. Something Orange had previously never done. We tailored early morning shift advertising messages to appeal to retirees. In addition, we created school-run and term-time shifts, designed specifically for parents. The campaign was a big success and won a national award.

What technologies have been the most 'disruptive' to business practices during your career?

The virtual workspace has, and will continue, to disrupt the way people work. I experienced the cutting edge of this technology at GE. The business uses the Cisco TelePresence programme for cross-country collaboration, which enables a fully immersive video conferencing experience where remote employees feel like they're in the same room. It's impressive and I expect this, as well as tools like WebEx Connect, Skype for Business etc. to become more widely used, especially as the flexible working trend becomes more entrenched.

After four years at PFK, you joined Provident Financial and took on an international remit for the first time. How valuable was gaining international exposure early in your career to your subsequent global roles?

My experience since, until recently, has largely been in international roles, so I would say it was incredibly valuable. Working in an international

"HR practitioners have realised that great employee engagement drives the best possible customer outcomes."



“It’s easy to become insular and absorbed in your own organisation, so I believe in the value of building networks. They allow you to step out of your own company and learn how other businesses are tackling similar issues to yours.”

business does two things. Firstly, it makes you more aware and understanding of cultural sensitivities. Secondly, it trains your brain to think differently. The HR Project Manager position at Provident Financial was my first leadership role and included a one-year secondment to the Czech Republic, as well as responsibility for developing HR functions in South Africa and Poland. I created a 'performance management' system for use across multiple countries. It tested my abilities because I had to consider the impact it would have within different cultural settings. Putting myself in other people's shoes and learning about other cultures and ways of life. It's daunting and takes you out of your comfort zone but is ultimately rewarding. My advice to anyone is if given the opportunity, embrace it. You'll learn quickly and it will help shape the rest of your career.

You've worked in a variety of sectors: consumer products, financial and legal services, telecommunications. Do you have a favourite?

I've always taken opportunities as they've come up. I've never specifically targeted a sector nor do I have a favourite. Moving between B2C and B2B, however, was a valuable experience. Links between employee engagement and customer outcomes are less clear in B2B. Influencing and educating people on the positive impact employee engagement can have on overall service performance, and the bottom-line, posed a genuine professional challenge. Moving back into a B2C environment following many years in B2B, though, was refreshing. I'd missed having a genuine connection and empathy with the customer. Rather than the sector, I would say that I prefer working in larger corporate environments. The infrastructure and networks you can build are incredibly supportive. There's always lots to learn too.

How important are business networks in the HR community?

It's easy to become insular and absorbed in your own organisation, so I believe in the value of building networks. They allow you to step out of your own company and learn how other businesses are tackling similar issues to yours. Furthermore, in the North East, many companies only have one or two HR professionals. It can be quite a lonely existence, so in those contexts, networks are hugely beneficial for professional support. You also make some great friends.

In the 20 years since you began your career have you established basic rules – let's call them 'Jules's rules' – that you try to adhere to in your professional life?

I have five: Be true to yourself; get comfortable with being uncomfortable; have humility; invest in positive relationships; get under the



skin of your business. Leaders must act with authenticity, humility and show vulnerability. Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable is important as we must be adaptable and resilient in a changing world. I always find that when I am feeling uncomfortable, I know I am about to learn something.

What people, companies or business models have inspired you during your career?

Two organisations I'm privileged to have been part of are GE and Virgin Money, both have offered valuable and diverse professional experiences. At GE, I gained global exposure and had access to some of the best, and most renowned, leadership thinkers in the world. I find Virgin Money's ambition and the way it does business compelling. There's a desire to be different and to make a difference. I have been fortunate to work with some amazing people. My first HR boss taught me how to be a commercially and customer centric HR practitioner. I have also had the privilege of partnering with some brilliant business leaders who involved me and taught me a lot about running a business, which extended beyond the HR agenda.

What kind of leader are you? How do you get the most out of your teams?

I like to think I am an inclusive and supportive leader, I certainly try to be. My aim is to help people



understand their purpose and let them deliver what needs to be delivered supporting them when they need my support. I try to lead in the way I want to be led. Honesty and fairness are important as well as regular feedback and coaching. I enjoy building and leading teams and am proud to see some of the people I have supported over the years go on to do some great things.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

If you'd asked me that question 10 years ago, I would have given a definitive answer. Now, I view my career as a series of experiences and learning opportunities. I don't aspire to any position or stature within a company. Learning, growing and experiencing new and different things is important. And of course, making a difference.

