

Somerset Voice

The Official Magazine of
Somerset Chamber of Commerce

**December 2023
/ January 2024**



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 **Somerset
Chamber of
Commerce**
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Axbridge Chamber of Commerce

T: 01934 733078 | E: mike.sartain@hale-events.ltd.uk
axbridgechamber.co.uk

Bridgwater Chamber of Commerce

T: 01278 228004 | E: info@bridgwaterchamber.org.uk
bridgwaterchamber.org.uk

Brunton Chamber of Commerce

T: 01749 813291 | E: bruntonchamber@gmail.com
bruntonchamber.org

Burnham-on-Sea Chamber of Trade & Commerce

T: 01278 238959 | E: deryk@kds-interiors.co.uk
burnhamonseachamber.org

Business Exmoor

T: 01643 851895 | E: admin@businessexmoor.co.uk
businessexmoor.co.uk

Cheddar Chamber of Commerce & Industry

T: 01934 741792 | E: beccycheddarchamber@gmail.com

Frome Chamber of Commerce

T: 01749 342255 | E: president@fromechamber.com
fromechamber.com

Glastonbury Chamber of Commerce

T: 01458 835678 | E: office@glastonburychamber.co.uk
glastonburychamber.co.uk

Ilminster Chamber of Commerce

T: 01460 52506 | E: enquiries@ilminsterhomehardware.co.uk
ilminsterchamber.org.uk

Shepton Mallet & District Chamber

T: 01749 681413 | E: sheptonchamber@gmail.com
shepton.biz

Street Chamber of Commerce

T: 07552 170725 | E: secretary@streetchamber.co.uk

Taunton Chamber of Commerce

T: 01823 230898 | E: office@taunton-chamber.co.uk
taunton-chamber.co.uk

Watchet Chamber of Trade

T: 07836 239 932
visit-watchet.co.uk

Wells Chamber of Commerce

T: 01749 685236 | E: info@wellschamberofcommerce.co.uk
wellschamberofcommerce.co.uk

Weston-super-Mare Chamber

T: 07850 363249 | E: President@westonchamber.org.uk
westonchamber.org.uk

Wincanton Chamber of Commerce

T: 01963 34327 | E: chair@wincantonchamber.co.uk
wincantonchamber.co.uk

Wiveliscombe & 10 Parish Business Group

T: 01984 684777 | E: secinfo@10pbg.co.uk
10pbg.co.uk

Yeovil Chamber of Commerce

T: 01935 804999 | E: secretary@yeovilchamber.org
yeovilchamber.org

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Front page: Yeovil College has a long-standing partnership, training the future workforce for the town's Leonardo Helicopters. Full story on pages 12-16. Photo: Yeovil College

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Somerset Chamber of Commerce
Equity House
Blackbrook Park Avenue
Blackbrook Business Park
Taunton, Somerset TA1 2PX

Editorial and advertising:

E: marketing@somerset-chamber.co.uk
T: 01823 444924
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MANUFACTURING,
ENGINEERING AND
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SDS Limited
Unit 3-4 Suprema Industrial Estate,
Edington, Somerset TA7 9LF

T: 01278 723784 F: 01278 723785
E: info@sds ltd.uk www.sds ltd.uk







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FIRST WORD

Business investment is the lifeblood of local economies, creating jobs and supporting public services. In his long-awaited Autumn Statement, the Chancellor took a step in the right direction, by announcing tax breaks, work incentives and investment opportunities for businesses.

The Chamber network has long called on the Government to offer solutions to the many obstacles which have prevented businesses from investing.

But while the Autumn Statement provided some welcome remedies at a time when businesses of all sizes needed certainty and security for the difficult months ahead, nothing should be taken for granted.

We must all continue to focus on encouraging companies to grow; investment is key to getting Britain's economy on a firmer footing and out of the doldrums.

Smaller firms will be relieved to see a package of measures that alleviate the cashflow problems they face, such as continued business rates relief for hospitality, retail and leisure and new rules to help them get paid on time.

Businesses will also take comfort in data showing inflation had fallen sharply to 4.6% in October, its lowest rate in two years. While still high and dampening consumer-driven spending, it shows the economy is, hopefully, heading in the right direction.

On a lighter note, I would like to personally thank all the businesses, charities and organisations which took the time and effort to submit entries to the Somerset Business Awards 2024. We really do appreciate your hard work and I know the judges and sponsors are looking forward to meeting all those who are lucky enough to be shortlisted!

