



BUSINESSWORKS

Issue 7 October 2024 North East

PUTTING COQUETDALE ON THE MAP

Serial entrepreneur, Roz Tinlin, shares the novel ways she's promoting an often overlooked area of Northumberland

BOXING CLEVER

Matthew Drennan of Lush Logistics on why his order fulfilment centre packs a punch

IN GOOD HEALTH

As the Business Clinic at Northumbria Uni turns 10, founder Nigel Coates reflects on how far the award-winning initiative has come

MADE OF THE RITE STUFF

Melissa Coutts, MD of Recruitrite, shares her business journey that started with a bold move

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WELCOME

Welcome to the autumn issue of Businessworks North East, which celebrates entrepreneurship while bringing you news and views from around the region.

We have a new Government since our last issue and we wait to see what 'Time for a Change' means for regional businesses. The PM struck a cautious tone at September's Labour Party Conference, with his "shared struggle" message. But it seems the government is keen to work closer with business to solve "complex challenges", which can only be a good thing.

Solving "complex challenges" is a theme that comes across in our entrepreneur stories this issue.

You can read how Nigel Coates, founder of the Business Clinic, is solving inequalities among university work placements, how Matthew Drennan is solving logistics with his company Lush, how Melissa Coutts of Recruitrite is solving recruitment for her clients, and how Ros Tinlin is solving the problem of Coquetdale being overlooked in Northumberland with whisky and chocolate!

I hope you are inspired.

Alison Cowie,
BW Editor



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MADE OF THE RITE STUFF

After she was made redundant in 2004, **Melissa Coutts** walked into a recruitment office and said 'I need a job. I'll do anything'. They responded by offering her a job. Ten years later, she started her own recruitment business, Recruitrite, focused on providing bespoke, long-term solutions for clients. Here, the Darlington-based managing director and recruitment professional reflects on her journey, the changing recruitment landscape, and the people who have helped and inspired her ►





Tell us about your early career...

I started my career in business development and my first proper job was at BT. It was excellent training and gave me a good grounding in business processes. I worked for a couple of telecoms companies and ended up in business process outsourcing, providing helpdesk services and managing the delivery of their customer support functions to the financial services sector just as banks were starting to do online banking.

Sounds like an exciting time so why the move to recruitment?

I got made redundant. I'd never been in that situation before and I didn't know what to do. One day I walked into a recruitment company and said, 'I need a job. I'll do anything'. A woman asked if I'd ever thought about recruitment? I didn't

know anything about it but I had nothing to lose. I thought I'd try it for six months to see how goes, and I took to it like a duck to water!

What was it about recruitment that appealed?

I enjoyed learning about the client companies we worked with. I'm naturally curious so it fitted me well. I also liked finding out about the candidates - what they wanted and what worked for them. I enjoyed being a matchmaker!

You worked for a large-scale recruitment company for 10 years and ended up looking after its North East region. Why leave and set up on your own?

I'd left to have a baby and when I came back from maternity leave, things felt

different. I was more concerned about reporting stats into head office and making sure the team were hitting their KPIs rather than supporting my team to deliver excellent recruitment services to meet the needs of our clients and candidates. I was speaking to a client one day and he said, 'Why don't you set up on your own?'. That was a catalyst.

What were your biggest challenges starting out?

There were so many challenges at the start. I had to learn a lot, very quickly.

For example, we started the company by doing volume temp recruitment, which we still do. We had to pay the agency workers we'd placed weekly, whereas the clients usually worked on a 30-day basis. This caused a shortfall, so



I had to look at different forms of funding and quickly understand how invoice finance worked. It was tough but I made it work.

Did you get support from anyone?

I'm fortunate to be based in the Tees Valley which has such a good business network. I asked lots of people for help. It was mainly having chats, sharing contacts and leads over a cup of coffee. It wasn't anything very formal but it helped enormously.

How did you develop the business?

Recruitment is typically all about sales targets, hitting numbers, making a set number of calls a day, or going out to a certain number of clients. I didn't want Recruitrite to be about the numbers, we are all about the people. I wanted it to be about adding value, designing recruitment and onboarding strategies to meet with our clients requirements. I wanted the focus to be on building quality long-term relationships with clients, providing fantastic opportunities for our candidates to gain stable, long term and rewarding opportunities and developing a supportive environment for recruiters to flourish.

Recruitment seems to be about fulfilling an immediate need. Why focus on long-term relationships?

Typically most client businesses contact an agency as they have had a resignation, given a promotion, or the business is expanding so it is an immediate need, but by getting to know more about them and what they want to achieve over the next six, months, 12 months or beyond, you can start preparing for their future recruitment needs. We are essentially developing a talent pool for them and anticipating what is next for their business. We can start identifying and building relationships with candidates to enable our clients' business to achieve their future goals.

How have you used technology in your business?

When we started, we used an applicant tracking system (ATS), like a lot of recruiters, but as we evolved, we implemented an Excepoint no code system that digitised a lot of our processes, especially those in the early stages. I knew it would allow us more time to build those long term relationships. This was the start of 2020. We obviously couldn't have predicted what was going to happen in terms of the COVID pandemic, but having the system in place put us in a really good position after lockdown. ►



It meant we could scale up quickly and easily and meet the uplifted demands as we came out of the pandemic.

How did the pandemic effect you and recruitment more generally?

For most of our clients it was a quiet time but as recruiters for the Aldi RDC we needed to get staff in and quickly in order to enable them to get stock out into their stores; so even though I wasn't technically a key worker as part of Aldi's supply chain we worked all the way through. Following lockdown demand spiked across all our clients as they needed to get back up and running quickly and the lockdown gave many people some time to reflect and make changes to their chosen career. It was definitely a boom time for all of the recruiters I know.

