

Magazine of the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce

# CONNECTED

ISSUE 25

COMPLIMENTARY COPY

## CITY OF DERRY AIRPORT: CATALYSTS OF GROWTH

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ROUTE  
DEVELOPMENT;  
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# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



**Welcome to the first 2026 edition of Connected, the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce magazine.**

We begin the year with a strong sense of purpose and momentum. Following our Annual General Meeting at the close of 2025, we were pleased to see Steven Lindsay appointed as the Chamber's 83rd President. From the outset, Steven has set a clear and ambitious tone, one firmly focused on delivery. His priorities reflect the issues that matter most to our members and the wider region: advancing the expansion of Ulster University's Magee Campus, maintaining momentum on City Deal projects, improving connectivity, and supporting innovation in areas such as artificial intelligence and renewable energy. The emphasis is clear: turning ambition into tangible outcomes that will make a meaningful difference.

That focus on delivery has already shaped our work in the early months of this year. Throughout March, the Chamber facilitated a series of targeted engagements with key decision-makers to ensure the North West's voice is heard where it matters most. Constructive discussions with Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd MLA examined the Draft Budget and its implications for the region, with particular emphasis on protecting funding for Magee expansion towards 10,000 students and sustaining progress on City Deal delivery. Alongside this, we highlighted critical infrastructure challenges, including delays to the A2 and A5, wastewater capacity constraints, and the need for planning reform, reinforcing the importance of coordinated, cross-departmental action to safeguard investment and delivery. You will note in this issue we are introducing the members of our Board who chair the three sub committees – Ronan Duffy, Greg McCann, and Julie Pollock – and hearing from them on progress made so far.

We also convened a strategic roundtable with Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Matthew Patrick MP, hosted by Alchemy Technology Services. This provided a valuable platform to showcase the North West's strengths in talent, innovation, and advanced industries, while setting out the practical steps required to unlock further investment and support business growth. The message was consistent and confident: this region is well positioned to play a central role in driving economic growth across Northern Ireland.

Engagement with Minister of Justice Naomi Long MLA further broadened our focus, addressing issues that impact both businesses and communities. Conversations centred on city centre safety, workforce development, and the importance of achieving regional balance, alongside wider societal priorities such as ending violence against women and girls.

Looking beyond our immediate region, international collaboration has also been a key theme. We were delighted to welcome Mark Owens, Honorary Consul of Ireland in Ohio, for discussions exploring shared opportunities between the North West and Northeast Ohio. The strong alignment between our regions, particularly in advanced manufacturing, innovation, and workforce development, presents exciting potential for future transatlantic partnerships. Next month, the President and I will travel to London as part of the Trade NI delegation to Westminster to represent the North West business community to the UK Government.

As we move through 2026, the Chamber remains committed to ensuring that ambition is matched by action. Our role is to advocate, to connect, and to deliver; working in partnership with our members, government, and stakeholders to unlock the full potential of the North West.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Connected, and I look forward to working together to make 2026 a year of real progress and impact for our region.

**Anna Doherty** CEO

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# BISHOP'S GATE HOTEL CONCIERGE IS FIRST WOMAN FROM NORTHERN IRELAND TO RECEIVE COVETED LES CLEFS D'OR HONOUR

When Kaysi Straw left the retail industry to work at Bishop's Gate Hotel in Derry~Londonderry, she had no idea it would springboard her career to a level which saw her become the first woman from Northern Ireland to receive one of hospitality's most coveted recognitions.

Les Clefs d'Or is globally recognised as a symbol of excellence and the pinnacle of concierge service with only 4,000 members around the world.

Kaysi made the leap into a career in tourism and hospitality five years ago and hasn't looked back.

She said: "To receive Les Clefs d'Or was a huge honour. I'm over the moon and it's great to see women being more represented in a role that is often perceived as being male dominated."

Les Clefs d'Or is globally recognised but particularly among North American visitors who immediately spot the crossed gold keys.

"When they see it, they know they're in good hands," Kaysi explains. The rigorous application process – including mystery shops and monthly meetings – reflects the high standards required.

Joining the organisation has opened doors to mentorship, professional development and a worldwide network of expertise which Kaysi has availed of.

Kaysi is keen to highlight how flexible a career in tourism and hospitality can be.

She said: "There's a role here for everybody. We have students working here and people who are working around childcare. There are great opportunities for progression if you're willing to put in the work."



Her advice to anyone thinking of changing career is simple: "Keep an open mind. Try your hand at all aspects of the industry, and, most importantly, enjoy what you do."

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# WELCOME MESSAGE FROM THE CHAMBER PRESIDENT

Dear Members and Friends,

It is a privilege to welcome you to this latest edition of Connected, my first as President of the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce.

I am conscious of the important role our region plays in the wider economic future of Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland. A confident, outward-looking North West is key to achieving balanced and sustainable economic growth. This edition of Connected reflects the momentum building across our business community.

For too long, our region has been defined more by its challenges than its opportunities. Yet every day, across our city and the wider North West, we see a different reality; one defined by innovation, enterprise and growing cross-border connections. Derry stands as the economic anchor of this dynamic region, and the strength of our business base continues to grow from within.

Our future success will be driven not only by external investment but by the ambition and strength of our indigenous businesses, entrepreneurs and institutions. From digital and creative industries to advanced manufacturing, tourism and life sciences, the North West is finding its voice and growing in confidence.

At the Chamber, we remain committed to supporting progress, championing our members, strengthening connections and advocating for the investment and infrastructure needed to unlock our full potential. Key developments such as the expansion of Ulster University's Magee campus and the delivery of the City Deal demonstrate what can be achieved when ambition is matched with action.

As you explore this issue of Connected, I hope you are encouraged by the stories and insights



it shares. They highlight how a strong North West benefits not only this region but also contributes to a more balanced and resilient economy across these islands.

Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement.

Best wishes  
**Steven Lindsay**  
President, Londonderry Chamber of Commerce



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# A MODERN, RESILIENT ELECTRICITY GRID IS CRITICAL TO POWERING UP DERRY'S ECONOMY

*Alan Campbell is the Chief Executive of SONI, Northern Ireland's Transmission System Operator. Previously the Power Station Manager at ESB Coolkeeragh in Derry/Londonderry, Alan now has a leading role in transforming Northern Ireland's electricity transmission grid to ensure the changing energy needs of consumers can be met today and into the future.*

Maydown is home to Coolkeeragh Power Station as well as Northern Ireland Electricity Networks high-voltage electricity substation which services the electricity needs of the north and west of Northern Ireland. The substation is key for enabling the flow of the vast increase of readily available renewable energy generated in this part of the region.

Across the world electricity systems are changing — Northern Ireland's must change too. As the Transmission System Operator, SONI have the crucial task of transforming Northern Ireland's electricity grid to deliver a cleaner, more secure and affordable energy future for everyone. Investing in the upgrade of the electricity substation at Coolkeeragh is a fundamental part of this journey.

Like all critical infrastructure, Northern Ireland's electricity grid was built to meet the needs of its time – when consumer demand was lower and the system was designed around a different economic landscape. First developed in the 1950s and 1960s, the grid centred around the heavily industrialised east of Northern Ireland.

Since then, the energy landscape has changed dramatically. Rapid growth in renewable investment across the north and west of Northern Ireland means the way we plan the power system must change too. Future grid infrastructure investment must be delivered in a more regionally balanced way.



Derry is a thriving, fast-growing city. The planned expansion of Ulster University's Magee Campus to a 10,000-student intake by 2032 and the £482m programme of transformative strategic and community capital investment being taken forward by Derry City and Strabane District Council demonstrate this.

But progress does not happen in isolation. Public and private sector investment, alongside a growing residential population, must be backed by a modern electricity grid that can meet rising demand from the people who live, work and do business here. Grid investment also acts as a catalyst for wider economic growth — and the regions that decarbonise their electricity systems first will be best placed to attract new investment.

To meet these changing energy needs, SONI is advancing plans to extend the existing substation site at Coolkeeragh. By expanding the substation footprint and carrying out reinforcement works, we will be able to meet forecast electricity demand in the years ahead. Beyond future-proofing supply, the additional space within the site will also enable more connections to the grid — a strategic enabler of local economic development and employment.

Our project team is continuing to work with the Council and our partners at NIE Networks to advance proposals to extend Coolkeeragh Substation. In the months ahead, we will share updates and listen to local feedback as the plans progress. Getting this right matters: a modern, resilient grid at Coolkeeragh is essential to support homes, businesses and future growth in the North West.



# Powering Up the North West

SONI (System Operator for Northern Ireland) is planning to extend the existing substation at Coolkeeragh in Maydown. This will future-proof the electricity network, enhance energy security, drive economic growth, and support more renewable energy integration.

Find out more at [www.soni.ltd.uk](http://www.soni.ltd.uk)



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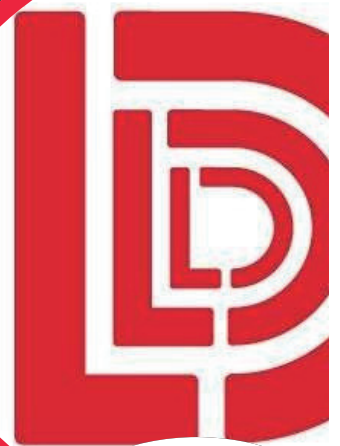
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# A DAY IN THE LIFE

**NAME**

Olga McAteer MBA



**AGE**

50

**HOMETOWN**

Toomebridge, Co Antrim

**ORGANISATION**

McAteer Solutions Estate Agents Ltd

**JOB TITLE**

Estate Agent Director/Founder

**TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF**

I am an entrepreneur who set out to challenge and modernise the traditional real estate industry. Eight years ago, I founded McAteer Solutions with a clear mission to disrupt outdated practices and deliver a more professional, transparent and client-focused service. Since then, we have grown into one of the top-performing commercial and residential estate agencies, now positioned within the top 5 percent of the market. Our brand is recognised across Northern Ireland, with four offices currently operating in Toomebridge, Derry, Armagh and London. We are now expanding further into the South of Ireland, continuing our growth journey across the UK and Ireland. From the beginning, my vision has always been to provide the highest standard of service and to redefine what clients should expect from an estate agent.