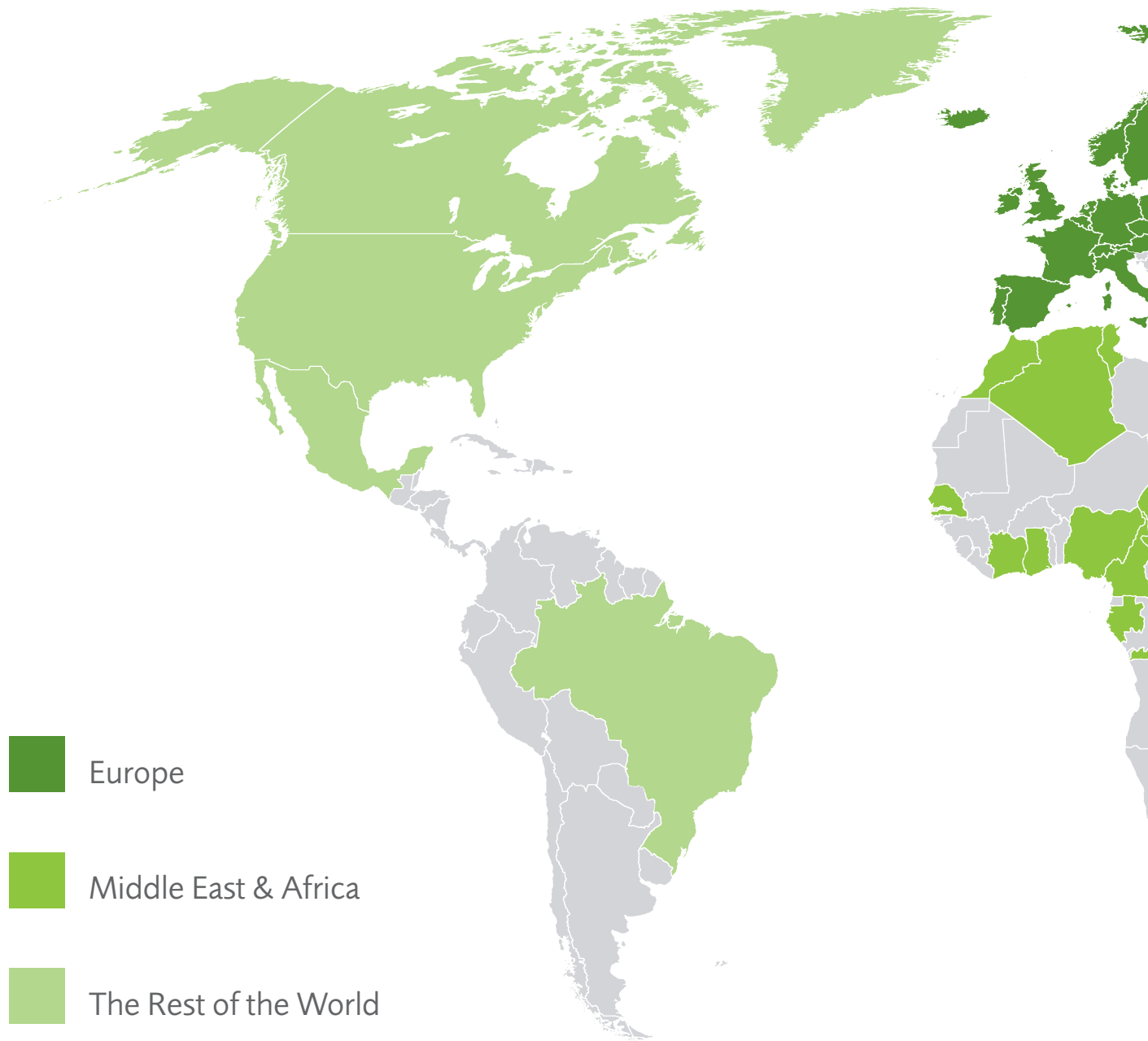
What do you get up to outside of work?

My partner and I recently moved to the Northumberland countryside, which is perfect for getting outdoors and walking our dog, Woody. Running is also a new hobby of mine. I did the Great North Run for the first time this year and raised £3000 for Women's Aid. I've not quite got the running bug, but I try and run a few times per week.