What sectors and roles do you know deal with?

Initially, I started the business working for manufacturing and logistics and supply chain. I'm a warehouse geek and know a lot about warehouse floors and automation! But we've since evolved and now work in healthcare, specialist engineering, hospitality, and admin and call centres, too. We historically have been an agency providing temporary

and contingent workers, but we now also support our clients permanent recruitment requirements and we certainly do much more of this as a business.

You're recently launched a new recruitment platform, Ritepeople RaaS. Tell us more.

Recruiters are not particularly popular with businesses because there's a traditional view that we're only interested in getting a fee and more often than not it's a big one. But for us, it's never been about that, and we wanted to put a commercial model in place that mirrored that. Effectively Raas (Recruitment as a Service) dramatically reduces the cost of recruitment, typically by 30-50% and flattens their cashflow.

Clients pay a set monthly fee to work with us. It's designed to save the client time and money by allowing us to build that relationship with them. If we can understand how the business will grow, we can identify what positions they'll need in the future and start identifying candidates for when that happens.

Clients who are using RaaS love it because it takes the pressure off them to decide how their recruitment is going to look. It's like we become their recruitment team.

Our clients can use our Recruitment as a Service model, but they can also use our

services in a more traditional way. We want to be as flexible as possible.

What are your future plans for Recruitrite?

We've got the right foundations in place now and so we want to do more of what we do well. There's loads going on in Teesside, which represent a lot of opportunities to build our client base.

We also want to shout about ourselves more. A lot of female-led businesses are guilty of not pushing themselves to say how good they are. That needs to change.

A couple of years ago, we appointed Caroline Noble as our marketing manager and that has been really good for us in getting our consistent brand message out there.

What are the future trends in recruitment?

Recruitment has always been a candidate-driven market but we're seeing the tides change with companies able to be more selective about who they employ.

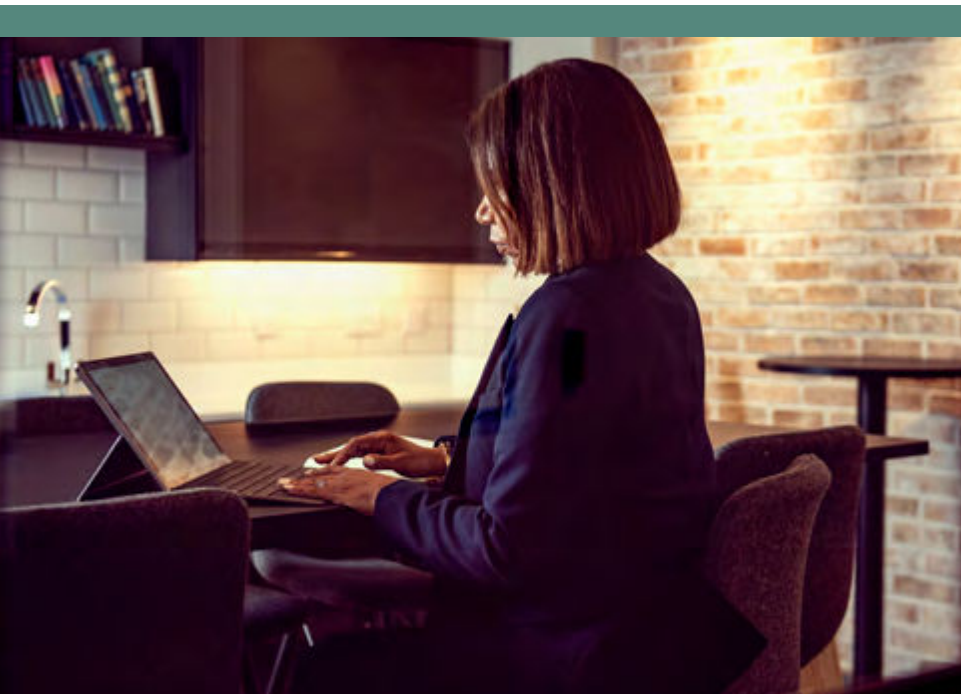
Things have settled down after the pandemic and people are looking for stability. Salaries aren't rising as fast as they were previously and so now is a good time for employers to examine what they need, identify a strategy going forward, and start an engagement model with people.

But, employers need to adapt to changes too. It's now much more important to candidates to know up front about a company or organisations' ethos and what benefits they offer. Things like walkaround interviews are also becoming more popular as they allow candidates to get a better picture of the workplace. Simple things like that can make a big difference in terms of successful recruitment and retention.

Is networking still important to you?

Absolutely! I love networking, I find it fascinating meeting new people, talking to people about their experiences, and catching up with my contacts. It's also great that there's more diversity. When I started out as a black female in business, no one looked like me, but that's changed now. You see people of different ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds... It's great and I love learning from different people! ●

For more information, visit
www.recruitriteuk.com





ADOPTION IS LIFE CHANGING

Adopt North East is the North East's largest regional adoption agency, and since its launch nearly six years ago, has found loving forever families for 600 children, as well as supporting hundreds of adoptive families



Among the growing community of adopters is Lynn* who has benefited from the ongoing, dedicated support and guidance the agency offers throughout the process.

Speaking of her experience she says: "I feel a huge sense of gratitude to Adopt North East for welcoming me into the adoption process with them. I have felt a greater degree of empathy and support here than in any other agency I have been in touch with. I feel very grateful to have had the opportunity to take two days out of my life to seriously reflect on my life-changing decision to adopt."