**HOW IT ALL BEGAN**

My career started in construction at the age of 15, working weekends and throughout school holidays. Coming from a hardworking background, I was inspired by my parents' strong work ethic and values. I spent 30 years in the construction industry, which gave me a solid foundation and deep understanding of property. Eight years ago, I took a leap and launched my own estate agency with no external funding, only belief, determination and a clear vision to do things differently. I have always believed in doing right by people and helping others wherever possible. That mindset has shaped both my reputation and the culture of the business. Today, we are one

of the fastest-growing and most trusted estate agents in Northern Ireland, competing with established global brands through dedication, consistency and a strong client-first approach.

**DESCRIBE WHAT YOUR JOB INVOLVES**

No two days are ever the same in my role. One day I might be valuing a residential property, the next I could be walking a large farm or managing a major commercial deal. Our work ranges from £100,000 homes to multi-million-pound commercial properties. I am also heavily involved in helping clients navigate complex situations such as family or legal property disputes. I typically work six days a week, and sometimes seven depending on client needs and market demands. While I do make time for family and friends, I find it difficult to fully switch off, as I am deeply invested in the business and its growth.

**WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE DAY AT WORK?**

There is not just one standout moment because I genuinely enjoy every day. I love the energy of meeting new clients and closing deals, but the most rewarding moments come from helping people. Seeing a young couple receive the keys to their first home is incredibly special. Being trusted with major commercial sales is also a huge honour. These experiences reinforce why I do what I do.

**WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT?**

Winning the Women in Business Small Business of the Year award in 2026 is one of my proudest achievements. It reflects the hard work, strong values and consistent growth we have achieved as a company. More importantly, it



validates our mission to challenge the traditional estate agency model and deliver something better.

**WHAT IS THE MOST FULFILLING ASPECT OF YOUR JOB?**

The most fulfilling part of my role is the people. Our clients, our team and the relationships we build are at the heart of everything we do. Managing a portfolio of around 200 properties is a privilege and a reflection of the trust we have earned.

**WHERE DO YOU SEE THE BUSINESS IN 5 YEARS?**

I see McAteer Solutions progressing from the top 5 percent to the top 2 percent of estate agencies across Ireland and the UK, continuing to grow while maintaining the high standards and values that define our business.

TurtleTots Northwest and Donegal has built its reputation on one simple belief: introducing children to water early can make a lifelong difference. Swimming is often viewed as a hobby, but in reality it should be one of the most important activities a child ever learns. It is a life skill that can build confidence, support development, and, most importantly, help keep children safe around water.

From as young as 12 weeks old, babies can begin their swimming journey, developing confidence, coordination, and essential water safety skills. As they grow, our structured programme supports children all the way up to age 12, depending on the pool, ensuring every stage of development is nurtured in a safe, supportive environment.

Our lessons are about far more than simply learning strokes. They help strengthen the bond between parent and child, encourage social interaction, and build confidence both in and out of the water. We are proud to offer classes that are fully inclusive and accessible to all children. Whether a child has additional needs or is typically developing, every swimmer is welcomed, supported, and encouraged to progress at their own pace.



Beyond the pool, education remains a huge part of what we do. Through our Instagram and Facebook platforms, we aim to provide useful, educational content for every family who follows our pages. We regularly share tips, guidance, and water safety advice so that even if a family is not currently attending lessons, they can still learn something valuable along the way.

Accessibility is equally important to us. Our payment plans are designed to make classes achievable for families across all income levels, because we believe every child deserves the opportunity to learn this vital life skill. As TurtleTots Northwest approaches its 10th anniversary next year, it is exciting to see the brand continue to grow. With a new franchise now opened in the Belfast area, TurtleTots is reaching more families across Northern Ireland, and the future looks brighter than ever.



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# CATALYSTS OF GROWTH AT CITY OF DERRY AIRPORT

*Steve Frazer and Brenda Morgan discuss strategy, development and future ambitions for the Gateway of the Northwest.*

The renewed momentum at City of Derry Airport (CoDA) marks one of the most significant developments for the Northwest in the last decade. At the heart of this region's growth is improved connectivity. A marked increase of 23% in passenger numbers from 2024 to 2025, continuing into 2026 at a 13% growth with easyJet, Ryanair, and Loganair all strengthening their presence, while the long-awaited reinstatement of the Derry–Dublin air link set to restore a crucial connection for both business and tourism. The three times daily service to London Heathrow has added another 119 destinations through codeshare and interline ticketing.

For this region, improved air links are an essential part of our economic jigsaw. Direct links between the Northwest and the UK are vital in connecting corporate, leisure and students to key cities and business hubs on a daily basis, and the new access between the Northwest and Dublin will further open international pathways, shorten travel times dramatically, and enhance the region's attractiveness for business, tourism, and education.

Steve Frazer, Managing Director, and Brenda Morgan MBE, Head of Business

Development, have been pioneers of change at City of Derry Airport over the last six years, opening a new chapter of growth, collaboration and partnerships.

## REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Working in close collaboration with both governments here on the importance of aviation for the development of the Northwest region, and strengthening partnerships with stakeholders across Derry~Londonderry, the Causeway Coast and Glens, and Donegal, has been a central component in the Airport's growth strategy following Steve Frazer's appointment as Managing Director at City of Derry Airport in 2020.

Having spent 30 years in a variety of Aviation roles in Heathrow, Stansted and Doha, Steve returned home to the role at City of Derry Airport to use that experience and help his native Northwest thrive: "Considering I left for London 36 years ago as I didn't see a future and career opportunities, I returned with a young family in tow, because there is every opportunity available here now; my children can access education, skills and opportunities for great careers without having to head overseas.

"2020 was one of the toughest periods for everyone, CoDA survived as the recognition and importance of good connectivity for this region was unquestionable for business and tourism and no less than people here



deserve. Our government has regional balance cited at the core of its program which is extremely welcome, and it is vitally important that we maintain support for all sectors to grow in the Northwest. The post pandemic era has seen CoDA establish itself as the 'Gateway of the Northwest', steadily building back route networks and frequency, most notably with the three times daily service to London Heathrow, and easyJet now serving the region and becoming the airports largest carrier by volume within less than a year of launching direct services to Liverpool, Birmingham and Edinburgh. With the Ryanair service to Manchester now operating four days a week and Loganair serving Glasgow as well as Heathrow, CoDA has a strong network of direct connectivity to the major UK cities, and the much-anticipated route to Dublin scheduled for take-off in October 2026,

| Line     | Flight | Time  | Destination       | Remarks        |
|----------|--------|-------|-------------------|----------------|
| easyJet  | EZY318 | 09:15 | EDINBURGH         | Airborne 09:17 |
| Loganair | LM210  | 10:45 | GLASGOW INT       | Airborne 10:47 |
| easyJet  | EZY542 | 12:00 | LIVERPOOL         | Gate           |
| Loganair | LM655  | 14:00 | LONDON (HEATHROW) |                |
| easyJet  | EZY902 | 14:45 | BIRMINGHAM        |                |
| RYANAIR  | RK8491 | 14:55 | MANCHESTER        |                |
| Loganair | LM657  | 18:10 | LONDON (HEATHROW) |                |

brings further hub connectivity and opportunity for both business and tourism growth across the Northwest region."

Steve has recently been appointed as President of the Causeway Coast and Glens Chamber of Commerce and noted how he has benefited from the existing strong relationship with the Derry~Londonderry and Letterkenny Chambers and believes this one stronger and united voice across the whole Northwest will help reinforce the regions ambitions and opportunities; "Collaboration is central to the progress of the Airport given our geographical location and focus from both governments to stimulate economic growth and prosperity. Our relationships, particularly with the Chambers of Commerce across the Northwest, has been key to understanding the needs of the region and using their influence to keep that recognition of what an important infrastructural asset City of Derry Airport is."

### ROUTE DEVELOPMENT

With a career in aviation exceeding 30 years and a wealth of experience from leadership roles at British Airways and bmi (British Midland), Brenda Morgan MBE, has been a catalyst in attracting new airlines and tour operators to the Gateway of the Northwest over the last few years.

Brenda Morgan MBE, Head of Business Development at City of Derry Airport, said: "After more than 30 years working across airlines and the wider travel

industry, I was drawn to City of Derry Airport because it's an airport with real purpose. It plays a central role in connecting people, supporting jobs, and helping the Northwest to compete and grow. What I'm most passionate about is unlocking that potential - making it easier for families, students and businesses across Derry~Londonderry, the Causeway Coast, Donegal and the wider region to travel, and making it easier for visitors to discover everything this part of the island has to offer."

She added: "Route development is a long-term process built on evidence and partnership. We start with the data; understanding where our passengers want to fly, the mix of business and leisure demand, and how a route can perform year-round. Then we build a robust case with our stakeholders and take that to airline network teams. The challenge across the industry right now is that aircraft are in short supply and schedules are under constant pressure, so every new route competes with opportunities elsewhere. Operational costs including fuel, crew and maintenance also influence decisions, and of course, geopolitical events can quickly change demand patterns, airspace access and airline strategy.