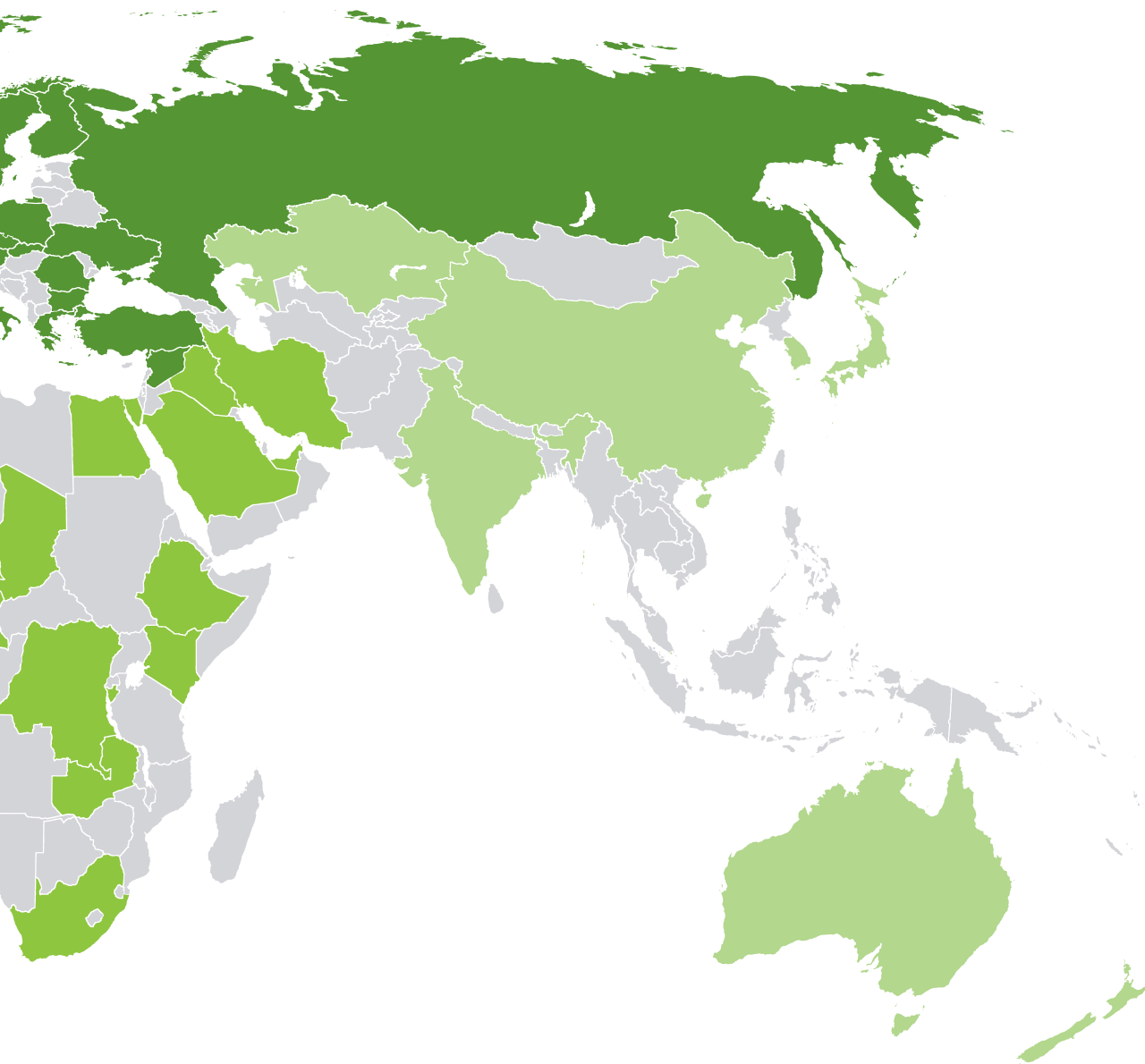
"..My aim is to help people understand their purpose and let them deliver what needs to be delivered supporting them when they need my support."

Global reach



Nigel Wright regularly fulfils recruitment assignments for clients around the world. >>

Our leading reputation has contributed to us being given recruitment assignments in all six continents, across 30+ international territories. Many of Nigel Wright's international clients are seeking to achieve long term growth in new and emerging markets. As a result Nigel Wright has been instrumental in assisting clients build new business units in key strategic markets such as Europe, Asia, the Americas, Africa and the Middle East.





It's more than just fun and games at tombola... it's tech and R&D too

Nigel Wright's Andrew Openshaw catches up with Chris Shepherd, Principal Client Developer at tombola

Chris Shepherd has just grabbed two coffees from tombola's free staff canteen and brought them through to the boardroom where I'm waiting to meet him. He jokes about how tempting it is for employees to just go ahead and eat four meals a day if they wanted, but added that directly above us is the tombola gym, so they can always 'work it off' if they needed to. >>



"tombola's in-house development team are currently ... phasing out Flash... and replacing it with AngularJS."

It's Friday afternoon and I know we're pushed for time. tombola's in-house development team are currently in the throes of a major transformation project, phasing out Flash, which is a central feature of its vast array of online games and apps, and replacing it with AngularJS.

The team are very excited as according to Chris, 'not only is this a chance to work on a complete refresh with a new technology stack, but it also involves replacing tombola's native app with a hybrid app, using the Cordova and Ionic frameworks. It's a huge project that encompasses the UK, Spain and Italy, and it's only just started - things are kicking off big time!'

I'm here to find out from Chris, tombola's Principal Client Developer, why he thinks more people should consider joining the multi-award winning Sunderland based online gaming firm. The company is currently one of the largest employers of game and web developers in the North East, yet within the region's vibrant tech scene it still seems to be relatively unknown. With plans to double its size over the next four years, the business knows that this perception needs to change quickly.

Chris thinks tombola has struggled to attract developers because, historically, the sixteen year old company has always been widely known as an entertainment services provider. On the contrary, Chris argues, 'it should actually be recognised primarily as a tech company. If I was to do a talk about the kinds of technology we are using at tombola it would probably last for a month – this business is completely driven by delivering cutting edge and best practice tech solutions.'

It seems there is indeed truth in what Chris is saying. As well as using AngularJS for its in-house framework, tombola is employing a bespoke build system with Gulp at its core, alongside a suite of unit and end-to-end tests using Sinon, Mocha and Protractor. Once built using TeamCity, the company release apps using Octopus Deploy. Longer term, the code base will be upgraded from ES5 to ES6 and Angular 2.

