

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be standing here again representing Nigel Wright Recruitment. We're obviously privileged to be part of this prestigious event with so many of the region's leading finance and accountancy professionals...

...and thank God England did the business on Sunday otherwise I'd be addressing an empty room. I've advised the awards committee to strengthen their relationship with FIFA when planning future events.

Anyway...

This is a special year for Nigel Wright, as our business is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I'm proud to have been part of the team there for eight years, and especially pleased to tell you that 2018 is a third consecutive record year for the company.

Customer service is the key to our success and we've found that our customers – both clients and candidates – have higher expectations and are more demanding than ever and rightly so. And we've embraced that – that's been a key reason why we continue to grow and outperform the market.

It goes without saying, though, that it's the rich bed of talent in the region which facilitates Nigel Wright's success and this pool wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the outstanding work done by companies based in the North East in developing their staff and helping them to move forward in their careers.

We've been headline sponsors of The Accountancy Awards for twelve years and during that time the role of finance has changed and will continue to change thanks to technology. There's less focus on reporting and compliance and more on advisory and driving performance – and we see this clearly in the impact of finance departments and talented individuals here in the region.

This awards night is a fantastic opportunity to recognise that talent and during the year of the Great Exhibition of the North, the opportunity to shout about the strength of the North East's workforce, and all region's positives, has never been greater.

The area continues to defy expectations and deliver impressive results across employment, trade and business growth. Unemployment figures reached an all-time low in April and the North East remains a rich area of opportunity, with a broad range of organisations continuing to recruit key staff across all disciplines.

A healthy business environment also puts the region in a great position to attract further inward investment. Newcastle will become home to the National Innovation Centre for Data (NICD) in 2019. It will join already established national institutions covering Offshore Renewable Energy, Ageing Innovation and Subsea Engineering amongst others, reinforcing the region as a hub for cutting edge ideas and investment.

However, when it comes to raising the profile of the region, you won't find a better and more remarkable example this year than Team Tyne Innovation – a group of

four North East professionals and amateur rowers, preparing to take on the 3,000-mile Talisker Whiskey Atlantic Challenge, the world's toughest rowing race.

Nigel Wright is proud to be a lead sponsor of Team Tyne Innovation, whose boat will be a living exhibit of North East innovation incorporating products and services coming out of local businesses, colleges and universities.

More people have been into space or climbed Everest than have rowed the Atlantic. This is a not only a herculean effort by four willing adventurers, but also a chance to put the North East on the map as a world leading centre for innovation.

Before I welcome Phil Kite to the stage to talk more about this amazing project, I would just like to take this opportunity to congratulate everyone who has been nominated and wish you all the best of luck.

Enjoy the evening.