"Against that backdrop, CoDA's role is to make the Northwest opportunity



crystal clear and to work collaboratively with airline partners to deliver sustainable services. Recent travel trends show people are still prioritising breaks and experiences, and with capacity constrained in many markets, there's a real opportunity for us to keep promoting the Northwest as an easy, great-value short-break destination and a strong base for exploring the wider region.

"Looking ahead, we're focused on protecting and growing our core UK connectivity, while continuing to build demand for key European city and leisure markets that best match our catchment - routes that support inbound tourism, visiting friends and relatives, and the region's growing business base, as investment and growth plans across the Northwest accelerate."

### EXPANSION OF SERVICES

The increased easyJet services to Edinburgh, Liverpool and Birmingham, and a sold out Topflight for Schools Ski Programme to Verona, has brought a flying start to the year at City of Derry Airport, and the trend is set to continue across the summer season with pilgrimages to Lourdes and Medjugorje taking flight, additional services available on Ryanair's Manchester service, and increased passenger loads expected on Loganair's London Heathrow and Glasgow services.

In addition to the launch of the new double daily Dublin service later this year, a new charter service to Lapland will be launching in December for families in the Northwest, outlining the Airport's dedication to fulfilling the travel needs of all corporate and leisure travellers across the region.

Steve Frazer concluded: "Growth at the Gateway of the Northwest represents real promise for future success of the Airport and offers the opportunity to help redefine the economic trajectory of the Northwest."



# STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS

**Chris Gray CDir,**  
**Chief Executive at Grays**

As Gray's Marketing and Comms Specialists has grown, so too has the responsibility that comes with leading it. Growth exposes gaps, it tests judgement and it demands strong governance as much as strong ambition. A number of years ago, I recognised that if the business was evolving, I needed to evolve with it. That decision led me to the Certificate in Company Direction with the Institute of Directors.

I completed the Certificate during an accelerated on-site week when Covid restrictions required us to operate in bubbles. Our cohort spent five intensive days together learning, debating and challenging each other. It created a focused environment with zero distraction. Discussions and tasks during the process were direct, challenging and, at times, deliberately uncomfortable. It forced you to examine not just what you do as a leader, but how and why you do it.

The calibre of the group really elevated the experience. Leaders from significant private, public and third sector organisations brought perspectives shaped by scale, scrutiny and accountability. For me, it quickly became clear that while sectors differ, the fundamentals of good governance do not.

My business operates in a compact, highly networked market where relationships are critical and reputations travel fast. The course sharpened my thinking around the distinction between executive leadership and board responsibility, the importance of inviting genuine challenge (at Gray's and across other boards I have served on) and ensuring my ambition and drive is matched by proper oversight. Completing the four core modules of the Certificate in Company Direction i.e., Role of the Director and the Board, Finance for Non-Finance Directors, Leadership for



Directors and Strategy for Directors, provided a framework that I continue to use daily.

Twelve months later, I returned to undertake the Diploma in Company Direction. The standard was high and the final three-hour examination was rigorous but rewarding and I was pleased to achieve a distinction. Six months later, following a demanding interview process, I became a Chartered Director and was admitted as one of the youngest Fellows of the Institute of Directors in Northern Ireland at the time.

The most valuable aspect of the journey was the discipline of stepping back. In a growing agency, it is easy to become absorbed in momentum and delivery. The courses created space to think more about sustainability, risk and long-term value creation. They sharpened my decision-making and clarified where I add most to those around me.

What I would say is that professional development at this level requires time and focus but the return has been tangible. It has strengthened how we plan at Gray's, how we govern and how I contribute across other board roles. It has enabled me to be more deliberate, more balanced and more effective in providing constructive challenge.

Investing in structured board-level development through the Institute of Directors has been one of the most worthwhile decisions of my career. I can wholeheartedly say that the lessons learned continue to inform how I lead every day.

Are you interested in the Institute of Directors Professional Development qualifications? Contact [heather.white@iod.com](mailto:heather.white@iod.com) or visit [www.iod.com](http://www.iod.com)



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**Option 2**

**Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction**

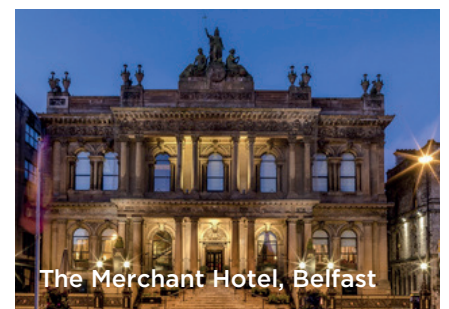
17-22 May  
Culloden Estate

Role of the Director and the Board

Finance for Non-Finance Directors

Leadership for Directors

Strategy for Directors



The Merchant Hotel, Belfast



Culloden Estate



**Stage 2 Diploma in Company Direction**

3-5 November  
The Merchant Hotel, Belfast

# LONDONDERRY CHAMBER

CONNECTING BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY IN THE NORTH WEST



## CHAMBER LIFE

*It has been a powerful period of progress for Derry Chamber, marked by strong leadership, meaningful engagement, and a continued focus on delivering for the North West business community. From strategic policy discussions to innovative skills initiatives and high-profile events, members have remained at the heart of a growing and confident regional economy.*

The Chamber wrapped up 2025 with our Annual General Meeting, which saw Steven Lindsay appointed as the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce's 83rd President. Setting a clear and ambitious tone for his tenure, President Lindsay outlined a focus on delivery — from advancing the expansion of Ulster University's Magee Campus and progressing City Deal projects, to improving connectivity and supporting innovation in AI and renewables.

With a strong emphasis on turning ambition into tangible outcomes, the year ahead was framed around making a real difference for members and the wider region.

In this spirit, early 2026 brought a renewed focus on connection and collaboration. February saw members gather at the Bishop's Gate Hotel for "In Your Space – Go Succeed," a fresh take on networking designed to

build confidence and encourage authentic interaction. With creative facilitation from In Your Space Circus, the session offered a relaxed and engaging environment that demonstrated how meaningful connections can be built in new and innovative ways.

Connection remained front and centre with the 'Chambers Connect' speed networking session, delivered in partnership



with Causeway Chamber. The fast-paced session brought members together for structured, high-energy networking, creating opportunities to build new relationships across the wider business community.

Later that month, attention turned to the practical challenges facing businesses operating across borders. In partnership with CBPES, the Chamber hosted a detailed briefing on cross-border employment, offering expert guidance on tax, compliance, and workforce mobility. The session provided members with valuable clarity on navigating an increasingly complex



landscape, reinforcing the importance of supporting our businesses that are facing real-world challenges.

March saw a series of high-level engagements that placed the North West firmly in the spotlight. At the President's Annual Lunch in the Millennium Forum, attended by over

200 business and civic leaders, the theme of "Driving Regional Delivery for National Impact" captured the growing momentum across the region. Contributions from senior political leaders and industry voices highlighted the North West's increasing importance in shaping the wider economic future.



Throughout March, the Chamber facilitated a series of focused engagements with key decision-makers. Senior business leaders met with Finance Minister John O’Dowd MLA to examine the Draft Budget and its implications for the region. Discussions centred on the need to protect funding for the expansion of Ulster University’s Magee campus towards 10,000 students, alongside the importance of maintaining momentum on City Deal delivery. The Chamber also raised concerns around infrastructure constraints, including delays to the A2 and A5, wastewater capacity, and planning reform, while highlighting the need for coordinated, cross-departmental approaches to safeguard investment and delivery.



The Chamber also convened a strategic roundtable with Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Matthew Patrick MP, hosted by Alchemy Technology Services. This engagement provided an opportunity to showcase the North West’s strengths in talent, innovation, and advanced industries, while outlining the practical steps required

to unlock further investment and support business growth. Discussions emphasised the importance of collaboration between government and industry, with a clear message that the North West is well positioned to play a central role in driving wider economic growth across Northern Ireland.

Further engagement took place with Minister of Justice Naomi Long MLA, where discussions focused on issues impacting both businesses and communities. Key topics included city centre safety, workforce development, and the importance of regional balance, alongside wider societal challenges such as ending violence against women and girls.







International collaboration was another key theme in March, with the Chamber welcoming Mark Owens, Honorary Consul of Ireland in Ohio, for discussions exploring shared opportunities between the North

West and Northeast Ohio. The exchange highlighted strong alignment between the regions, particularly in areas such as advanced manufacturing, innovation, and workforce development, opening the door to future transatlantic partnerships.

April brought a continued focus on innovation and resilience with the launch of the North West AI Masterclass, marking a significant step forward in supporting businesses to adopt new technologies in a practical and accessible way. Delivered in partnership with NI Chamber, Letterkenny Chamber and Causeway Chamber, the programme reflects a

shared commitment to building skills, improving productivity, and ensuring that businesses across the North West are equipped to compete in a rapidly evolving economy.

Members also had the opportunity to strengthen their cyber resilience at a dedicated workshop delivered in partnership with NFU Mutual. With tailored insights and expert advice, the session highlighted the importance of preparedness in an increasingly digital business environment.

Meanwhile, anticipation has been building for the North West Business Awards, with finalists announced in April ahead of what promises to be a celebration of excellence across the region at the awards evening on Friday 5th June. The high standard of entries once again reflects the innovation and ambition that defines our local business community.