May I also take this opportunity to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year – see you in 2024!

Emma Rawlings

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS

Contact us to find out what benefits Somerset Chamber Business Partners receive.

T: 01823 444924 E: membership@somerset-chamber.co.uk



Get in touch

Membership

Jenn Chidley-Sanders

Membership Manager

T: 01823 444924 | M: 07872 063039
E: jenn.c.sanders@somerset-chamber.co.uk

Natalie Hodgson

Membership Officer

T: 01823 444924 | M: 07749 493145
E: natalie.hodgson@somerset-chamber.co.uk

Robert Dakin

Membership Development Officer

T: 01823 444924 | M: 07512 317391
E: robert.dakin@somerset-chamber.co.uk

Events

Sallie Barnes

Events Manager

T: 01823 444924 | M: 07706 360398
E: sallie.barnes@somerset-chamber.co.uk

Emma Rudkin

Senior Events Officer

T: 01823 444924 | M: 07821 950379
E: emma.rudkin@somerset-chamber.co.uk

Communications and PR

Annelise Cowie

PR and Communications Executive

T: 01823 444924 | M: 07702 537630
E: annelise.cowie@somerset-chamber.co.uk

Hinkley Supply Chain

Scott Jenkins

Project Manager

T: 01823 444924 | M: 07519 116916
E: scott.jenkins@hinkleysupplychain.co.uk

Oliver Morgan

Data Analyst

T: 01823 443425 | M: 07525 809274
E: oliver.morgan@hinkleysupplychain.co.uk

Glastonbury Town Deal

Dayna Bee

Project Officer

T: 01823 444924 | M: 07512 311573
E: dayna.bee@somerset-chamber.co.uk

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QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q4 2023

Investment flatlining as interest rate concerns grow. The BCC's Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) for Q3 2023 – the UK's largest independent survey of business sentiment, made up of 91% SMEs and a leading indicator of UK GDP growth – shows that while firms expecting to raise prices in has fallen for the fifth consecutive quarter, almost half are now concerned about interest rates.

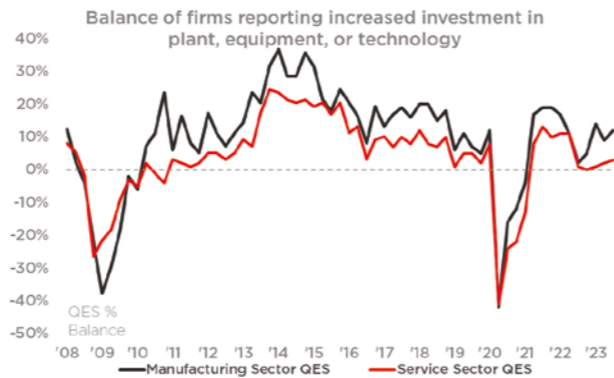
<p>Most firms see no improvement to sales, cash flow, or investment</p>	<p>Fewer firms expect their prices to rise as inflationary pressures ease</p>	<p>The proportion of firms concerned about interest rates rises to 45%</p>
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AT A GLANCE

Investment

Overall, 23% of respondents reported an increase to plant/equipment investment in the past three months, while 59% reported no change, and 18% reported a decrease.

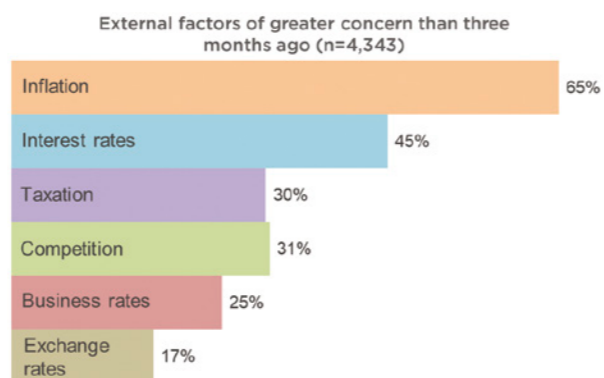
As measured as a percentage balance, the manufacturing sector stands at +12% (up from +9% in Q2) while the service sector stands at +3%.



External factors

Inflation remains the top external factor of concern for the majority of respondents (65%), though this has declined from the peak of 84% in Q3 2022.

