

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to represent Nigel Wright Recruitment here this evening. We're always privileged to part of this prestigious event with so many of the region's leading HR&D professionals, alongside great business leaders and their colleagues.

I can't believe how amazing this venue looks tonight! The CIPD Branch and The Journal have really pulled out all the stops to truly transform the place and bring a great fun vibe to the evening.

The sporting venue made me really think about teamwork which is one of the key themes we are here to celebrate tonight.

There are so many amazing teams here in this room – and as we all know, teams only become 'amazing' when equipped with the right skills and the right environments to help them to succeed.

High performing teams will help organisations to punch well above their weight. That's certainly the case with the Newcastle Eagles – the UK's most successful basketball team – and this state of the art venue is absolute testament to that

Part of our role at Nigel Wright is to bring new teams together, or to strengthen existing teams with new individuals. And it's meeting all these teams and learning about both their collective and individual hopes, dreams, aspirations and fears that makes our role as professional matchmakers so exciting and so challenging at the same time.

Our role as a judge at these awards gives us the opportunity to hear some amazing stories of teamwork, about the great successes these teams have achieved and the obstacles they have overcome to make a real difference to their organisation, their colleagues and their customers.

The other thing that really stood out to us this year when we were judging, was the focus on diversity and inclusion, which has gone from being something of a niche category, to being a key element in many of the entries into the wider categories.

It's integral to many company strategies which is great to see. For sure, it's something that a lots of companies talk about quite frequently and most of them say they would like to do more around inclusion and diversity. But I really believe that business leaders and investors now understand its importance and the real commercial value that it can bring. As well as being the right thing to do.

There are so many talented HR professionals in the room tonight who I know feel passionately about this and can have such a positive influence on the diversity agenda in the region and beyond.

The other key theme that runs throughout the categories this year is the rapid pace of developments in new technology and the positive contribution this is making, especially within learning and development.

Investment in new technology as well as investing in your people is key to keeping business moving with the times – ensuring organisations have the right skills and can continue to innovate and create new solutions.

We all know there's a skills shortage, and one of the great things you will see here tonight are companies across the region enhancing learning and development opportunities to ensure they don't fall behind. By investing in your people, organisations create and develop that future talent who can fill these gaps and be our future leaders.

And again, its HR&D, leads the way in developing talent and inspiring people to succeed in their careers.

Me and my colleagues at Nigel Wright are truly passionate about attracting, developing and retaining talent in the region and are extremely proud to support these awards that recognise the region's best HR&D talent.

Now, I would like to introduce Mark Simpson our Executive Director to the stage for a special presentation.

Best of luck to everyone shortlisted and enjoy the evening.