More than 35 children are waiting to be adopted right now. Get in touch at any time to find out more about adoption or join one of the informal, warm, and honest information events:

Monday 4 November: Linskill Centre, North Shields

Tuesday 3 December: Online event

Monday 13 January: Linskill Centre, North Shields

Tuesday 11 February: Online event
Please see our website to book access to an online information event.

www.adoptnortheast.org.uk

0191 643 5000

Email: adoptnortheast@adoptne.org.uk

*name has been changed





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BOXING

CLEVER

Frustrated by poor service and hidden costs when using third party logistics companies, **Matthew Drennan** has established an order fulfilment centre with a difference. Here, he talks about Lush Logistics' journey so far and reveals why office space, transparent pricing and supporting local are helping this company pack a punch

When Matthew Drennan and his wife, Emma, had their first child in their early 20s, Matthew knew he needed a career change to support his family.

The 21-year-old freelance coach began working full time in a major supermarket but the regular night shifts made it difficult to spend time with his new baby.

Matthew moved to an ecommerce sunglasses company where he thrived as its warehouse manager. But when the company was bought out, he didn't want to relocate his young family to Swindon.

He instead took a job as an Operations Manager for a sports equipment company in Billingham.

When the pandemic struck, the

company - which specialised in indoor racquet sports such as squash and badminton - furloughed most of its staff, including Matthew.

This break allowed Matthew some downtime and he enjoyed walks with the dad of his daughter's best friend, Rob.

Matthew and Rob, who ran several businesses, would often talk about the things they found frustrating in their careers.

For Matthew, his biggest gripe was dealing with third party logistics companies (3PLs) that ecommerce enterprises often recruit to manage services such as inventory management, warehousing, fulfilment and shipping.

Matthew explains: "I had spent a lot of time dealing with 3PLs but it always seemed like it was one step forward, two steps back. Every time I identified an opportunity to save money, I would be hit with a hidden cost.

"Working in seasonal businesses, such as sunglasses, we had far more sales in the summer compared to the winter but we would get punished for that, too."

When Matthew's furlough ended, he returned to the sports equipment company but the daily commute from North Tyneside to Billingham began to take a toll.

"I was getting home in the evenings and the kids were already in bed," Matthew adds. ►





Matthew met Rob for a coffee and the chat soon turned to business again. Matthew confided in his friend that he wanted to start a company.

At that point, Rob got his laptop out and started typing. Matthew was surprised when he asked what his friend was doing.

"Rob turned his laptop around and told me he'd registered a business for us," Matthew reveals.

The pair agreed that Rob would help get the business established before stepping back to leave Matthew and his wife, Emma, to run the new company.

Lush Logistics Order Fulfilment Centre started in April 2022 as a third party logistics and storage facility.

Matthew wanted to focus on the ecommerce businesses that specialised in smaller B2C goods, which were often put at a disadvantage when getting their products packaged and shipped by a third party.

He took space in an office premises in North Shields and it wasn't long before he attracted his first customer - a skin and hair care company.

“*I had spent a lot of time dealing with 3PLs but it always seemed like it was one step forward, two steps back.”*

Matthew worked with the company's owner to create a streamlined process that ensured any sales the company made were packed and distributed by Lush Logistics in a timely manner and in a way that best reflected the company.

"We wanted to keep the product as true to the customer and their brand values as possible," Matthew explains.

With this attention to detail, Lush Logistics attracted several more clients and began packaging and shipping everything from handmade mugs and tea towels to artisan piccalilli, chocolate and sweets.

This allowed Lush Logistics to take additional space in its secure office premises.

According to Matthew, being based in such an environment is an important selling point:

"Everyone we spoke to really liked that their products were in a nice clean and tidy office space with carpets and windows. It wasn't a dusty, crusty warehouse where their products were sat covered in muck."

Transparent pricing is also crucial to Lush's owners, as Matthew explains.

"Our clients like that we don't have hidden fees. Our pricing structure is simple and based on five key things – storage, the picking and packing of goods, the postage and, if they want, we can arrange the packaging for their goods, too." ►



“Everyone we spoke to really liked that their products were in a nice clean and tidy office space with carpets and windows. It wasn't a dusty, crusty warehouse where their products were sat covered in muck.”

A year ago, Lush Logistics attracted its biggest client – a local hamper company – to date. The win allowed the order fulfilment centre to recruit its first members of staff.

With growing orders and employees, everything was falling into place for Lush Logistics. It was even nominated for a North Tyneside Business Award.

But tragedy struck when Matthew's Grandpa died suddenly in November.

For a time, Matthew was unable to give his business his full attention while he attended to his grieving family. But the father of two reveals his family repaid this support by helping Lush Logistics ensure it could fulfil its pre-Christmas rush.

“My family chipped in on the weekends to pick up some of the slack for Christmas. It was a big effort, not just from me and Emma, but from everyone.”

This commitment to help others is important to Matthew who wants to create a community feel among his clients.

“My vision is that Lush Logistics becomes a community where clients can bounce ideas around and help each other. If one client needs support with, for example, their SEO, another client could help with that and vice versa. We are the thing that ties it all together, while fulfilling their orders, too.”

Matthew and Emma want to support local businesses and the local community,

and the fledgling company already sponsors Whitley Bay Football Club's U13s boys team.

Ask Matthew what the future holds for Lush Logistics and he talks about his ambition to expand the business and move into larger goods. But any of Lush Logistics' success, its owner says, hinges on his clients' success.