Interest rates are now a concern for 45% of respondents, up from 41% last quarter. Hospitality firms are the most likely to cite both inflation (74%) and interest rates (52%) as a concern.



QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q4 2023

Concerns about inflation remain the main concern for Somerset businesses, but those concerns appear to be levelling off, with 67% citing it as their main worry, compared to 85% in the previous quarter. Interest rates, however, are starting to replace inflation as a cause for concern, with 59% citing it as a business worry.

Labour costs remain the biggest pressure on companies to raise prices, with 80% saying rising wages were having an impact, compared to a third who cited increased raw material costs.

Almost half of businesses expected their prices to remain the same in the coming three months, with 42% saying they could go up. Business confidence remains rocky but has shown an improvement on the previous quarter when almost a third believed turnover would worsen in the next 12 months. That figure has now dropped to just over a quarter, with 28% expecting it to remain the same and almost 47% believing it will improve.

- 59%** cite inflation as their biggest concern
- 42%** of businesses expect to increase costs in the next quarter
- 47%** of firms believe turnover will improve in the next 12 months

Albert Goodman supports Taunton East Development Trust

Regional chartered accountancy firm Albert Goodman is supporting local charity organisation Taunton East Development Trust (TEDT) with a financial and non-financial support agreement over the next three years.

Parts of Taunton are in the fifth most deprived areas of the UK, so Albert Goodman has committed to helping the charity which is engaged in the improvement of community life within The Halcon, Lane, Lambrook and nearby areas of East Taunton.

The community covers in the region of 6,500 residents where some of the key challenges include extreme poverty, isolation, poor mental and physical health, drug dependency and multi-generational unemployment.

As part of the agreement, volunteers and residents will have access to the following opportunities:

- Annual donation of £5k per annum to support the stocking costs of TEDT's community shop
- Access to Albert Goodman's employee volunteering scheme to support delivery of TEDT's daily activities
- Mentoring services to TEDT's Community Shop, but also to residents who are considering setting up a micro business within the Halcon community
- Employability skills workshops

- Training on bookkeeping and financial management to TEDT staff, volunteers and residents

Sophie Parkhouse, Partner at Albert Goodman, said: "Supporting the local community through the sharing of invaluable financial skills, training and knowledge is really important to us, so we are thrilled to provide this to TEDT.

"Equipping people with the right skills to enable entry to the workplace or the setting up of their own business one day is a really exciting prospect, and we can't wait to play our part."

Paul Hughes, Chairman of Trustees at Taunton East Development Trust, said: "The support of key stakeholders like Albert Goodman is an integral part of the charity's strategy, giving TEDT and the residents we support access to financial and non-financial expertise.

"Albert Goodman has the power and resources to support a charity like TEDT and we couldn't be more delighted to partner with them as they put their skills to practical use, finding a route to success for so many individuals that will help them turn their lives around."

ALBERT
GOODMAN

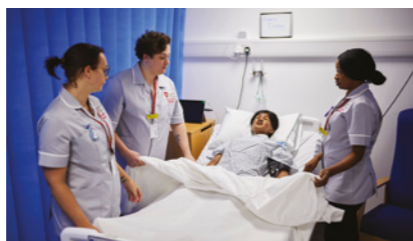


Bridgwater & Taunton College honoured with Prestigious Queen's Anniversary Prize for Education

Bridgwater & Taunton College (BTC) is proud to have been awarded a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Education, a distinguished award recognising the college's unparalleled commitment to addressing the critical workforce challenges faced by the NHS in Somerset.

BTC, in an extraordinary initiative, has become the pioneering force behind addressing the shortage of qualified nurses in Somerset. Over a period of ten years, BTC has been steadfastly forging partnerships, advocating for change, and innovating solutions that have transformed healthcare education and career opportunities in the region.

In a nationwide first, BTC gained consent from both the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) and its university partner, University of the West of England, to deliver nursing degrees locally. This has positioned the College as the first FE institution to join



the Council of Deans of Health, lending a voice in shaping health policy and education on a national scale.

"By delivering nursing degrees right here in Somerset through our University Centre, University Centre Somerset, we've not only expanded career horizons for our community but also made a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents," said Andy Berry, Principal and CEO, BTC. "This initiative demonstrates our dedication to meeting local workforce demands and retaining local talent."