Beyond events, Derry Chamber has continued to play an important advocacy role at both regional and national levels. Chamber officials attended a joint appearance with

cross-border economic region spanning Derry, Strabane, and Donegal. Progress already being made through collaboration between business, education, and civic partners

Letterkenny Chamber before an Oireachtas Committee in Leinster House examining the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The session provided an important platform to position the North West not as a peripheral area, but as a crucial and connected


was highlighted in the session, while also addressing ongoing structural challenges, including infrastructure deficits, wastewater capacity, energy provision, and barriers to cross-border mobility. We collectively emphasised that with the right support, the region is well placed to deliver even greater economic impact, underpinned by a growing talent pipeline through Magee expansion and the development of Atlantic Technological University.

Looking ahead, our focus will remain firmly on delivery and impact. By continuing to convene, advocate, and collaborate, Derry Chamber and our valued members are helping to translate regional ambition into concrete action.



# THREE SURVEYS, ONE CLEAR MESSAGE

What members told us across the Member Satisfaction Survey 2025, Business Sentiment Survey 2025 and Skills & Workforce Survey 2026.

 Across all three surveys, members told a consistent story: they value Chamber support, but recruitment, skills and practical capability-building are now pressing priorities.



**80%**  
say Chamber membership has benefited their business



**4.6/5**  
average rating for Chamber staff support



**75%**  
already use AI tools in business operations



**82%**  
cite difficulty recruiting suitably skilled staff

1

## MEMBER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2025



**80%**  
say joining the Chamber has benefited their business



**4.6/5**  
Support from Chamber staff rated 4.6/5



**Top workshop demand:**  
AI, networking, social media and management




Members strongly preferred in-person delivery, with some demand for webinars.

2

## BUSINESS SENTIMENT SURVEY 2025

### TOP CHALLENGES FACING YOUR BUSINESS



 Around 60% were actively recruiting or planning to recruit.



**93%** expect a positive impact from catalyst projects such as City Deal, UU Magee expansion and city centre regeneration



**97%** have or are exploring a sustainability strategy



**80%** use AI in operations

3

## SKILLS & WORKFORCE SURVEY 2026



**69%**  
expect headcount to increase over the next 12 months



**82%**  
cite difficulty recruiting suitably skilled staff



**87%**  
see skills constraints as a moderate or major risk to future growth



**25%**  
turned down work or opportunities because of skills shortages



**94%**  
would consider recruiting or upskilling through an apprenticeship or HLA in the next 2-3 years



**100%**  
would invest more or possibly more in AI if local support existed



**BARRIERS TO AI ADOPTION**



**65%**  
lack of in-house expertise



**65%**  
lack of time to explore



**41%**  
unclear use cases



**24%**  
data protection / compliance



## WHAT THIS MEANS

The message from members is practical rather than abstract: businesses want locally delivered, flexible support that helps them recruit, build skills, use apprenticeships more effectively and adopt AI with confidence.



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# Unit 7

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# THE REAL LIVING WAGE, GOOD FOR EMPLOYEES, GOOD FOR BUSINESS AND GOOD FOR THE ECONOMY

In June 2024, Advice NI launched Living Wage NI in partnership with the Living Wage Foundation and the Department for the Economy NI, supporting the drive to create Good Jobs across Northern Ireland. The real Living Wage is the only UK wage rate independently calculated on the cost of living, ensuring workers earn enough to meet everyday essentials such as food, housing and energy. The current real Living Wage is £13.45 per hour for workers aged 18 and over.



The Living Wage movement began in London in 2001 and has grown into a UK-wide network of over 16,000 accredited employers. While more than 220 employers in Northern Ireland have committed to paying the real Living Wage, uptake remains lower than in Scotland and Wales. Across Northern Ireland, almost one in six jobs is paid below the real Living Wage.

The challenge is even greater locally. In the Derry City and Strabane District Council area, one in five jobs is paid below the real Living Wage. If 50% of these jobs were uplifted, an estimated £3,629,000 would flow into the local economy, boosting household spending and supporting local businesses.

**“ AT FOYLE NETWORK FOUNDATION, WE SEE THE REAL IMPACT OF INADEQUATE INCOMES EVERY DAY. PAYING OUR EMPLOYEES THE REAL LIVING WAGE IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST FAIR COMPENSATION; IT'S ABOUT PRACTICING THE VALUES WE ADVOCATE FOR. WE'RE PROUD TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO JOIN US IN ENSURING DIGNITY AND FINANCIAL STABILITY FOR ALL.”**

**Karen Mullan, Strategic Development Manager at Foyle Network Foundation**

Crucially, paying the real Living Wage is also good for business. Despite a challenging economic climate, 2300 employers across the UK signed up in 2025 alone. Research by Cardiff Business School found that 94% of accredited employers experienced business benefits, including improved reputation, stronger recruitment, higher retention and clearer differentiation within their sector.

To accredit, employers must ensure all directly employed staff are paid at least the real Living Wage and have a plan in place to ensure all indirectly employed staff are also paid the real Living Wage. In the Derry City and Strabane Council area, 17 businesses are leading the way, including One Source Virtual, Hawthorn Heights, Gray's Marketing and Communications, Learning Pool, Enterprise North West, St Columb's Hall Trust and Foyle Network Foundation.

Now is the time for North West businesses to accredit. Becoming a real Living Wage Employer is a practical step that strengthens your workforce, demonstrates leadership on fair pay and supports a stronger local economy.

You can register your interest to accredit here, [www.livingwage.org.uk/accredit](http://www.livingwage.org.uk/accredit) Or contact [livingwageni@adviceni.net](mailto:livingwageni@adviceni.net) for more information.



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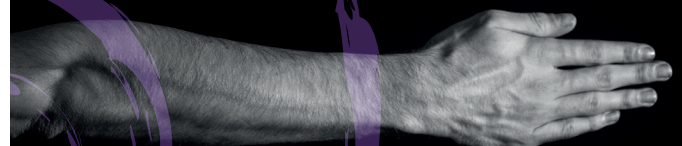
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# EXCELLENCE RECOGNISED - NWRC'S QUEEN'S AWARD HONOUR

Work at North West Regional College, growing skills and driving innovation, has been given the Royal Seal of Approval.

The college's Business Support Team were recently presented with The Queen Elizabeth Prize for Education, the highest national honour awarded to UK colleges and universities.

Awarded every two years, the prize recognises outstanding work at the highest level. Previous recipients include Oxford University, University of Edinburgh and Queen's University Belfast.

His Majesty King Charles presented the award to NWRC's Governing Body Chair Professor Malachy O'Neill, NWRC Principal and Chief Executive Leo Murphy, Finance Director Patrick McKeown, Director of Curriculum and Academic Standards Dr Catherine O'Mullan and Business Support Centre Manager, Dr. Fergal Tuffy at a special ceremony in London. During the event the college's Business Support Centre team was commended for its excellence, innovation and impact, and for delivering real public benefit.

This award is significant recognition for a team who have dedicated their work over the past decade to delivering results for small and medium enterprises and large organisations. This is a team where actions speak louder than words – working strategically while maintaining a strong personal focus with all of their clients. Since its inception in 2015, NWRC's Business Support Centre has grown from one small office to a unique suite of five innovation centres dedicated to supporting businesses to develop skills, foster innovation and drive applied research.

The five industry-focused innovation centres are:

- Food and drink innovation (Foodovation)
- Healthcare and assisted living (Design Innovation for Assisted Living)
- Advanced manufacturing, materials and engineering (Product Design Centre)
- Augmented, virtual and extended reality (XR)



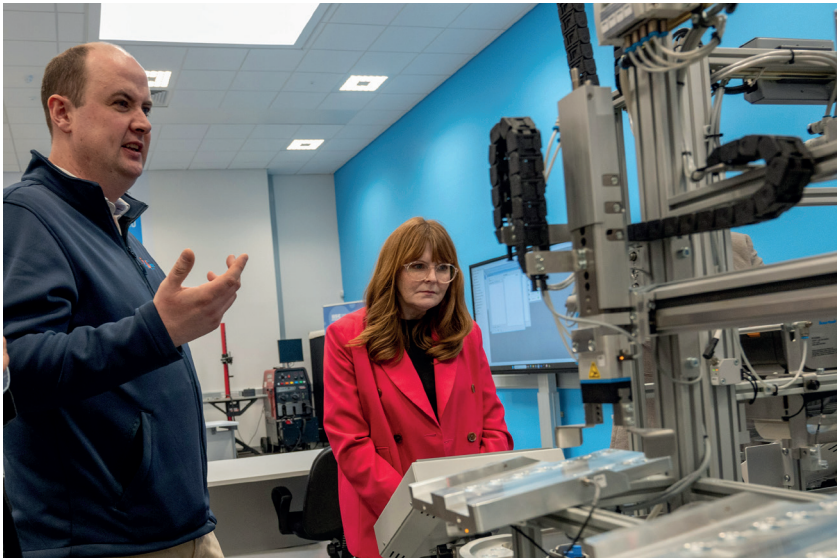
**Chief Executive and Principal of NWRC Leo Murphy, and NWRC Business Support Centre Manager Dr Fergal Tuffy receive the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Education from King Charles and Queen Camilla**

- Automation, robotics and 5G technologies (industry 4.0)

Clients include Braidwater Homes, Brighter Gold and travel car seat company BubbleBum. Dr Fergal Tuffy, Business Support Centre Manager said: "The team is honoured to receive this award, and is recognition of the significant

contribution made by the Business Support Centre in strengthening and supporting the regional economy.