“We see ourselves as an extension of our clients' business and our biggest ambition is to see them succeed. I know that might sound cheesy to some people, but it's not for us.

“If our clients grow, we grow; it's that simple.” ●

For more information visit
www.lushlogistics.co.uk

Lush Logistics
Order Fulfilment Centre







0333 0048 470
or visit ucq.ac.uk

University Centre Quayside step in to Skills Bootcamps

University Centre Quayside have been successful in tendering for the new programmes in the North East called Skills Bootcamps

Skills Bootcamps are flexible courses lasting 2 to 16 weeks, giving people the opportunity to build up sector-specific skills and fast-track to a guaranteed interview with a local employer.

Skills Bootcamps are delivered in partnership with employers, further education training providers and local government.

The main objective of a Skills Bootcamp is to support people transferring in to sector specialised areas, progress into employment and develop their skills to get a better job or added responsibility.

Skills Bootcamps are bespoke programmes that are designed with employers we have had commitment from, employers such as Formula Plastics, Marmax Products, Key Enterprises, Jackson Hogg and AR Power. The cost is fully funded for learners not taking the course through an employer or for those that are self-employed.

If the programme is through an employer to upskill their exiting workforce then there is a contribution of 10% of the course price for SME's and 30% for larger employers. All Skills Bootcamps start at level 3.



University Centre Quayside are aligned to specific growth sectors within the North East region including Advanced Manufacturing, Digital Skills, Green Power and Green Transport. Our programmes include:

Advanced Manufacturing: Clean and Lean, Improve and Sustain and Train the Trainer.

Clean and Lean Digital Skills: AI and Digital Skills for Industry and AI and Digital Skills for Educators.

Green Power: Improving Performance in Green Power Operations and Driving Team Performance in Green Power Operations.

Green Transport: Improving Performance in Green Transport Operations, Driving Team Performance in Green Transport Operations and Leadership and Management.

The Skills Bootcamps are a mix of lectures, observations, discussions and support sessions. The Skills Bootcamps are designed around employer needs so could run in a block of a 2 week period or one day a week for up to 16 weeks. Skills Bootcamps are a minimum of 60glh (100 for digital)

If you are interested in a Skills Bootcamp then please visit ucq.ac.uk/skills-bootcamps and complete contact us today and one of the team will be in contact with you. ●



“The main objective of a Skills Bootcamp is to support people transferring in to sector specialised areas, progress into employment and develop their skills to get a better job or added responsibility.”





Putting Coquetdale on the map

Former IT professional **Roz Tinlin** is on a mission to raise the profile of an often overlooked area of Northumberland she's called home for the last 23 years. How? Through her B&B, whisky and chocolate, of course! *Alison Cowie* speaks to the serial entrepreneur to find out more

Roz Tinlin had enjoyed a successful career in IT when, in 2001, she and her family decided to buy a B&B in Rothbury, Northumberland.

She explains: "We fell in love with the area and bought the property on a whim. Our girls were nine and ten at the time and we thought Rothbury and Coquetdale would be a lovely place to bring them up." ►

The former consultant threw herself into her new business venture, called The Haven, which had previously been used as a B&B and a base for outdoor pursuits training.

After fully refurbishing the property, Roz spent her days attending to guests staying in the 13 bedrooms, and her evenings cooking meals for patrons and locals.

"It was very full on at the start," Roz recalls. "I had to get up to speed on everything. But I have a very strong work

ethic and learnt on the job. I worked well with Environmental Services, Trading Standards and Fire Regulations. A lot of business owners grumbled about these, but I found they helped me to get everything in order."

As a new resident of Rothbury, Roz also became a prominent member of the Coquetdale Business Club, and was appointed chairperson.

Discussions between fellow B&B owners, farmers, shopkeepers and

other small business owners often centred around ways to raise the profile of their area of Northumberland that is often overlooked.

"Coquetdale gets missed out because people tend to go to Alnwick, Hexham or Bamburgh at the coast," Roz explains. "They forget about the stunningly beautiful bit in the middle."

The group began researching the area and a local artist found that Coquetdale had a rich history of whisky smuggling

“*"I just love the thought of smugglers roaming around that area, and bringing out [Black Rory] whisky was a great way to honour that while promoting the Coquet Valley."*



The revelation gave Roz the idea to develop a whisky to promote the area and honour its infamous past.

However, Her whisky dream was almost shattered before it started as Roz kept getting knocked back from distillers.

"I spoke to lots of people in the whisky industry but no one was interested," she adds.

She then met a distiller called John McDougall

Roz invited him to the Coquet Valley and she told him about the history of the area and her desire to create a whisky.

John liked what he heard and the pair went for a walk in the local valley. The distiller took samples of the local peat and water before returning to his native Scotland to develop a whisky blend that reflected the Northumbrian area. Once the perfect blend was made, it was sent to an independent bottler, Jane, based in Glasgow.

Black Rory Whisky – named after the historic 19th Century smuggler who ran illicit stills in the hills of Upper Coquetdale – was launched in 2007. Roz reveals it has enjoyed steady sales over the years.

“Coquetdale gets missed out because people tend to go to Alnwick, Hexham or Bamburgh at the coast. They forget about the stunningly beautiful bit in the middle.”

"I just love the thought of smugglers roaming around that area, and bringing out the whisky was a great way to honour that while promoting the Coquet Valley," she adds.

Meanwhile, Roz had begun to employ help with the cooking and housekeeping at her B&B.

She took advantage of local courses for her staff and a tutor came to the B&B weekly to work with them.