As Principal Client Developer, Chris is responsible for decisions on high-level architecture, coding and solution stacks for the company's UK and International divisions. Joining as a Client Developer in 2014, his career has advanced

tombola



“Chris began to take an increasing interest in front end development ... and decided he wanted to pursue a career solely in front end solutions”

rapidly in just over two years and Chris is positively adamant that quick progression through the ranks is 'available to anyone who joins.'

Since acquiring his degree in Business Informatics and Information Technology, Chris explained that, prior to joining tombola, he'd been on a fairly typical journey. For seven years he worked as a full-stack developer at two IT services companies, one in the North East and one based in his native Chesterfield, where he gained the opportunity to engage in various aspects of front and back end development. Chris explained that he learnt early on how there is a tendency within the industry towards 'cost effective off the shelf solutions' and had pretty much conceded that unless you were at the 'top of the tree', your chances of getting a sense of ownership over the code you were working on or indeed opportunities to bring new ideas to the table and have an impact on product development, 'were virtually non-existent.'

In 2013 Chris began to take an increasing interest in front end development work, experimenting with the technology at home, and decided he wanted to pursue a career solely in front end solutions, due to

the fact that it's 'more challenging and varied.'

The problem was, he noted, jobs in pure front end were very rare. When he saw tombola were looking for front end developers, however, he decided to investigate this fairly unique opportunity.

Going in to his first interview, Chris admitted he didn't know much about tombola - 'it wasn't selling itself as a tech business afterall' - but following two hours of informally discussing software development with peers, he left the interview with a great feeling about the company and convinced that the people who worked at tombola clearly shared his passion for tech. He officially joined in January 2014 and hasn't looked back.

When I asked Chris what was different about tombola compared to other companies he had worked for, he was very clear; 'Everyone is listened to and has an equal say and you feel like the products you're working on are actually yours.'



“Everyone is listened to and has an equal say and you feel like the products you’re working on are actually yours.”



He elaborated by telling me how in many tech firms, ‘senior or principal developers always take the lead and make decisions, but at tombola it’s not like that at all.’ Within his first two weeks, Chris found his ideas were being taken seriously and implemented without any resistance. ‘That blew me away, I was thinking ‘hang on, people are actually listening to what I’m saying here, this has never happened before!’

Another refreshing change for Chris, and one he was adamant would be very attractive to other developers is ‘the freedom you have to investigate different technologies and present a business case for adoption of new technology.’ Many developers working elsewhere, in Chris’s view, will be used to rules which discourage the acquisition of new knowledge because of its tendency to result in a decline in production output. ‘In these firms there is a resistance to change; they won’t push the boundaries because of the associated risk.’

tombola is the opposite. Chris highlighted that R&D is very much seen as part of a developer’s job and if a technology that someone has sponsored is adopted, that person is then responsible for disseminating knowledge across the business. Ownership in general is also very strong at tombola according to Chris. Because employees are made to feel that the products they’re working on are

actually theirs, this ‘really motivates them to want to make them better.’

Furthermore, at an operational level there is little restraint. tombola’s two divisions, Bingo and International, although having to adhere to underlying standards of code quality, can otherwise be flexible in other areas and not constrained by having to do things in a certain way. For example, as Chris explained, ‘if they want to use Agile or Kanban, they are free to make a decision which best suits the needs of the division at that time.’ Lead developers from each division then feedback to Chris who has visibility of both. He continued, ‘the amount of trust we are afforded to spend time as a group to troubleshoot problems or plan new features is just brilliant.’

All in all Chris believes these factors, central to working life at tombola, are the reason why he has been so successful in his career with the business to date. In his words, ‘Your basic everyday job is challenging enough, but add to that the R&D side of things as well as the flexibility the teams have to operate in the most efficient way, means that your skill set improves rapidly.’ He added, ‘since joining tombola I’ve become a far better developer – I wouldn’t have necessarily gained these types of skills and experiences elsewhere.’



Perhaps the elephant in the room for anyone thinking about joining tombola is the ethical aspects of the job, being that the company operates in the online gambling industry. Chris, however, was quick to respond to my query, explaining that 'gambling responsibly' is at the forefront of every decision the business makes. Any new application or feature added to the tombola site is only done so once the business is satisfied that it's not in any way breaking its moral code. 'Features like promoting 'self-exclusion' and 'cool downs' is indicative of the fact that we care about our players wellbeing.'

Before I left I was keen to know what was next for Chris, now that he'd been appointed Principal Developer. His answer was simple, 'I want to be a Chief Technology Officer.' Of course, this role doesn't currently exist at tombola but with the rate it's expanding, Chris is sure it will within the next four years. He noted, 'the way in which the business is allowing me to develop is certainly positioning me to be a contender for the job.'

Due to its expansion, tombola has recently introduced a personal development plan for all staff. This involves regular catch-ups to discuss a person's strengths and weaknesses and working out how each individual can develop their skills in a particular area to get to the next level in their role. Chris believes it's a great way of challenging people and getting them to improve and it doesn't just include technical skills, but rather encompasses

'project management, product launches, people engagement and so on.' In addition, tombola pays for its staff to attend conferences and also allows them to leave work early to attend tech meetups, such as Frontend North East, a monthly event that takes place at Campus North in Newcastle, which tombola became a sponsor of last year.