The importance of this initiative

is underscored by the daunting challenges faced by the healthcare sector. Projections reveal a looming gap of 140,600 nurses by 2031 in England, coupled with a decline in nursing graduates by 2025. With an ageing population and the ripple effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for qualified healthcare professionals is paramount.

The Queen's Anniversary Prize, run by the Royal Anniversary Trust, honours institutions that showcase excellence, innovation, and significant public benefit in the sphere of UK education. BTC's recognition is a testament to its pivotal role in steering healthcare education and workforce solutions in the right direction.

More information about studying nursing at Bridgwater & Taunton College or University Centre Somerset is available at www.btc.ac.uk or www.somerset.ac.uk.

BRIDGWATER
& TAUNTON
COLLEGE

Somerset based WPA wins Best Group Health Insurance Provider at national awards

WPA was delighted to win best Group Health Insurance Provider at the UK Health and Protection Awards 2023, which were held at the Hilton, Park Lane, in London.

WPA's health insurance and wellbeing products were also recognised for their customer centric focus and innovation, standing out from the competition that included BUPA, Aviva and Axa.

WPA has a range of comprehensive healthcare solutions and advanced services to support employee health and wellbeing ranging from:

- Precision Corporate Healthcare for SMEs wanting a dynamic solution, supplemented by the market leading Group Deductible to help companies reduce costs with no additional risk
- WPA Protocol Corporate Healthcare Trust for larger companies who wish to 'self-insure' and achieve unsurpassed flexibility. In comparison to the equivalent insured arrangements, customers can reduce costs by in the region of 10% through an HMRC approved funding vehicle

WPA's corporate products are backed up, and supplemented, by excellent customer service excellence credentials, including being the Which? Recommended Private Medical Insurer and consistently market leading Trustpilot scores.

Specialist in-house clinical teams providing dedicated and personal claims management to support customers with complex clinical needs, while a freedom to choose ethos means customers can choose when, where and who provides their



▲ Pictured, from left, are Charlie MacEwan, Jess Devlin, Kathryn Vellacott, Jenna Bishop and Liam McClelland at the awards.



treatment – something which others in the UK health insurance market constrain.

Russell Kane, the host on the night, announced WPA as truly customer centric with huge innovation in claims handling.

Kathryn Vellacott, WPA's General Manager of Business Development, said: "Employee Health is so important to corporate healthcare. Companies are recognising that healthy employees are so much more productive, partly explaining WPA's 17% growth over the last 12 months.

"Winning the Group Health Insurance Provider of the Year is not just recognition of the WPA way of standing out from the market. It's also recognition of every single member of the team to exceed every single customer's expectation."

Bridgwater Town Deal event goes down a storm

Around 200 people braved the wind and rain of Storm Babet to attend a Bridgwater Town Deal information event at the town hall theatre.

Organised by Somerset Council, the event provided an opportunity for local residents and businesses to find out about the projects, opportunities and benefits that the £23.2million Town Deal investment will bring for Bridgwater.

All 11 town deal projects were represented, sharing details about their plans, answering any questions about them, and gathering feedback from the local community.

Paul Moore, Chairman of the Bridgwater Town Deal Board, said: "It's really exciting to finally see all of the projects 'out of the box'. We've been dealing with and focusing on the minutiae of these plans for such a long time now, so to see the people behind the projects, the photographs, the banners – to see it all unpacked –

is even more exciting than I thought it was going to be!"

Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council, said: "The attendance at this event has been phenomenal, with so many people coming in wanting to find out more and have positive conversations about the projects. It's also been great to see all of the partners coming together, networking and supporting each other, because these are projects that have to be delivered in partnership, they can't be done in isolation.

"Getting everyone together in a room to showcase what we're doing and find ways that we can do it even better, that's what is going to make the outcome of the Bridgwater Town Deal even more exciting than it is already."

Bridgwater was chosen as one of 101 towns that would receive investment through the government's Towns Fund scheme as part of its Levelling Up programme. The £23.2million



▲ Pictured, from left, are Cllr Bill Revans, Paul Moore and Cllr Ros Wyke.

government funding aims to 'level up' the area and create a vibrant and welcoming town centre.

This will be achieved by revitalising the social, cultural and economic offerings in town centre, as well as unlocking future growth by resolving traffic congestion and protecting the area from tidal flooding.

For more information about the Bridgwater Town Deal, visit www.bridgwatertowndeal.co.uk.