One day, the tutor asked if Roz would be interested in becoming a tutor herself. Always up for a challenge, The Haven's owner accepted and, for the next five years, taught literacy, numeracy, and food hygiene to adults with learning difficulties.

Her tutoring experience was to lead to yet another business venture.

Roz recognised that the best way to teach her students food hygiene was to learn skills on the job. She decided chocolate was the perfect tasty treat to make

"I'd never taken an interest in making chocolate before. It just came to me, thinking I wanted to do something nice and interesting with the people I was tutoring. We could make the chocolate together and then design the wrappers."

Roz took several courses to learn how to make chocolate. But, just as she was about to embark on her teaching courses with the adults, everything came to an abrupt halt.

"All funding stopped overnight and I found I couldn't put what I'd learnt into practice." ►



Instead of letting her newly acquired skills melt away, Roz began making bars of chocolate to sell at local farms and food markets.

Her brand, Coquet Chocolates, gave the serial entrepreneur another opportunity to promote the area she called home.

"Like the whisky, I wanted to create a good quality product that would help highlight Coquetdale. I suppose, I hoped people would like the chocolate and decide to look up what the area had to offer."

Roz currently produces 30 flavours of bars and her 'Clarts', puddles of chocolate with luxury fruit and nuts named after the Geordie word for clumps of dirt.

She supplies around 12 local shops with her chocolatey treats and produces one-off confectionary for corporate and special events.

In addition, Roz hosts chocolate-making workshops and chocolate and whiskey tasting classes.

Alongside running her B&B and whisky enterprise, Roz would like to develop her

chocolate business and is currently looking into suppliers for more eco-friendly packaging.

She would also like to take on a chocolate-making apprentice, but the rising cost of ingredients has delayed her plans for now.

Whatever the future brings, Coquetdale is definitely in a sweeter position with Roz as one of its residents. Cheers to that! ●

Find out more about Coquet Chocolate at www.coquetchocolates.co.uk

“*"I'd never taken an interest in making chocolate before. It just came to me, thinking I wanted to do something nice and interesting with the people I was tutoring."*





Why it's important to understand neurodiversity

In today's workplace, understanding neurodiversity, including conditions like ADHD, is essential for HR teams and businesses

For decades, we have been told that an individual who is neurodiverse will be unfocused, disorganised, unreliable, and bring many challenges for a business. However, what they don't tell you is that they are curious, resilient, creative and visionary individuals and include some of our most successful entrepreneurs in the world. Just think what this could do for your business success to have these traits available to you.

As the workforce of today becomes more diverse, it's crucial to recognise that individuals with neurodiverse traits often bring unique strengths but may also face challenges in their roles that require tailored support and adjustments. Whether someone is self-diagnosed or formally diagnosed,

creating an environment where they can thrive and be supported is key to fostering success for all.

At Inspired HR, we recognised early that knowledge on this subject, in addition to partnerships with Occupational Health and other leading ADHD organisations, was critical. This has led to us now being recognised as an expert in our own right and resulted in the launch of "Inspired Minds ADHD", a specialist arm of our business dedicated to providing ADHD coaching, neurodiverse training, complex case management and advisory services.

Our approach is shaped by lived experience, with our MD Nikki Masterman having a firsthand understanding of neurodiversity within her family and herself



which has been the driver for her business success at Inspired HR and Inspired Minds ADHD. ●



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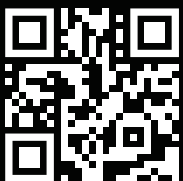
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The Business Clinic

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Since 2014, the trailblazing Business Clinic at Northumbria University has provided pro-bono consultancy work to hundreds of companies and organisations. The benefits have not only helped level the playing field for students but provided a fresh perspective on business challenges. *Alison Cowie* asks its founder, **Nigel Coates**, why the initiative has been such a success

University Business Schools have long been teaching facts and models to students in lecture theatres, while practical real-work experience has come via work placements.

But getting the best placements hasn't always been an equal playing field, with students often relying on parents' established networks and connections to secure prized experience in sought-after companies.

This quandary led Associate Professor Nigel Coates to establish the Business Clinic at Northumbria University in 2014.

He explains: "We wanted to create something that would enable students who didn't have the contacts through their own personal networks or that of their families to get a better insight into business."

The initial aim of the Business Clinic was to provide an environment where Newcastle Business School students could work directly with a client on a real world business challenge.

Ten years on and it has delivered 780 consultancy projects involving more than 3100 students.

Business School Students work

at the Clinic in their final year of study, offering clients a full pro bono consultancy service. Projects include feasibility studies in finance, investment and growth; branding and marketing; business analytics and logistics, and more.

At the end, students present their findings and short and long-term recommendations to clients.

Not only has the trailblazing initiative helped students gain quality real-world business experience, no matter their background, but as Nigel reveals, it has also helped to open up new sectors ►

to participants, particularly those previously seen as male-dominated.

"The projects have helped to break down lots of different barriers," Nigel adds.

The Business Clinic has garnered much attention and numerous accolades over the years. Most recently it won a Small Business Charter Excellence Award.

Nigel did Business Studies at university in the 1980s, completing a placement as part of his degree.

After graduating, he moved to the Isle of Man to work as a business manager in a small startup computer company. But while the 23 year old enjoyed his job, the gentile island lifestyle wasn't conducive and he relocated to the North East to take a marketing position at a large manufacturer in Sunderland.

A move to be a commercial manager at a small yet successful company that monitored corrosion for the oil and gas industry followed.