Chris enthusiastically concluded by stating that any developer who wants to work with exciting new technology, expand their horizons and be challenged everyday should consider a career with tombola. 'There's always something new happening and a business decision that you think 'oh man, that's going to be really difficult to do, but let's do it anyway. It's all about teamwork, collaboration and taking ownership of ideas and making them work.'

It's Friday and some tombola staff are off to play basketball later. There's also a Haxball tournament taking place upstairs, as well as plans to go to a local pub. There's a genuine family vibe in the building and Chris highlighted that even after two weeks with the business, he felt like he'd 'been there for years.' I left him to get back to the pressing Flash-replacement project...taking a slight detour via the free canteen before heading back to Newcastle – I just couldn't help it!

For for information about careers at tombola please visit: <https://www.tombola.co.uk/careers>



"I was keen to know what was next for Chris, now that he'd been appointed Principal Developer. His answer was simple, 'I want to be a Chief Technology Officer.'"





Jac Gardner

HR Director at Arriva

Joining as a graduate in 1996, Jac Gardner enjoyed a successful 15-year career with Rolls-Royce where she progressed to Head of UK Employee Relations, covering 21,000 employees across 15 locations. In 2011 she decided to relocate to her native North East when an opportunity arose to join Arriva as HR Director. We caught up with her to discuss her views on the North East business community and Arriva's talent acquisition strategy, as the transport firm seeks to expand further across the UK and Europe. >>



“There are perhaps fewer senior HR roles in the North East than in some other regions, simply because there are fewer big multinational firms based here.”

Firstly, what persuaded you to return to the North East when you did?

The decision was partly motivated by the chance it offered me to be closer to family. I have three young children and I like the idea of them growing up with an attachment to the area. It also meant their grandparents could spend more time with them. I am, however, primarily motivated by opportunities. When I left the North East, yes, I wanted to experience living somewhere else, but I was ideally seeking a graduate scheme in a big company, where I could develop my career and specialise in HR. Rolls-Royce fitted the bill perfectly and I was very fortunate to develop a great breadth of experience within a blue-chip company so early in my career. In moving back to the region a good few years later I had to be sure that the opportunity was right for me. Arriva ticked all the boxes. It is a large, international organisation with an ambitious growth agenda, and the HR side was a perfect fit for me. It was a role leading the HR strategy 'end-to-end', and as I'd never had to deliver across multiple countries in previous roles, the international aspect was new and challenging.

When seeking to return to the region, was it difficult to find a role that fit your career aspirations? Are the networks for HR professionals as strong here as they are elsewhere?

There are perhaps fewer senior HR roles in the North East than in some other regions, simply because there are fewer big multinational firms

based here. I found out about the role at Arriva through a chance conversation with a colleague, which led to my application and subsequent appointment, but I am sure my search would have taken a lot longer had I been actively looking for a role. I've found there is a wealth of talent in the North East, and a thriving business community, so I'd love to see more big companies consider moving to or expanding their operations in the North East and therefore creating more career opportunities. The HR networks are as strong here as they are in other regions outside of London. I'm invited to various networking events throughout the year, which allow me to get together with business leaders and other HR Directors in the region. I can't always attend, but when I do, they're always valuable. Where the North East is perhaps lacking is in the number of thought leadership type events that are held here. I would like to see more HR summits or conferences further north, although with the increasing use of technology to share learning and events I guess it shouldn't matter where you are located.

Is there enough done, therefore, to promote the North East as a great place to live and work? What advice would you give to professionals thinking of moving here?

Local companies have a shared responsibility to attract investment to the region. That will continue to be the region's biggest challenge over the next few years. However, the other big challenge is





“For senior professionals thinking about... relocating to the North East, my advice would be to consider factors such as any development areas or knowledge gaps they have, or what interests them and motivates them at work, and think about how a particular job opportunity can therefore offer a different perspective to their career.”

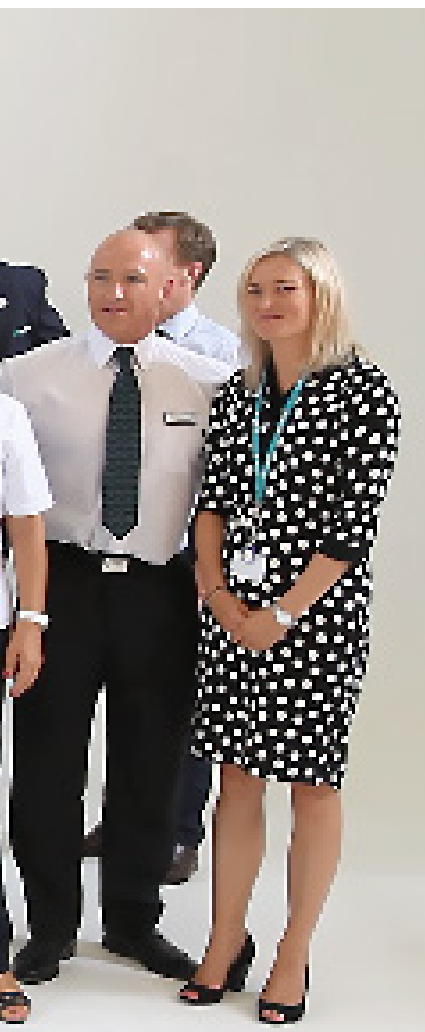


attracting the best talent. The North East offers that 'something special' about being a great place to live and work, which will certainly be attractive to some. However, in a competitive talent market, companies may have to be flexible on location or be able to offer other flexibilities around balancing travel and homeworking to attract the best candidates. For senior professionals thinking about moving or relocating to the region, my advice would be to consider factors such as any development areas or knowledge gaps they have, or what interests them and motivates them at work, and think about how a particular job opportunity can therefore offer a different perspective to their career. It could be a different sector, a different organisational culture or a different role. Basically, be creative in your job search and focus on career challenges rather than business size.