"Our centre is unique within the UK's further education sector. In the past year, the NWRC has completed more than 140 applied research and development projects through these centres, helping SMEs innovate



Economy Minister Dr. Caoimhe Archibald with Cathal Ferry, i4.0 Manager at NWRC



The Business Support centre at NWRC runs a series of networking events throughout the year including Business breakfasts

and grow by developing new products, processes and services. The College has also trained more than 1,000 individuals, including business employees, who received upskilling, and individuals who were trained in priority skills areas for new opportunities.

"I would like to thank all the staff within the Business Support Centre for their hard work and commitment which has led to this success, and to our senior leadership team for supporting our strategic vision.

"It is our plan to continue to move forward, continuing to innovate and evolve and we are planning for the future via Peace Plus, the Derry City & Strabane City Deal and an extension of Foodovation™ with our new Foodovation™ and Skills centre in Limavady through the Causeway Coast and Glens Council's Growth Deal, the Financial Deal contract for this Growth Deal was signed at a ceremony held at the College's Main Street, Limavady campus on 29 April."

Leo Murphy, Principal and Chief Executive of NWRC said: "This award is welcome as it recognises our sector as one that makes a significant collective impact on the lives of our citizens and businesses.



The Innovation and Skills centre managers at NWRC

"Our Business Support Centre staff consistently rise to the challenge, always flexible, adaptable and 100% committed to any task that has been set. Our team consists of a wide range of experts in a range of fields that include food and drink, robotics, augmented reality, healthcare and product design.

"This is a huge honour for North West Regional College, an organisation that has a long history in delivering for businesses across the region through skills development and innovation. I

have spoken with many of the clients of the centres who consistently tell me about the differences our team of experts have made to their businesses by improving productivity, innovation and creativity.

"It is our privilege to work so closely with these enterprises and watch them succeed. My congratulations to our entire team on this hugely significant accolade."

NWRC is part of the 2025 cohort of award winners which saw applications from more than 100 institutions.

## UPCOMING EVENTS



**5**  
June

**NORTH WEST BUSINESS AWARDS**  
White Horse Hotel

**9**  
June

**INTERTRADE IRELAND'S FUNDING  
ADVISORY SERVICE WORKSHOP**  
City Hotel

**11**  
June

**NORTH WEST AI MASTERCLASS**  
Webinar

**15**  
June

**MAXIMISE YOUR MEMBERSHIP**  
Webinar

**17**  
June

**KING'S AWARD INFORMATION  
EVENT**  
Flying Clipper Restaurant, NWRC

**3**  
July

**FORE THE WIN: GOLF DAY**  
Foyle Golf Club

**2**  
Oct

**68TH PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL  
DINNER**  
Everglades Hotel

**18**  
Nov

**NORTH WEST FUTURE OF ENERGY  
CONFERENCE**  
White Horse Hotel



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Access to the Main Day Conference talks, panels and presentations. Access to all networking areas, lunch, snacks and coffee/tea etc.

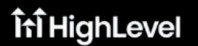


### General Admission

£50.00 + VAT

Access to the Main Day Conference talks, panels, presentations and main foyer networking areas. No breakfast, lunch or access to the VIP area.

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# DOWN MEMORY LANE

**MARK JOHNSTON** JOHNSTON FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS

## WHAT AGE ARE YOU?

56

## WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

Originally from Derry now based in the Faughan Valley.

## CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT YOUR BUSINESS DOES?

Johnston Financial Solutions is a commercial finance brokerage. We support SMEs across Northern Ireland and the wider UK in accessing funding for property, equipment, and working capital. A key part of our role is helping clients structure finance correctly, not simply sourcing lending options.

## WHAT IS YOUR TITLE, AND HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR ROLE?

Director, since establishing the business in 2013.

## WHAT WAS NORTHERN IRELAND LIKE OUTSIDE YOUR WINDOW IN THAT ERA? HOW HAS IT CHANGED?

When I started the business, access to finance was still relatively constrained in the aftermath of the financial crisis, and the funding landscape was far more traditional, with most businesses relying on the high street banks. Since then, the market has evolved significantly. In today's information age, there are far more funding opportunities available, greater flexibility, and access to a much wider range of lenders. We now have more information at our fingertips than ever before, which means we are continually finding new funders and sourcing new opportunities for clients.

## HAS THE ETHOS OF YOUR BUSINESS EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

The foundation has stayed the same, trusted relationships, honest advice, and taking the

time to understand each client's business properly. What has changed is the market around us. With so many more lenders and funding options available today, our role has become helping clients navigate the increasing choice in the market, cut through the noise, and secure the right funding solution with confidence.

## WHAT'S THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU'VE RECEIVED OVER THE YEARS?

Coming from the banking sector, I have always valued good structure and clear processes. In my role as a commercial finance broker and mentor, one of the best pieces of advice I've received is to get the structure right at the outset, it is far easier to build on a solid foundation. That said, the right structure is the one that suits your business at that stage and can adapt as it grows. Equally important is not waiting for everything to be perfect before taking action.

## HAS THE WAY YOU DO BUSINESS IN THE NORTH WEST CHANGED? DO YOU HAVE ANY EXAMPLES OF IMPROVEMENTS?

Yes — businesses are now more open to change and more dynamic, largely as a result of the economic shocks and challenges of recent years. I have also seen a real increase in collaboration, with people more willing to share knowledge, work together, and take pride in what they do. We have strong connections with advisers, accountants, and other professionals, all with the



ultimate aim of providing the best possible service for clients. It is a far more open and progressive business environment.

## WHAT CAN BUSINESSES LEARN FROM THE PAST TO BUILD A STRONG FUTURE?

For me, the biggest lessons are to stay resilient, be prepared to adapt, and always know your numbers. There will always be changes in the market and challenges along the way, but businesses that plan ahead, make informed decisions, and keep moving forward are usually the ones that come through strongest.

# NEW APPOINTMENTS



**FAST**

**1. Clive Wilson**

FAST, one of Northern Ireland’s most innovative end-to-end automation, robotics and software solutions companies has appointed Clive Wilson as its new Managing Director, bringing more than 16 years of senior supply chain leadership experience from Coca-Cola HBC.

Clive has led major automation, robotics and digital transformation programmes across Europe and his appointment marks a significant milestone for the company as it continues to expand its capabilities. Coupled with his understanding of FAST’s products and the markets it serves, Clive is well positioned to drive performance, accelerate strategic execution, and deliver sustainable growth for the business.

Founded in Derry/Londonderry, FAST provides bespoke end-to-end automation, robotics, software and production line integration solutions for

global brands and local manufacturers.

Clive’s appointment represents a strategic step forward as the company strengthens its position as one of Northern Ireland’s leading automation companies.



**HEALTHCARE INSURANCE NI LTD**

**2. Simon Waring**

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**MCCOLGAN’S**

**3. Mark Southgate**

Mark Southgate has been appointed Commercial Director at McColgan’s. With 20 years’ experience in FMCG and Food Manufacturing in Scotland and Northern Ireland, Mark will lead the commercial, NPD and Procurement teams at McColgan’s, driving growth for the successful Strabane based savoury pastry business, across the UK and Ireland.



**MILLENNIUM FORUM**

**4. Aodhan Kehoe**

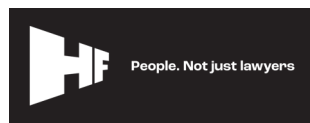
Aodhan works as Digital Marketing and Communications Officer at The Millennium Forum. With over four years working in marketing, Aodhan brings a creative, story-led approach shaped by his work as an actor. He specialises in digital campaigns, content creation and audience engagement and is currently working on 25th anniversary activity celebrating the Millennium Forum’s community impact and legacy.



# WELCOME TO THE CHAMBER

CONNECTED is highlighting some of the Chamber's newest members. Let us introduce you to the wider range of members that the Londonderry Chamber represents across the North West. Will your business be featured in the next edition?

#GrowingBusinessNW



Interested in your business benefiting from all Chamber has to offer?  
For further information on membership contact [natalie@londonderrychamber.co.uk](mailto:natalie@londonderrychamber.co.uk)



### AAB

AAB exists to help clients overcome barriers, achieve their goals and reach their full potential.

We deliver Audit, Accounting, Tax, Payroll, HR and Advisory Solutions globally from our offices in the United Kingdom, Ireland and internationally.



### ST Tax

At ST Tax, we provide expert tax and business advisory services to clients operating on both sides of the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland border. We specialise in helping individuals, landlords, and businesses navigate complex cross-border tax obligations. Our services include VAT compliance and strategic VAT planning, income tax compliance and landlord returns, RCT and CIS compliance, corporation tax compliance, inheritance and capital acquisitions tax planning and tax residency advice. With a practical, client-focused approach, ST Tax delivers clear guidance, proactive planning and reliable compliance support tailored to each client's needs.



### HR Team

HR Team is the trusted provider of employment law advice, human resource management and health and safety compliance services.

Our commercially-focussed approach ensures our clients' organisations can thrive while minimising risk.

We cater for a wide range of sectors in Derry-Londonderry and throughout Northern Ireland, Ireland and the UK, providing expert advice and sector-specific HR solutions.

Our highly experienced HR consultants provide bespoke employment law and health and safety solutions, and tailored human resources packages to ensure our clients maximise performance.

We can operate as your outsourced HR management team or as an extension of your existing in-house HR function.