It was during this latter role that Nigel was approached to do some part-time lecturing at what was then North Tyneside College.

He recalls: "The college asked if I would run a City and Guilds for owners of small hotels and guesthouses. I said yes and taught everything apart from the cooking!"

Nigel says the experience gave him "the bug for teaching and learning" and he took a full-time lecturer position at Northumbria University in 1988.

Despite his career change, Nigel maintained strong links with industry, which informed his teaching style.

He organised several knowledge transfer partnership schemes with local companies, which proved pivotal in the later evolution of the Business Clinic.

The main catalyst for the Business Clinic, however, came when Northumbria University merged its Business School and its Law School into a Faculty.

Nigel explains: "After the two merged, the Executive Dean asked what the Business School was doing that was the equivalent to the Student Law Office. At the time, we weren't doing anything similar, so that's why we started the Business Clinic."

In its first year, the Clinic provided 20 undergraduate students with a year-long consultancy experience that would be in place of their dissertations. They worked in groups of 4 with a client who asked them to come up with solutions to a real life business challenge.

Nigel also encouraged the students to keep a learning journal to help them identify skills and anecdotes that would differentiate them in job interviews once they graduated.

"I'd previously sat in on interviews where you could see the graduates knew the facts they'd learnt from textbooks but they were missing those practical examples," the Associate Professor adds.

The pilot project proved an overwhelming success and while it was initially meant for students who hadn't secured a placement, more and more business school students soon wanted to get involved.

"They could see the value in getting involved and working with clients at a

strategic level," Nigel adds.

Within a few years, Northumbria University decided to invest in the Business Clinic by providing it with purpose-built facilities.

"We designed the space to be more like a work environment than an education one, with private meeting spaces and its own entrance so that students could greet clients as they came in."

Since 2014, Nigel and the Business Clinic have attracted a diverse range of businesses including micro-businesses, SMEs, multi-national organisations, charitable organisations, educational trusts, social enterprises and public sector organisations.

The Clinic now has a full-time business clinic manager who brings in around 100 projects a year, while students are guided by a team of tutors who specialise in all aspects of business.

Its founder reveals: "We began working with Nissan after one of its regional managers – who was a

“*I'd previously sat in on interviews where you could see the graduates knew the facts they'd learnt from textbooks but they were missing those practical examples.”*



former student of the Business Clinic – recommended us.”

Nigel knows the projects he is offering to students represent a different way of learning.

“There’s no one right answer when it comes to working in the Business Clinic. The tutors will offer advice on potential pitfalls, but students need to work with each other, conduct research and come up with solutions that demonstrate impact and value.”

The Business Clinic’s aim to better prepare students for the world of work seems to be working, as its founder explains.

“We ask students to complete a survey before and after the course about where they see themselves in terms of employability. We see things like resilience, which we know is highly valued by employers, shooting up as they’ve had the experience of working directly with clients.”

Meanwhile, the Clinic is also proving to be a fertile environment for budding entrepreneurs with 86% of Business Clinic participants placing themselves in the top two categories for having ‘an entrepreneurial mindset’ at the end of the course.

The key to the Business Clinic’s success, though, is that the initiative doesn’t just benefit students. There are also considerable benefits for businesses to get involved.

Nigel explains: “The advice we give is free of charge, which is obviously a benefit, but clients also get a lot of creativity, a fresh set of eyes and a different perspective.

“Students can also be brutally honest and clients appreciate that. It’s why many come back the next year.”

Nigel is proud of how the Business Clinic has developed over the last 10 years and sees it as an important part of the North East business support ecosystem.

“The real buzz is about having a positive impact that goes beyond the students. You can see the effect we’re having on the businesses and the charitable organisations – some of which don’t have the finances or the time to get the consultancy support we offer.

“It feels like we are putting something back into the economy and into society.”

The success of the Business Clinic at Newcastle Business School means

Nigel is now advising numerous other universities on how to set up similar initiatives, including Sheffield Hallam, Birmingham City, Liverpool John Moores, Leeds Beckett, Sunderland, York St John, Durham and even Deakin University in Australia.

In terms of the Business Clinic at Northumbria, Nigel is keen to expand the initiative to students beyond the Business School. This process has already started with

business students partnering with film students on several projects last year to deliver promotional materials for the RNLI and for South Tyneside Council.

“We want to continue to engage students in other areas of the university as developing more interdisciplinary teams is something that you are increasingly seeing in the real world,” Nigel adds.

It seems the Business Clinic is a win-win for everyone. Here’s to the next 10 years! ●

For more information, visit
www.northumbria.ac.uk/business-services/engage-with-us/talent-and-insight/the-business-clinic/



Have you ever avoided a conversation you knew you needed to have?

You are not alone, says leadership mentor and speaker Michaela Reaney

Research from Harvard Business Review says that 80% of people avoid at least one workplace conversation. At a recent conference where I delivered a keynote, I tested this theory by asking the group to vote on the topic that was most on their mind right now... You guessed it 76% of the audience said it was navigating a difficult conversation they know they need to have.

There was a conversation recently that I kept putting off. I knew I needed to have it. The person I needed to speak to had a tendency to get defensive, so I kept postponing. This person is a freelancer that our client has hired to work on a project. It is that strange dynamic where they are not someone I lead but the success of the project depends on them collaborating and communicating well with my team.

One of my team had flagged that this person had been really short and quite obstructive on a recent project call, some follow-up emails had been snippy, and it was causing friction in the team. Why did I not have the conversation straight away? Honestly, because I am human, I was tired and overwhelmed with my own to do list. It was a Friday afternoon, and I thought, I can leave it until next week - that classic kick it into the long grass and deal with it another day. When I had given feedback to this person before it became clear they were not operating in a feedback culture and so it felt awkward and difficult for them to hear.