Arriva has recently had a big push on promoting its graduate scheme. How important is this programme? Why should people consider joining the organisation?

It's vitally important to the future of our business. We need a strong pipeline of future leaders, but

also people who can bring different views and ideas to our business. Our graduates can expect to be given significant responsibility early on in their careers and will find themselves doing placements in a number of different areas of the business to obtain a broad perspective of Arriva and build their network. Attracting graduates has historically been difficult for transport businesses because of the misperception of the industry. In reality it is an exciting time to be working in transport and the mobility sector. Our approach to the graduate market, therefore, is about promoting the industry and Arriva as we aim to lead on 'connected mobility'. Arriva is a place full of opportunity and graduates are guaranteed responsibility early in their career, and with a range of opportunities available. We encourage and challenge our people to always look for improvements in their areas. They gain visibility within the wider business and get to travel and work with people from different countries, which is a great experience to acquire. To be successful here, people must be open minded and value different perspectives. They must be accountable and curious to learn. Ultimately, they must connect with what the business wants to achieve.



Employer branding has been another major focus for you. The strategy was recently communicated in the 'Together we are Arriva' video. Could you tell us about that project?

Making the 'Together we are Arriva' video was probably the best day I've ever had at work. The project stemmed from the fact that we have a relatively devolved accountability model across the business but there are a number of strategic areas where we need an integrated approach, and what we represent as an employer of 60,000 people is one of them. While Arriva is an international business, each of our operations has 'local' ways of working based on the markets in which they operate. In developing an employer brand, therefore, we set out to highlight and promote what connects us to Arriva, and our group identity. Colleagues representing each of our countries and businesses took part in a series of workshops to establish our employer brand 'Together we are Arriva' and the five attributes that form our employee value proposition which define what it means to work at Arriva: Belonging, Caring, Talking, Growing and Rewarding. These are underpinned by an 'employee journey' which is designed to reflect that, regardless of what role you have or where you work in Arriva, you enjoy the same experience as an employee. All of this is summarised in the video by our employer brand ambassadors, who came together from across the business to tell their stories. It's been a fantastic project.

What else is Arriva currently doing to attract talent?

Engagement of our leaders is key – talent across Arriva is their responsibility. One of the phrases we use is 'if you're good, you're welcome'. Our leaders therefore have a key role in identifying the skills and roles we need for the future and attracting and selecting the best people. But there is also a key role for them to play in identifying the talent they have within their businesses already, and ensuring that they understand the aspirations of their people, give honest feedback and provide the right opportunities to help people grow. We welcome different perspectives from our graduate programme, to campaigns run by some of our businesses to recruit more female colleagues. We are also working on creating more visibility of the range and different locations of opportunities within Arriva and our parent group, Deutsche Bahn.

Outside of work, what do you get up to?

My free time is largely focused on my three children - their social lives appear to have become my social life. I have two boys and a girl and they're all sports mad. I'm usually stood watching them playing football at weekends, or taking them to cheer on Newcastle United at St. James' Park, balanced with horse riding, Brownies and birthday parties! I recently acquired a Fitbit as part of a wellbeing challenge at work, so I'm running more and obsessing over how many steps I've done. I play netball for a local team too.



"While Arriva is an international business, each of our operations has 'local' ways of working based on the markets in which they operate."



Case Study: ENGIE

High volume temporary recruitment assignment. >>

About the client

- ENGIE is a leading energy and services group employing 20,000 people in the UK, with a turnover of £3.7bn;
- Formerly Cofely, a division of GDF Suez, the GDF Suez Group rebranded all its operations under the ENGIE name in early 2016;
- Providing power and gas to thousands of UK businesses, ENGIE also delivers services to 14,000 customer sites across the public and private sectors;
- Its customers range from hospitals and schools to Government, as well as private and public buildings;
- Headquartered in London, its shared service centre in Newcastle upon Tyne, established in 2014, delivers support services to ENGIE operations across the UK;
- The site has over 220 employees that deliver a range of business support services including accounting, HR, IT, customer services, procurement support, purchase to pay, order to cash and continuous improvement.