Further expansion in Clarke Willmott's Taunton real estate team

Law firm Clarke Willmott LLP has recruited another senior lawyer to its Taunton real estate team - cementing its position as the largest commercial property practice in the area.

Andrea Livingstone, an experienced commercial property solicitor, has joined the firm as a partner from DAC Beachcroft. Andrea specialises in advising corporate and retail occupiers, as well as handling acquisitions and disposals for investors and developers.

Her arrival takes the number of senior property lawyers at Clarke Willmott in Taunton to 20, with seven senior partners including:

- Peter Swinburn, CEO of Clarke Willmott, who specialises in development, investment, retail and property finance
- Caroline Waller, who specialises in all aspects of planning law including advice on delivery of complex mixed-use and housing-led developments and negotiation and preparation of planning and highways agreements



▲ Pictured, from left, are Andrea Livingstone, Sarah Manley, Robert Hill and Caroline Mortimer.

- Sarah Manley, who acts for a wide range of investors, portfolio managers and lenders in the full life cycle of their holdings, from acquisition through management and financing to disposals
- Adam Burrage, who acts for housebuilders in residential and mixed-use development transactions, as well as advising landowners, promoters and corporate occupiers on various property transactions
- Caroline Mortimer, who acts for housebuilders in all aspects of residential development as well as landowners in disposal of land

for residential and mixed-use development

- Robert Hill, who advises landowners and developers on promotion and option agreements, and corporate occupiers and investors on acquisitions, development and disposals
- Amanda French, who acts for multi-national retail businesses in portfolio management and store development programmes and is also head of the retail and leisure sector at Clarke Willmott

"With a client base including several retail chains, an extensive mix of housebuilders (including national, regional and SME residential developers) and a wide range of commercial property developers, investors and managers, our commercial property practice was one of nine disciplines across our Taunton and Bristol offices to be listed in the Top Tier in the 2024 Legal 500 rankings," said Peter Swinburn.

For more information about Clarke Willmott visit www.clarkewillmott.com.

University Centre Weston earns coveted gold rating in the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework

University Centre Weston (UCW) is among the best places to study at university level in the UK, according to the results of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) published this month.

The TEF panel considered the overall rating for UCW to be Gold, placing it among the country's best university and college higher education providers. This recognition by the TEF panel reflects UCW's unwavering dedication to providing outstanding education to a diverse student body and places it within the top 20% in the UK and one of only four colleges nationally to achieve the status.

TEF is a national scheme run by the Office for Students (OfS) that aims to encourage higher education providers to improve and deliver excellence in the areas that students care about the most: teaching, learning and achieving positive outcomes from their studies.

The TEF does this by assessing and rating universities and colleges for excellence above a set of minimum requirements for quality and standards.

Providers that take part in the TEF receive an overall rating as well as two underpinning ratings - one for the student experience and one for student outcomes.

The ratings reflect the extent to which a provider delivers an excellent experience and outcomes for its mix of undergraduate students and across the range of its undergraduate courses and subjects.

Jacqui Ford, Interim Principal and Chief Executive of the Weston College Group, said: "This achievement represents a significant milestone for our region, confirming the excellence of our institution for higher education.



"Furthermore, it underscores the Weston College Group's positive impact on learners both locally and nationally. Attaining Gold status also validates UCW's approach of seamlessly blending high-quality academic learning with practical, career-oriented education, providing our students and university partners with confidence in our offerings."

UCW's Vice Principal for Higher Education, Sadie Skellon, added: "The TEF panel has recognised the efforts of the talented and dedicated students and staff that we have at UCW and across the Weston College Group, and the value of the outstanding support we provide."

New images capture A303 Sparkford scheme taking shape

Striking new images released by National Highways give a bird's eye view of the new Sparkford to Ilchester upgrade starting to emerge in Somerset.

Two years on since work started, the progress being made on the scheme between Sparkford and Ilchester, which will tackle congestion, improve safety and help support increased economic prosperity in the Somerset and the South West, is clear in these new aerial pictures.

The project has already hit several milestones throughout the build and will involve finishing off the new road and linking it in with the existing A303 as it nears completion next year.