When I finally took a deep breath and had that conversation, it wasn't half as bad as I'd built it up to be. In fact, it felt like a relief! The story I'd told myself—that it would be difficult and their reaction would be 'bad'—was just that, a story. The truth was the conversation was a chance for both of us to learn.



What I realised is how much energy I'd wasted overthinking. The impact on productivity, project success, and opportunities for growth.

You've been putting off that conversation, fearing the worst, overthinking every word, and feeling anxious about how the other person might react. Do this instead.

- 1. Put yourself in their shoes:** Empathy and compassion is a powerful tool. Remember, everyone reacts to situations based on their own beliefs, and the resources available to them at that moment in time.
- 2. Listen actively:** Reflect back to the other person what you have heard to confirm understanding. Nothing feels better than being listened to.
- 3. Try to respond not react to the other person:** Instead, observe and witness their behaviour without reacting. People tend to be more defensive when they feel misunderstood or not listened to.
- 4. If you feel yourself getting frustrated or nervous, ground yourself:** Take a couple of deep breaths, short pauses can bring you back to the present moment.

Here's the truth...

It's never as bad as you think it is going to be. And once you've started the conversation, you won't regret having it. I hope you've found this topic useful. I'd love to hear your results once you've tackled that difficult conversation. ●

Feel free to DM me on socials
@mjreaney on Instagram
or on LinkedIn.

Michaela Reaney, Opportunity Global
www.theopportunity.global





LS | LIFESTYLE

ISSUE 7

MOTORING ■ DINING

Redefining the grand tourer

Bentley has marked the 21st anniversary of its Continental GT with the launch of a highly anticipated new range that blends supercar performance, handcrafted luxury and more sustainable hybrid technology



The launch of the fourth generation of Continental GT Speed by the exclusive brand, Bentley, in the summer attracted the attention of many motorheads.

'Supercar performance' and 'everyday usability' are what have been promised.

This performance comes from all-new Ultra Performance Hybrid powertrain with 782 PS and 1,000 Nm, from a 4.0-litre V8 working in tandem with a 190 PS electric motor.

This means you can get from 0-60 mph in just 3.1 seconds, 0-60 mph in 3.1 seconds with the added benefit of 50 miles (81 km) of usable electric-only range (on the EU drive cycle) and a total range of 534 miles (859 km) – creating an everyday supercar.

The powertrain's performance is matched by a new chassis system, with new two-chamber air springs paired with new dual-valve dampers, along with Bentley Dynamic Ride (48V active anti-roll

control), eLSD and torque vectoring and a 49:51, rear-biased weight distribution. The result, Bentley says, means the Continental GT offers the best ever ride comfort.

Externally, Bentley's looks are iconic but the company says this is the biggest revision to the face of the Continental GT in two decades.

The range maintains a sleek and muscular style, with the front inspired by the upright elegance of a thoroughbred horse and the

22-inch wheels' inspired by the claws of a tiger 'digging into the road'.

The new Bentley also comes with single headlamps for the first time since the 1950s while at the rear, the boot lid boasts an integrated aerodynamic form to provide rear downforce without the need for a deployable rear spoiler.

Pleasingly, for the first time in the history of the Continental GT, the convertible Continental GTC is being launched concurrently with the coupe - providing customers with ultimate flexibility.

The luxury continues inside with

Bentley's usual interior cabin design offering uncompromising materials, quality, and craftsmanship. Added benefits include the introduction of wellness seat technology (with more than 30 settings to choose from), new air ionisation, three-dimensional leather textures, new modern quilting, and technical finishes such as new dark chrome.

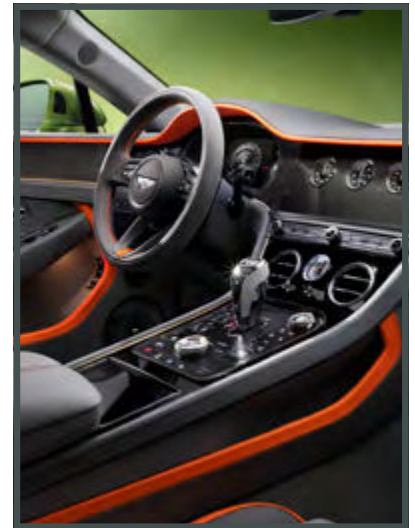
There's also a 12.3 inch high-definition rotating display, 30 options of in-cabin mood lighting, and the choice of three audio systems – a standard 10 speaker, 65 watts; a Bang & Olufsen 1500 watts, 16

speaker and a Naim 2,200 watt, 18 speaker system with Active Bass Transducers built into the front seat.

This is combined with a myriad of additional cutting edge tech, such as driver assistance, infotainment systems and connected car services.

Both coupe and convertible models will be crafted entirely by hand at Bentley's Dream Factory in Crewe and can be pre-ordered now. The cost for each model is expected to be around £170,000. ●

For more information,
visit www.bentleymotors.com





SPICES DANCING IN HARMONY

Alison Cowie visits **Zamorins** on Park View in Whitley Bay to enjoy authentic South Indian cooking and hospitality



“When you enter the restaurant, you are greeted with a warm welcome from the staff and an elegant interior with cream, navy and gold décor, warm honeywood furnishings, and a smattering of Indian-themed artworks and wall hangings.”