Background

- In 2014, Cofely (now ENGIE) relocated several of its company functions from Buckinghamshire to a new shared services centre in Newcastle upon Tyne;
- The move followed Cofely's acquisitions of Balfour Beatty WorkPlace and Lend Lease FM, two facilities management firms that substantially grew the company's footprint nationally and in the North East;
- The centre was to be 'built from scratch' with a planned recruitment drive to hire 200 staff over an 18-month period;
- Based on reputation and prior relationships developed with Cofely and Balfour Beatty WorkPlace, Nigel Wright was selected to assist ENGIE with this high-volume recruitment project;
- In addition to working with ENGIE to fill various senior permanent positions at the new centre across finance and IT, Nigel Wright's temporary recruitment team was tasked with identifying temp resource for the expanding accounts payable team.



The challenge

- ENGIE had a backlog of invoices and needed to hire several experienced and capable temps to assist with reducing it;
- The accounts payable team consists of data input administrators, payment processor/analysts and customer service specialists. ENGIE wanted individuals with the necessary skills to fulfil vacancies across all these areas;
- Furthermore, an ongoing SAP migration project meant candidates with experience using SAP were preferable;
- The shared service centre is a strategic asset, providing long-term support to ENGIE's growth agenda in the UK and Ireland. Consequently, ENGIE was keen to meet candidates with the potential to progress into permanent positions within the organisation.



“I cannot praise Nigel Wright enough and I lean towards using them for other recruitment projects, because of the service they provide.”

*Caron Leck,
AP Team Lead, ENGIE*

Nigel Wright solution

- Our consultants visited the shared service centre and met with relevant line managers to discuss the vacancies;
- They also took the time to tour the site and understand the culture and type of people who would succeed in that environment;
- Nigel Wright's temp consultants have extensive networks and are constantly talking to candidates. This enables them to know, quickly, those available or those who may consider a temporary contract;
- After taking a thorough brief from ENGIE, our team reached out to their networks and quickly gained the interest of potential candidates;
- Vacancies were also advertised online via Nigel Wright's website and social media accounts, as well as on relevant job boards. This resulted in a high volume of applications;
- The consultant assessed candidates' suitability and most vacancies were shortlisted within 48 hours;
- All shortlisted candidates were met in person following an initial phone screening for final assessment, and to prepare them for the client interview.

The result

- Nigel Wright successfully recruited 40+ temporary finance candidates over an 18-month period;
- Most placements were made within one week of the commencement of an assignment;
- Many of the candidates have since been hired on a permanent basis;
- Some have also either been seconded into the management accounts team, or officially transferred there due to high performance and potential;
- Nigel Wright partnership with ENGIE has been extended due to the success of this project.

Susan McNair

Director at
PwC Newcastle



In this interview Susan chats to Nigel Wright about the firm's diversity agenda including steps being taken to reduce its gender pay gap and recruit more people from wider social and educational backgrounds. Susan also shares with us her career journey in Risk Assurance and her thoughts about the North East's challenges and opportunities over the next few years. >>



Since becoming a director, how has your role at PwC evolved?

We always tell our new joiners that on your first day at PwC you're a new starter; on the second day, you're a leader and it's true. We have a culture of mentoring and coaching from all grades and it's a big part of the job that doesn't change however senior you get. So, for me, I've spent my entire career preparing for and growing into this role. Of course, you do get to make more decisions that affect the whole team and clients, and it's exciting and challenging because I can have a bigger impact. The support is always there from partners and peers as well so I'm not alone. Pastoral care of the team is something I'm hugely passionate about. People are our firm's only asset, so I believe it's important to ensure their well-being and to create opportunities to learn and develop them.

How would you describe your leadership style? What advice would you pass on to other aspiring leaders?

I think my leadership style is empowering and fair. I want my team to enjoy learning but I hold them to



"This year 40% of new directors and 28% of new partners are female. 42% of our promotions to both Senior Manager and Manager in the North are female"



account for delivery and expect high standards. In my experience, if you work hard the firm rewards you and you learn something new here every day. In terms of advice, I think learning is the most important thing, whether it's the people you work with or the businesses you get to spend time with; absorbing it all and being open to advice and new experiences is crucial.

What's the best piece of advice you've received?

I've had some excellent mentors over the years, men and women, who make time for me and have supported me at different times in my career. One of the things that has and continues to help me over the years is receiving encouragement. It gives me the confidence to try to achieve more. Encouraging people helps plant seeds of belief, and it's something I consciously try to give to my team.

Last year PwC removed UCAS points as entry criteria for graduates. What impact has this had on applications? Has that impact been visible in the North East business?

Yes, the impact is clear. This initiative is about promoting talented people regardless of their social backgrounds or educational pathway. We used to recruit from similar backgrounds; University graduates who had followed similar paths. We want to encourage applications from other qualification routes, different degree subjects and all walks of life. Our graduate scheme no longer focuses on training accountancy skills but also includes a much broader technology pathway. UCAS points as well as name and gender no longer appear on our application forms during screening.

PwC is now recruiting higher apprentices. How is that working in your business?

Our Higher Apprenticeship pathway is an excellent programme, taking leavers from sixth forms and colleges, and providing them with a work and study package that gives a fantastic start to working life. Many will qualify as accountants much quicker than they would as a graduate and certainly from the higher apprentices I have worked with in Newcastle, the recruitment has been very successful.

PwC's aim is a diverse and inclusive organisation. What diversity metrics does it monitor? How satisfied is the business that targets are being met?