Some key achievements over the last two years include:

- Creating five new attenuation ponds to help with drainage on the scheme
- Installing the Steart Hill and Hazlegrove bridge decks - weighing a combined 1,673 tonnes - the same as 137 double decker buses
- Laying 12.5km/over 7.5 miles of drainage piping to date
- Installing the Hazlegrove underpass, designed to connect the communities of Camel Hill with Sparkford and Queen Camel
- Installing more than 300 bird, bat, dormouse and owl boxes, to support wildlife relocation during the construction phase
- Completing 10 archaeological digs

As part of National Highways' commitment to the local area, the Government-owned company has also invested more than £21,000 in community projects through its social value fund, helping to leave a lasting legacy for the community.

Siân Hopkins, Senior Project Manager for National Highways, said: "The A303



is a vital scheme for the South West and we have pushed ahead on this much-needed scheme, competing work so far with minimal disruption to the travelling public and local residents.

"We're also extremely proud of the work we have done in the community, committing thousands to projects that will help leave a positive legacy in the area.

"The upgrade will mean smoother, safer and more reliable journeys for drivers and we will build on the progress already made to deliver this new stretch of road as soon as we can."

Although initially due to open in March 2024, that will now be moving to Winter 2024/2025 due to delays caused by bad weather and the discovery of protected species on site.

To finish the scheme over the next year, National Highways will:

- Complete the six crossovers to tie in the new road to the existing A303
- Finish the Steart Hill bridge and Hazlegrove underpass
- Connect the local road network to the new road



Once complete, the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester upgrade will provide a high-quality three-mile dual carriageway link on the A303 in Somerset, including new and replacement slip roads, junctions and road bridges to replace existing junctions and direct access roads.

The new dualled section will start east of Podimore Roundabout, follow the alignment of the existing A303 to Downhead, and then move north of the existing A303 single carriageway, allowing the existing road to be kept for use as a local road in this section.

The route will rise up West Camel Hill before crossing over the existing A303 at the junction with Steart Hill/Howell Hill and meet up with the existing road again between Vale Farm and the Ministry of Defence signal station at Eyewell/Traits Land.

The final section of the route bypasses the existing Hazlegrove Roundabout to the north through the Registered Park and Garden associated with Hazlegrove House, before tying into the existing A303 Sparkford Bypass.





Skills and training

There has never been a more important time for businesses to ensure their staff have the right skills for the task at-hand in today's challenging economic climate. Making sure employees are properly trained not only boosts business productivity, but it also improves staff morale and shows that as an employer, you value your workforce and are prepared to invest in them. Here, Chamber members explain what they have done or what they can do to upskill Somerset's workers.

Wright Way Training

As a former Care Manager, I know only too well the difficulties faced by employers when it comes to staff retention, writes Hannah Sherfield-Wright, Training Consultant.

One of the simplest ways to keep staff, is by investing in them through supporting them to upskill. However, with a saturated sector, how do you find the right training provider? We all will have experienced 'death by PowerPoint' training sessions where staff switch off and disengage.

As a qualified teacher and trainer, here are my top training tips!

- Training should be inspiring. Staff should feel empowered by what they have learnt and want to apply their new skills and knowledge to their role
- Training should be engaging. Everyone learns differently, a good trainer will embed a range of

activities that meet the different learning styles. So, staff who are visual will benefit from observing a practical demonstration whilst those who learn from 'doing' will gain from hands-on experience

- Training should be relatable. If the trainer has vocational or lived experience of the topic they are delivering, they will capture their audience's attention, support reflective practice and share stories staff will relate to

My key message has to be that learning does not have to be boring! Fun training sessions result in staff remembering what they learnt and avoids the perception of training being a tick-box exercise.

Offering training opportunities to staff allows them to develop personally and professionally making them feel valued, appreciated and invested in, resulting in them being more inclined to stay with the corporation.



Teapot Creative

Making sure our clients get the best out of their new websites is something we are keen to ensure here at Teapot.

That is why when we have designed and built a new website, we deliver training to our clients on how it works. That way they know exactly what their website can do for them, and how they can get the most impact from it to help their business thrive.

To date we have trained more than 400 clients how to optimise, develop and cross-market their sites, and we are also able to offer our clients top-level training workshops in Mailchimp, GA4, digital marketing and SEO so when we have done our job, they can continue to get the best results long after the website is built.

To offer the best service we can, we invest in our staff with regular training, conferences and networking opportunities across the county and further afield.

Our team is full of creative and tech talent, and we get the best from everyone by working with their strengths, building on their knowledge and keeping them inspired with varied projects that appeal directly to them.

Our team is motivated to design and develop the very best websites and deliver top notch digital marketing thanks to this in-house support.