Once the preserve of curry houses and cheap and cheerful Italian restaurants, Whitley Bay is fast becoming a haven for gastronomes with the opening of numerous eateries serving menus from around the world.

Competition is high as people seek more adventurous global cuisine, but there is one restaurant that's been offering a different Indian dining experience to locals and visitors in the Bay for the past six years.

Zamorins is located on Park View, one of the 'top ten coolest shopping streets in the world' according to the Guardian.

The restaurant - named after a historic dynasty of Calicut, once the most important spice trading centre of South India - serves a menu that celebrates southern Indian cooking.

My dining companion and I visited Zamorins to sample its fare on an autumnal weekday evening.

When you enter the restaurant, you are greeted with a warm welcome from the staff and an elegant interior with cream, navy and gold décor, warm honeywood furnishings, and a smattering of Indian-themed artworks and wall hangings.

The first page of Zamorin's menu's explains more about the south Indian cuisine on offer, with descriptions such as 'spices dancing in harmony' to get your mouth watering.

Over the page, you'll find a vast selection of mundu (appetizers), thudakkam (starters), koottan (mains), biriyani, dosa, breads, rice, koode (sides) and madhuam (dessert).

Pescatarians are well served with a variety of diverse fish dishes, and non-meat eaters have lots of options that put vegetables front and centre. There is also a ►

kids menu and a 3-course set menu offered on Thursdays and Sundays for £19.95.

The expansive choice can be overwhelming but a nice touch is that some dishes are headed with 'chef recommends' to help guide you through Zamorin's top picks.

My dining partner and I enjoyed some poppadoms (98p each) and dips (£4.95) to begin our meal. The poppadoms arrived as big as dinner plates and proved the perfect

holders for the exquisite selection of dips that included the familiar mint yoghurt and mango chutney.

As recommended by Zamorin's attentive manager, we tried the punchy but very tasty Kerala fish pickle (£3.85) too.

For our starters, my companion chose the king prawn ularthu (£8.75) that offered an abundance of sea food cooked with fragrant spices, coconut and onion.

I opted for the Cauli 65 (£5.95), a vegan dish that comprised soft cauliflower enrobed in a wonderfully flavoursome Madras paste. There's no threat of getting a bland and uninspiring vegan dish at Zamorins!

Onto the mains and I went for the Goan monkfish curry (£16.95), which offered huge chunks of well-cooked fish bathed in the light but aromatically spiced



tomato sauce with onion, chilli, garlic and tamarind.

After much deliberation, my dining companion decided on the chicken butter masala (£11.95) with its succulent chargrilled chicken cooked in a creamy tomato and cashew sauce.

To accompany our mains, we shared the onion pilau rice (£3.95), a chapati (£3.50), and a Malabar porotta (£3.95) - a layered

bread coiled and cooked on a griddle that was delicious.

The generous portions meant neither of us could manage a dessert from the menu, which included tempting options such the mango saffron shrikhand (a creamy yogurt) or the gulab jamun (dumpling of soft cottage cheese in syrup). Next time.

Zamorins may have more competition than it once had, but its authentic celebration of

South Indian cooking means this eatery definitely holds its own. I recommend you give it a try and take yourself on an unexpected but brilliant journey of South Indian spice and flavour. Your tastebuds will be dancing by the end! ●

Zamorins is located 179-183 Park View, Whitley Bay. For more information and bookings, visit www.zamorins.co.uk or call (0191) 249 9800.



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EVENTS DIARY



NOVEMBER

- 6-7** Offshore Wind North East 2024 conference and exhibition, Beacon of Light, Monkwearmouth, Sunderland, SR5 1SN. 8.30am-3pm. From £342
- 14** North East Expo – Autumn 2024
Newcastle Racecourse, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 5HP. 9.30am-3pm. Free
- 21** North East Social Enterprise Day, The Common Room, Neville Hall, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1SE. 9.30am – 4pm. From £6.13
- 21** Dynamites Awards 2024, Newcastle Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7PF. 6pm – 11.30pm. From £144
- 29** Chamber Inspiring Females Awards 2024, Newcastle Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7PF. 12.30pm-5pm. From £96

DECEMBER

- 3** Kraken Networking (Sunderland), The Fire Station, High Street West, Sunderland, SR1 3HA. 9.30am-10.30am. Free-£5.03
- 5** BIPC Meet-Up, The Natural Grocer Market and Social, 13 Cattle Market, Hexham, NE46 1NJ. 10.15am-1.15pm. Free
- 5** North Tyneside Business Forum Christmas Social, The Murphy, 50 Bell Street, Tynemouth, NE30 1HF. 6pm-9pm. £22.38
- 6** The Snowflake Ball, The Biscuit Factory, 16 Stoddart Street, Shieldfield, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 1AN. 6.45pm-12am. From £80.80

JANUARY

- 7** Hexham Business Networking, InHouse Inspired Room Design, Hexham, NE46 4DQ. 8am-9.30am. £6
- 14** Tynedale Business Network, Beaumont Hotel, Beaumont Street, Hexham, NE46 3LT. 7.30am-9am. £10
- 21** How to ACTUALLY start a business in South Tyneside, One Trinity Green, Eldon Street, South Shields, NE33 1SA. 6pm-8pm. Free
- 26** North East Wellbeing Festival, Britannia Hotel, Newcastle Airport, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE13 8DJ. 10am-4pm. £10

To have your event listed here, please email alison@bw-magazine.co.uk.

Please note, while we make every effort to ensure these listings are correct, we cannot be held responsible for changes or cancellations – always contact the venue beforehand to check.



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