### AdminAnswers NI Ltd

AdminAnswers NI Ltd is a Business Admin Consultancy providing a comprehensive range of professional support to organisations across the UK and Ireland. Acting as a central hub for administrative services we help businesses manage everything from day-to-day admin and back-office processes to tailored operational solutions. We partner with SMEs and growing businesses to improve efficiency, streamline operations, and freeing valuable time to focus on growth.

Based in Northern Ireland, AdminAnswers NI delivers reliable, flexible, and people-focused solutions across a wide range of sectors.



### Duality Healthcare

Duality Healthcare is a modern healthcare provider delivering fast, accessible and personalised care across N Ireland. With clinics in Newry, Ballymena, Omagh and Derry/L'derry and a new Belfast city-centre clinic opening soon, Duality combines expert clinical teams with innovative digital solutions to offer both in person and virtual care under one seamless model. From GP appointments and diagnostics to specialist services and preventative health screening, we focus on early access, proactive health management and exceptional patient experience—removing barriers to healthcare and delivering high quality, affordable care when patients need it most.



### Air Ambulance NI

Air Ambulance NI delivers advanced, pre-hospital critical care across Northern Ireland, bringing emergency medical expertise directly to patients when every second counts. Our team works in partnership with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to attend the most serious incidents, on average twice every day. We can reach anywhere in Northern Ireland in under 25 minutes and have been tasked over 5,000 times since launching in 2017. This life-saving service costs around £3 million per year to operate.



### HF Northern Ireland LLP

HF Northern Ireland LLP is delighted to announce the opening of its new Derry office, marking the next stage of growth following eight years in Belfast. Advising the insurance and commercial sectors, the firm provides bespoke litigation services across policy coverage, property, motor, employer/public liability, and marine insurance matters.



**Netrio**

Netrio is a global Managed Service Provider (MSP) and Managed Security Service Provider (MSSP) serving mid-market and enterprise clients. It delivers end-to-end IT solutions, including infrastructure management, cybersecurity, cloud services, connectivity, and custom application development. With offices in the US, Northern Ireland, and India, Netrio supports over 1,000 customers and employs around 450 people worldwide. Its mission is to relieve internal IT pressures, enabling businesses to modernise operations, reduce costs, and focus on strategic growth.



**Roe Valley Resort**

Set amidst the scenic surroundings of Roe Valley Country Park and overlooked by the iconic Binevenagh mountain, Roe Valley Resort combines contemporary comfort with warm Northern Irish hospitality, creating the perfect setting for family escapes, golfing getaways and memorable stays in the heart of the North West.

Home to 118 guestrooms and three dog-friendly residences, the resort is centred around its own 18-hole parkland golf course and features a leisure club alongside a choice of welcoming dining experiences and bars, offering guests the opportunity to reconnect and enjoy quality time together.

With breathtaking landscapes, beaches and world-renowned attractions nearby, Roe Valley Resort is perfectly positioned for guests to experience the very best of the Causeway Coast and wider region, making it an ideal base from which to explore one of Northern Ireland's most picturesque settings.



**OK Wellbeing Solutions**

OK Wellbeing Solutions is a Derry-based wellbeing and training consultancy led by Directors Kayleigh Carlin and Orlagh Robson. We deliver trauma-informed, people-centred programmes that support workplace wellbeing, organisational health, and sustainable performance. Through practical tools, expert guidance, and creative approaches, we help organisations strengthen resilience, improve mental wellbeing, and build confident, connected teams. Our work also creates positive community impact by supporting inclusive, healthy environments where individuals, organisations, and communities can thrive.



**Share Energy**

Share Energy is Northern Ireland's fastest-growing electricity supplier – built on fairness, transparency, and community. Since launching in 2024, we've been shaking up the market with an innovative profit-sharing model that gives 50% of our profits back to customers. Add to that our market-leading tariffs and Refer-a-Friend scheme, and you'll see why more people are switching to Share.

We believe customers should feel like partners, not account numbers. We're proud to be a local company that values real connections – with friendly voices at the end of the phone and a commitment to doing right by our community.

Powered by modern technology and grounded in trusted principles, Share Energy is more than just an electricity supplier - it's energy, shared fairly.



**Remedy Chemist Pharmacy Group**

Remedy Chemist Pharmacy Group, owned by pharmacist and entrepreneur Lee Dearn, operates two community pharmacies in Belfast alongside a growing medicines wholesaling and commercial property portfolio. With over twenty years' experience building and scaling regulated businesses, Lee now focuses primarily on strategic leadership and governance rather than day-to-day operations.

Originally from Liverpool, Lee moved to Northern Ireland in 2004 and to Derry in 2022. In 2021, he was shortlisted for a non-executive director role with the Post Office, which reinforced his interest in board-level contribution. He enjoys connecting with fellow business owners and is always happy to engage where he may be able to add value at a strategic level.



**Healthcare Insurance NI Ltd**

Simon Waring: I'm the owner and Managing Director of Healthcare Insurance NI Ltd. We are an Appointed Representative of WPA Healthcare Practice PLC, the UK's most trusted not-for-profit provider of private medical and healthcare insurance. WPA offer ground-breaking business and personal health insurance policies that are helping to revolutionise healthcare with their people first mindset and clear honest advice. I work with businesses, advisors, and introducers to find cover that truly protects what matters most - your health, your family, your peace of mind. If you're looking for a partner who understands both the value and the impact of great health cover - I'd love to help you find the right solution. Contact me for a free consultation or review of your existing cover.



### The Parkfield Collective

The Parkfield Collective is a B2B consultancy specializing in commerce systems, ERP integration, payments, tariffs, and international trade. We help businesses reduce cross-border friction, including Windsor Framework compliance. Headquartered in Sligo, expanding across the northwest corridor, with major commercial and R&D operations opening in Derry~Londonderry. North Carolina roots, Toronto operations, global reach. Born on the Cape Fear, growing on the Foyle side, solving global commerce problems.



### The Aesthetics of Leadership

The Aesthetics of Leadership helps organisations eliminate leadership bottlenecks that stall growth.

We solve problems such as:

- Inconsistent leadership standards
- Cultural misalignment during scale
- Decision fatigue under pressure
- Burnout at senior levels
- Strategy-to-execution gaps

We design leadership operating systems and build the human capacity required for leaders to perform under pressure, aligning culture, clarity and execution so performance becomes sustainable.



### Vodafone

Tasee2 Ltd is the Franchise owner of Vodafone, Richmond Centre.

Vodafone UK is a leading technology communications company, and following its 2025 merger with Three UK, the nations largest mobile operator. Serving over 27 million customers, the company provides a comprehensive suite of digital services ranging from award winning 5G mobile plans/devices and multi award winning Home/Business broadband plans. Driven by the purpose of to "Connect for a better future".

At our heart, Vodafone isn't just a network provider. It's the link between you and the people who matter most.



### Wonderleap

Wonderleap is an innovative EdTech platform founded by Finneen Bradley, designed to address future skills shortages by building early awareness of careers and workforce pathways from primary school age. With over 20 years' experience in careers education and as founder of Finesse Careers and Empowerment C.I.C., Finneen has developed Wonderleap to combine immersive, game-based learning with real-world labour market insight. Built in Derry/Londonderry and scalable globally, Wonderleap connects education with future workforce talent ensuring the next generation is informed, inspired, and prepared to thrive in tomorrow's economy.

## NEW CHAMBER PARTNER



**alchemy**  
Part of NTT DATA

### Alchemy

Derry Chamber are thrilled to announce our newest Corporate Partner, Alchemy Technology Services. This marks another significant milestone in the Chamber's continued growth and influence across the North West business community, and in cementing one of Northern Ireland's leading tech firms as a key business stakeholder for the region both locally and nationally.

This new partnership reflects Derry Chamber's ongoing commitment to strengthening connections between industry leaders and supporting economic development across the region.

Alchemy, a leading software implementation and consultancy firm in the global insurance technology industry, was founded in Derry/Londonderry in 2018 by John Harkin with a mission to create a centre of excellence that would offer world class careers for the talent of the North West.

The organisation's commitment to our region has been clearly illustrated in the past, such as becoming the first tenant of the new Ebrington Plaza building as part of a multi-million pound investment in the North West region. The firm has gone on to further strengthen its position by being acquired by global technology leader NTT DATA, a move which accelerated international growth and established a new Global Centre of Excellence for Guidewire Delivery in our city.



North West  
Business Awards  
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# NORTH WEST BUSINESS AWARDS 2026

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# NORTH WEST BUSINESS AWARDS

## 2026 Finalists



### Creative Industries Business of the Year

In Your Space Circus  
Millennium Forum  
Playhouse Derry

### Creative Marketer of the Year

*Sponsored By: BHP Security Solutions*  
Kular Fashion  
Institute Football Club  
Millennium Forum

### Economic Impact Award

*Sponsored By: City Of Derry Airport*  
Derry Credit Union  
Foyleside Shopping Centre  
The AMP Growth Incubator

### Educational Collaborator Award

*Sponsored By: Loganair*  
Kippie CIC  
Millennium Forum  
Seagate

### Excellence in Retail Award

Cityman Menswear  
Foyleside Shopping Centre  
Nicholl Fuel Oils  
Supervalu Strabane

### Guest Experience Award

The Ebrington Hotel  
Hastings Everglades Hotel  
Maldron Hotel Derry

### Innovation & Technology Award

*Sponsored By: Allstate Northern Ireland*  
Low Digital  
Oculus Ireland  
Share Energy

### Large Business of the Year

*Sponsored By: Davy*  
Derry Credit Union  
Foyleside Shopping Centre  
MPA Recruitment

### Young Business Person of the Year

*Sponsored By: Alchemy*  
Eimear Morrison (Fujitsu)  
Nails By Caitlin  
Sienna Doherty Hair

### Small Business of the Year

*Sponsored By: Bauer Media*  
The AMP Growth Incubator  
CelloFella  
John Street Stores  
Lo & Slo

### Sustainability Champions Award

*Sponsored By: DCSDC*  
Craft Training  
Hastings Everglades Hotel  
Nicholl Fuel Oils

### Restaurant of the Year

*Sponsored By: Dillon Bass*  
El Tapas Grá  
Solo Restaurant & Bar, Eglinton  
Walled City Brewery



# SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTING

The Chamber's sub-committees were established to bring focused business insight to the major issues shaping the future of the North West. Covering infrastructure, investment and skills, each group draws on the experience of members and regional partners to help identify barriers, support delivery and keep priority projects moving.