PwC monitors diversity by grade, gender, age and flexible working arrangements and the data is all publicly available. If you go to our website, you can see employee representation within these diversity measurements. Targets are in place, with regards to achieving a diverse organisation, though we do not follow a quota rule. Hiring and promoting the best person for the job has always been my experience in the firm. Our Executive Board drives the diversity agenda, making sure everyone understands what we are trying to achieve. Monitoring and reviewing diversity also ensures we're on the right track. This year 40% of new directors and 28% of new partners are female. Almost half of those appointments have occurred in the regions, outside of London. Additionally, 42% of our promotions to both Senior Manager and Manager in the North are female. As a wider UK firm our BME % is on the rise with over 20% of our workforce coming from ethnic minority groups. Although progress is taking place, we



acknowledge that there's still more to do but we're moving in the right direction.

In addition to tackling demographic diversity, PwC has taken a leading role in efforts to realign the gender pay gap. What steps is the business taking to address this?

Regardless of gender, we have a clear pay structure for every grade. We publish our pay grades internally giving all employees visibility of what senior and junior staff earn. Historically, more men than women have risen to the senior grades so of course, a gender pay gap exists at some senior levels depending on experience. The issue, therefore, still lies with getting more women into senior roles. This year, though, we have had a record number of female partner promotions and if this trend continues, we expect the pay gap to continue to decline.

As a female director at PwC's Newcastle office, what more could PwC do to improve gender diversity in the North East?

Our North East and Yorkshire businesses do have a weaker gender mix compared with, for example, our London offices. Although 46% of our graduates are women, we often lose female employees when they reach senior management level. How we retain that talent is one of our biggest challenges. One way we're trying to improve our retention of women is by implementing flexible working initiatives, helping our employees balance work with other commitments. Role models are important too. Other women in senior roles inspired me and enabled me to visualise myself in their position. We've recently received funding from our Executive Board to run a programme called Pearls, working with an external company. It's focussed on nurturing our female talent pool by providing additional training, mentoring and networking with women. PwC also runs a Female Leaders in Business Programme. These networking events centre on career, personal and business challenges and provide a forum for discussion and making new contacts.

What role do you play in promoting the diversity agenda?

I act as a mentor for various female and male team members. Also, when I select project teams, I'm always conscious of making sure everybody gets opportunities to prove themselves, valuing different skills and never making assumptions about who might not want to work overseas or away from home. It's important to ensure project teams reflect clients too. I like to present clients with a diverse range of skills and personalities. As part of PwC's aim to champion women in the workplace, in October, I participated in the '5 days of women' campaign. Interviews with myself and other female leaders across PwC's North East and Yorkshire region took place which revealed their career journeys, their successes, and the challenges they have had to overcome to succeed along the way. I was amazed at the feedback from people who got in touch following the campaign and the social media footprint was much more than we expected.

You're from Sunderland and have spent your entire life living in the North East. What does the region have to offer professionals like yourself?

What's not to like about living near the coast and being surrounded by our beautiful region. Whenever I travel away from home and show colleagues or clients photographs of the North East they always seem surprised by what we offer, yet is it such an exciting and vibrant place to work. Many PwC employees live in the local area, including lots of the partners and directors. PwC has over three hundred employees in Newcastle representing all service lines. Within PwC UK, we always consider ourselves to be the friendliest office and visitors always say this. Our people enjoy travelling here for events or projects and integrating with our local teams. We, like all businesses, need to continue to invest in the region and support its future prosperity. Inspiring our children to aim higher and making sure the North East continues to be proud and vocal about everything we do here.



"Although 46% of our graduates are women, we often lose female employees when they reach senior management level. How we retain that talent is one of our biggest challenges."



North East Accountancy Awards 2016

Nigel Wright has been the main sponsor of the North East Accountancy Awards for many years and the 2016 awards were another great success. The Awards recognise some of the finest finance professionals and their companies in the region. >>

The tenth annual North East Accountancy Awards in 2016 saw hundreds of accountants, other finance professionals and their colleagues gather at the NewcastleGateshead Hilton hotel to celebrate the achievements of the region's top financial businesses and individuals. The event was hosted by ex-Olympian, TV presenter, Steve Cram.

Among the winners was Eoghan Johnston from Tekmar who picked up the title of Accountant of the Year and Kitwave Group's David Brind, who was named Finance Director of the Year.

The winners:

Accounting Technician of the Year:
Naz Jabeen, National Audit Office

New Accountant of the Year:
Ashleigh Jackson, National Audit Office

Accountant of the Year:
Eoghan Johnston, Tekmar

Finance Director of the Year:
David Brind, Kitwave Group

Tax Team of the Year:
Deloitte

Accounting and Finance Team of the Year:
Deloitte

Business Finance Team of the Year:
Pacifica Group Ltd.

Public Services Finance Team of Year:
National Audit Office

Corporate Finance Deal of the Year:
KPMG

Small Accountancy Firm of the Year:
Blue Sky Tax Ltd.

Large Accountancy Firm of the Year:
KPMG

John Wall Award for Outstanding Achievement:
Paul Woods

Non-Executive Director of the Year:
Christopher Fleetwood, NCFE





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