Their work is closely linked to the Chamber's wider ambition for a more connected, competitive and economically vibrant region. From Magee expansion and City Deal delivery to transport connectivity, student accommodation, AI adoption and workforce development, the sub-committees provide a practical forum for turning long-term ambition into clear actions and informed advocacy.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Connectivity remains one of the Chamber's core priorities for the North West. Following the Chamber's Strategy Day, the infrastructure sub committee has focused its work on a clear aim: ensuring the region has transport, water, energy, digital, and accommodation infrastructure needed to support future economic growth.

The group has brought together business voices and key stakeholders to examine pressures affecting major regional projects including the expansion of Ulster University's Magee campus, City Deal delivery, housing growth, student accommodation and wider transport connectivity.

A central focus has been Magee expansion and the need to ensure the city has the right supporting infrastructure. The sub committee has engaged with the Department for the Economy and the Ulster University

Taskforce Private Sector Sub group to better understand the barriers around student accommodation, planning, transport, and public utilities.

Wastewater capacity remains a major concern for housing, regeneration and business growth. The group has also continued to track progress on wider connectivity issues including the A5, City of Derry Airport, rail, bus services, and the need for stronger North West representation in regional infrastructure discussions.

There have been positive developments too. The approval of the first major purpose-built student accommodation on Strand Road is an important step for the university area, while work on energy transmission, City of Derry Airport funding, and closer collaboration with Derry City & Strabane District Council all provide areas where progress can be built upon.

The sub committee's role is to keep North West infrastructure needs clearly in front of decisionmakers and to help turn long-standing challenges into practical, deliverable asks.

*Infrastructure underpins every aspect of economic growth in the North West. Our focus has been on making sure that as ambition grows, particularly around Magee expansion and housing,*



*the supporting systems are not left behind. From wastewater capacity to transport connectivity and student accommodation, we are working to ensure that the region's long-standing challenges are clearly understood and translated into practical, deliverable solutions for decision-makers.*

## Ronan Duffy,

Chair of Infrastructure Sub Committee

## INVESTMENT

The Chamber's Investment Sub Committee has set an ambitious direction for the North West: helping to position the region as a place where major projects are delivered, businesses can grow and investors can see a clear opportunity.

Following the Chamber's Strategy Day, the group has focused on the practical steps needed to support economic vibrancy across the North West. Key priorities include the expansion of Ulster University's Magee campus, delivery of City Deal projects, support for our Local Economic Partnership, city centre regeneration, and the development of a clearer inward investment proposition for the region.

The sub committee has worked to improve information flow between business, Council and key delivery partners. This has included detailed engagement with Derry City and Strabane District Council on the capital programme, which includes major regeneration, innovation, health, public realm and infrastructure projects. The committee's role is not to duplicate delivery but to ensure business insight is reflected, risks are escalated where appropriate, and members understand where progress is being made.

The group is also considering how the Chamber can support inward investment activity by helping to shape a clearer value proposition for the North West. This means ensuring the region can confidently communicate its strengths, opportunities and growth potential during external visits, trade missions, and investor conversations. Alongside this, the committee is helping to identify the practical asks of government needed to support delivery, from infrastructure and skills to regeneration and business growth.

University expansion remains central to the investment agenda. The committee continues to monitor developments closely and support work that connects Magee's growth with wider opportunities for jobs, skills, accommodation, innovation and city centre activity.

The Investment Sub Committee is helping turn regional ambition into clearer priorities, stronger partnerships and a more confident investment message for the North West.

*The North West has a strong story to tell, but we need to ensure it is backed by delivery and clarity. Our work has centred on strengthening partnerships, improving visibility of key projects, and shaping a more confident investment proposition. By aligning business insight with regional priorities, we can help create the conditions where investment is not only attracted but successfully delivered.*

**Greg McCann,**  
Chair of Investment Sub Committee



## SKILLS

Skills are essential to the North West's economic ambitions. From Magee expansion and City Deal delivery to the AI Growth Zone and future inward investment, the region's ability to grow will depend on whether businesses can access the people, training, and capability they need.

The Chamber's Skills Sub Committee brings together employers, education partners, and regional stakeholders to identify where the biggest skills pressures are emerging and how the Chamber can help turn evidence into action. Its work has focused on understanding employer demand, avoiding duplication across the skills landscape and ensuring that business needs are reflected in the wider regional planning.

Since December, the group has mapped key stakeholders, reviewed policy alignment and examined the workforce requirements linked to major regional projects. Members have discussed shortages in areas including construction, engineering, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and green skills as well as the need for strong links between schools, further education, higher education, and employers.

A key focus has been apprenticeships and Higher Level Apprenticeships, with the committee exploring how clearer employer communication, practical case studies and stronger signposting could support recruitment, retention and long-term workforce planning.

AI and digital adoption have also become a major part of the committee's work. Members have noted that support does exist across the region, but that it can be difficult for businesses to navigate. The Chamber is therefore exploring clearer signposting for members, alongside the forthcoming North West AI Masterclass.

The Skills Sub Committee is helping

strengthen the connections between employers, education providers and regional partners so the North West is better placed to develop the talent base needed for growth, investment and innovation.

*Skills will ultimately determine how far and how fast the North West can grow. Our role has been to connect employers with education and training partners, ensuring that workforce needs are clearly understood and acted upon. From apprenticeships to AI adoption, the focus is on making the skills system more accessible, more aligned, and better equipped to support long-term economic ambition.*



**Julie Pollock**  
Chair of Skills Sub Committee

## CONCLUSION

Taken together, the work of the Infrastructure, Investment and Skills Sub-Committees reflects a clear message: the North West has major opportunities ahead, but delivery will depend on coordination, evidence and sustained engagement with decision-makers.

The Chamber will continue to use these groups to listen to members, convene the right partners, and champion the practical steps needed to support growth across the region. By keeping infrastructure, investment and skills connected, the Chamber can help ensure that the North West is better placed to attract opportunity, support businesses and deliver long-term economic benefit.

# BUSINESS ADVICE

*George Fleming is Chairman of Fleming Agri Products, a business with its routes going back to the 1860's in St. Johnston, Co. Donegal.*

Now a 5th generation company building Farm Machinery for a global market and is based in Newbuildings since 1983.

George Fleming has been involved in the family business for over 53 years and has navigated through many ups and downs in that time.

## WHAT WAS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU WERE GIVEN WHEN STARTED WORKING?

There were quite a number of learning experiences and pieces of wise advice in my early days in business, my father had always told me, **"That if you sell to people with no money, don't be surprised when you don't get paid."** This was advice from a man who trusted everyone and got caught more times than enough. **So, he knew what he was talking about!** Another was **"don't be a busy fool."** In the early 1990's I went on quite a few management courses, on the first, I was assigned a consultant for 5 days and after showing him around the premises and what we did, he got me to record all my phone calls and what they were about for 2 weeks. At that time, we still did steel sales and general engineering alongside the farming products. When we did the analysis of the calls, I was spending 80% of my time on 20% of my business and 1% of our profit. **If you keep doing the same thing, you can't expect a different result!** Within 3 months, I had stopped doing steel sales and general engineering.

## KEY STRATEGIES THAT HAVE SUPPORTED YOUR SUCCESS

You can't be all things to all people, so once we had stopped doing steel and general engineering, we were able to focus on what was profitable business and how we could make our products efficiently and service our customers. We developed a more democratic management system, with teams and team leaders in each department, with weekly information meetings involving sales and production. We surrounded ourselves with people with good attitudes and gave them the



skills and the tools to do the job efficiently. We developed a relationship with the North West Regional College taking on apprentices every year to grow the staff requirement (A relationship that exists to this day). We had a policy of continuous new product and process development to satisfy market demand.

## HOW YOU APPROACH CHALLENGES OR SETBACKS

To move forward I think you always need to examine the past to see the future. My father and grandfather had to deal with the first world war, Spanish Flu, partition of Ireland, 2nd world war, rationing, foot & mouth, a hard border. We did what they did, we have always dealt with business issues and obstacles head on. Although sometimes patience is a virtue and "a wait and see attitude" has merits, but generally when an issue that is going to affect your business on a short or medium to long term, then you need to act sooner rather than later. Over the years, there have been many challenges to our business, such as; the Irish £ breaking from Stg, and then to Euro, dealing with a hard border up to 1993, The Troubles, Foot & Mouth, BSE, Government Legislation, The Pandemic and

most recently, the Ukraine-Russian war and the war in Iran which are affecting raw material availability and costs. There are always answers to the problems, you just have to decide whether it is the business or the market that carry the cost of the solution. One thing is for sure. **"Business will always find a way."**

## ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT

Having a good idea for a business, is not a business plan. Know exact what it is you want to achieve. Know and research your market. Have short- and long-term goals. Make sure you have the right financial planning in place to satisfy your needs. There will be needs and wants for your business, satisfy the needs first, they will be the ones that move you forward. Calculate the cost v benefit of any capital expenditure. Know your customer, have they the ability to pay on time. Invest NI have a great program for business start-ups for advice and possible financial help. Invest NI have many good business management courses, use them. It is lonely running your own business and these courses put you together with like-minded people and you will all help each other.

# THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU HAVE RECEIVED

Over the years, the best piece of business advice I've received is this: "Surround yourself with people who will mention your name in rooms you are not yet in." For me, that has meant intentionally building connections and investing in communities like AwakenHub, where women across the island of Ireland share not just contacts, but hard-won lessons. Often the most valuable advice comes from founders who are just one step ahead of you in securing investment, getting a grant over the line or winning their first client: all practice and no preach, from people who are on the journey with you.

In my role as Chief Operating Officer at AwakenHub and AwakenAngels, I see every day that business development is rarely a straight line, especially for women founders seeking investment and growth. It can be hard to ask for help when things are going in the wrong direction, particularly when it looks like everyone else is getting it right. That is exactly when it matters to know who you can trust. In every business I've worked in, and when I was running my own company, people were far more willing to help than I expected, and if I can, I always try to pay that help back.

## KEY STRATEGIES THAT HAVE SUPPORTED YOUR SUCCESS

Key strategies that have supported my success come down to curiosity and connection. I've always been endlessly curious about business, process, technology and, most of all, what makes people tick. I'm constantly asking myself: why do people really take action, what's happening in their world right now, and how can I get as close as possible to their real problem so I can help them see our solution as a genuine fit rather than a pitch.

The second strategy I'm still actively learning and refining is how to be a better connector. I try to think about networking less as "who can help me?" and more as "who can I connect, and

what favour can I pay forward today?" When you help someone solve a problem, make an introduction or open a door with no immediate expectation in return, you don't just build a contact, you build an ally you can come back to later. That mindset has shaped so many of the opportunities and collaborations I've been part of.

Celebrate every small win, even when it feels like other people are miles ahead. Every sale, every product launch, the new office, the first hire, these aren't just business milestones, they become part of the fabric of your life. When you're growing a business, it never really leaves you; your head and heart are whirring all the time, so you have to make a point of clapping for the wins. It doesn't have to be a LinkedIn post that starts with "I'm delighted to share..." to count as a celebration. More often it's a message on the group chat with your inner circle who gets it or a call to a fellow founder who really understands the struggle. Marking those moments, however small, is what keeps you energised for the next stretch of the journey.

## HOW YOU APPROACH CHALLENGES OR SETBACKS

When it comes to challenges or setbacks, my first step is always to put things in perspective. My personal mantra is: "We're saving PDFs, not lives." It sounds light-hearted, but it helps me strip away the drama, see the situation clearly and remember that almost everything is fixable if we stay calm and curious. From there, I lean heavily on my team, being honest about what's not working and asking for support rather than trying to muscle through it alone.

I'm also learning to get more comfortable with saying, "That was a learning experience I could have done without," taking a deep breath, and then rebuilding. Instead of getting defensive (which is hard), I try to really listen to



feedback, especially from customers and community members, because that's where the real gold is. It isn't always easy when you've poured yourself into something, but ignoring what your customers are telling you is one of the riskiest moves you can make. Treating every setback as data, not a personal failure, is what helps me move forward faster and smarter.

## ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT

Advice I'd give to someone starting out would be to start before you feel ready and surround yourself with the right people. Stay endlessly interested in your customers, their world and what actually makes them take action, get as close to their real problem as you can, and let that shape what you build and how you talk about it. You don't need all the answers at the beginning, but you do need to be willing to keep asking better questions.

I'd also say: don't try to do it alone. Startup founders often feel they're on their own, and there's only so much of team me, myself and I you can cope with before the stress overwhelms you. Build a community of peers who are one or two steps ahead of you and be generous in how you show up for others. Make introductions, share what you've learned, and pay favours forward long before you need anything back. Those relationships will carry you through the inevitable setbacks and help you see opportunities you'd never find on your own. Finally, treat feedback, especially from customers, as fuel rather than a fight. Listening, adjusting quickly and keeping your ego out of the way (something we all have to work with) will move you forward faster than any "perfect" plan on paper.

# THE FINAL WORD

## BUILDING GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY FROM THE NORTH WEST

**Erin McFeely,**  
Director Northern Ireland, Alchemy Technology Services

Over the past decade, Northern Ireland's technology sector has become a serious player in the global digital economy, attracting sustained investment and delivering complex programmes across multiple industries.

A highly skilled workforce, competitive operating environment and strong university links have helped create a cluster that consistently punches above its weight. Crucially, Northern Ireland's unique access to both UK and EU markets continues to make it an attractive base for organisations seeking stability and connectivity in an uncertain global landscape.

The North West region is now firmly establishing itself as a central part of that growth story. Investment is accelerating, the talent pipeline is expanding, and Derry~Londonderry is increasingly attracting companies looking to build delivery capability outside traditional technology centres. For organisations seeking to scale, the North West offers access to a growing skills base alongside the advantages of a smaller, highly collaborative ecosystem.

Alchemy Technology Services has grown alongside this transformation. Founded in 2018 and headquartered in Derry~Londonderry, we specialise in digital transformation for the global insurance industry. As a Guidewire Advantage Partner, we support insurers across Europe and beyond with platform implementations, upgrades, testing and cloud adoption, modernising core systems that sit at the heart of their business.

A defining milestone came last year when Alchemy became part of NTT DATA, a global technology and consulting

organisation headquartered in Japan. Operating in more than 50 countries, NTT DATA brings significant scale and reach, enhancing our ability to deliver complex programmes while reinforcing the role of Derry~Londonderry within a global technology ecosystem.

Since the acquisition, NTT DATA has established our Derry~Londonderry headquarters as a Global Centre of Excellence, using the 'Alchemy Way' to inform delivery internationally. Our North West team is now supporting and mentoring colleagues across the globe, embedding consistent quality standards.

NTT DATA's investment and endorsement of our people and our approach reflects the growing confidence in the region's talent base and its ability to deliver at scale.

Putting people first sits at the heart of our strategy. Alchemy's unique Talent Engine focuses on personal as well as professional growth, developing people as individuals, building confidence, self-awareness, and collaborative ways of working.

We recruit high-potential graduates, invest heavily in training, and place them into live client projects early in their careers. Through structured development, mentoring and industry certification, we are building a pipeline of specialists in insurance technology while creating meaningful, long-term career opportunities in the North West.

We aim to create a supportive, collaborative environment where people



can thrive because they feel valued and are encouraged to grow. Our people are committed not only to delivering excellence for our clients, but also to making a lasting contribution to the region. That is what we describe as the Alchemy Way.

This people-first approach benefits both the business and the wider economy. It enables the delivery of complex programmes for global clients while ensuring talented individuals can build international careers without leaving the region. As the sector continues to mature, sustained investment in talent will be critical to long-term growth.

The North West has the skills, ambition and infrastructure to compete on a global stage. Its role in shaping Northern Ireland's technology success story is already significant, and it is only set to grow.

# SEAGATE TECHNOLOGY AT THE FOREFRONT OF GLOBAL DATA STORAGE INNOVATION

Seagate's NI facility is at the heart of one of the advanced data storage technologies in the world, demonstrating the strength of the region's advanced research and manufacturing capabilities.

In March 2026, Seagate announced its next-generation Mozaic™ 4+ platform - the industry's only heat-assisted magnetic recording (HAMR) based storage platform deployed at scale and is now qualified and in production. This represents a major step forward in storage technology, delivering greater capacity and efficiency while supporting the infrastructure required for an increasingly data-driven world.

The platform includes integrated photonics, and these next generation drives rely on advanced recording heads enabled by Seagate's custom-designed laser technology. This capability reflects years of investment, particularly in nanophotonic research, engineering, and manufacturing. It also highlights the ability of the skilled workforce to deliver highly complex, precision technologies that meet global demand.

Bringing this innovation from concept to high-volume production, required close collaboration across international teams, with a critical foundation in Derry~Londonderry. Local engineering, manufacturing and operation teams played a central role in solving the complex challenges required to scale such an advanced technology.

Debra McNeill, Senior Engineering Director at Seagate's NI site, leads the process team responsible for developing and manufacturing the laser component central to this technology. She emphasised the importance of local expertise and teamwork.

"Meeting performance and reliability requirements to proceed with product qualification was a team achievement," said McNeill. "Meeting those standards was essential to moving Mozaic 4+ into production at scale. Getting there required solving complex manufacturing and integration challenges across the factory environment - work that demanded deep expertise and disciplined execution. I am proud of the Seagate team for delivering on these milestones."

Seagate's presence in Derry~Londonderry dates back to 1993, and for more than three decades the company has become a cornerstone of Northern Ireland's technology sector.

Fergus O'Donnell, Vice President, Wafer Operations NI, highlighted the wider regional impact: "Seagate Technology's success in the region is more than a technical milestone; this is proof of what local talent can deliver on a global stage. We have built a world-class hub for innovation, advanced research, manufacturing, and technology right here in the city.

This latest development demonstrates how local talent, long-term investment, and international collaboration can combine to deliver technologies that power the modern world."

Today, Mozaic 4+ is a tangible result of sustained innovation, cross-functional collaboration, and the persistence of local and global teams who have transformed one of the most complex storage technologies into production reality.

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