Our customers benefit from us constantly upskilling our staff as in-turn, we can teach them what we know best!

For more information see our website www.teapot.agency.



Bridgwater & Taunton College

In the heart of Somerset's economy, Bridgwater & Taunton College (BTC) is a beacon of innovation and support for local businesses. As the county strides toward an era of growth and development, BTC is dedicated to providing the essential training and skills that employers need to stay competitive.

At BTC, we understand the power of education to transform businesses and lives. Our diverse range of courses have been developed with the needs of the Somerset business community in mind.



Our commitment to state-of-the-art training is evident in the modern facilities at our campuses, designed to simulate actual work environments and equipped with the latest technology. This hands-on approach to learning prepares our students to meet industry standards and required industry behaviours to exceed expectations, from the construction site to the digital realm.

BTC's active engagement in landmark projects like Hinkley Point C shows our adaptability and foresight in education through skills development. Our work has also been recognised for fostering local nursing talent, enabling students to advance their careers without relocating. These initiatives not only prepare our students for the current job market but also anticipate the skills needed for future industries.

For Somerset employers, BTC offers a partnership that goes beyond training. We are a resource and an ally, ready to help businesses grow by equipping them with a workforce that is skilled, ready, and capable.

As Somerset evolves, let us help you find the right training solutions to empower your workforce and drive your business forward. Speak to our team today: business@btc.ac.uk or 01278 655111.

Diversity Voice

Suzanne worked in the travel industry for 22 years, working in a diverse environment supporting customers globally. With a passion for helping people and a desire to transform lives of those in need she found Diversity Voice.

Investing in her skills was essential, Diversity Voice provided the opportunity to complete a Level 1 Digital Skills course in August 2022 which has given her the up to date IT skills required to be part of many incredible projects.

Suzanne is now upskilled to do essential office administration and be the Welcome Hub receptionist. The Welcome Hub project is funded by Somerset Council and allows

displaced people to access help and support. The hubs have a range of activities and events each week, and Suzanne has been a key part of their success.

With her new found admin skills, Suzanne now assists with bookings for ESOL English Lessons, interpreting, translations and resourcing. Another passion of Suzannes is gardening, working in conjunction with Social Circles she manages a garden at the Victoria Park Community Centre in Bridgwater.

The upskilling Suzanne has been able to do is a huge achievement and she feels proud to have come so far in such a short time. Looking to the future Suzanne hopes to progress further and gain more skills to utilise in the workplace.



She is eternally grateful for the prospects her new skills and learning have given her and looks forward to supporting a range of communities over the coming years.



GTE Training Academy

GTE Training Academy, located in Portishead, just a few minutes' drive from junction 19 of the M5, delivers first class training for those working within the construction industry.

With a spacious modern training centre boasting state of the art equipment and some of the best lecturers in the field, GTE TA is excited to be delivering a new series of CITB training courses this autumn and winter.



Managing director, Kevin Browning, said: "Many construction companies can find themselves falling foul of the law when an unannounced visit from a health and safety executive uncovers inadequate health and safety provision on site. There is no excuse for that in this day and age. The necessary training is readily available to make sure any workforce, no matter how big or small, can keep up-to-date with on-site safety."

The academy's training courses range from health and safety awareness (hsa) to site supervision and site management safety training schemes, with five-year renewable certificates. In addition, first aid courses, providing a three-year qualification, are available for all industries.

Kevin added: "Throughout the construction industry good management of on-site health and safety is crucial to the successful delivery of any project. Site leaders have an important role to play in ensuring standards are fully understood and met."

"With a wide range of health and safety training courses available through the classroom, remote-online sessions or training provided at your own premises, it's never been easier to up-skill your workforce."

To book on to one of the GTE TA training courses visit www.gteta.com.



Somertlap

In the same year that Somertlap became an Employee Ownership Trust, it has further invested in its staff with an extensive training programme which is reaping rewards.

From job-specific machinery, forklift and sales courses to manual handling, health and safety and first aid, Somertlap's staff have numerous opportunities to increase and update their knowledge. Supervisors have received management training, enabling them to lead their teams more effectively.

Somertlap has extended its training to enhance employee wellbeing, and has begun offering Mental Health first aid



courses to employees wishing to support their colleagues. It has also run team building sessions at Mendip Activity Centre.

The company's transition to an Employee Ownership Trust did not stop when the paperwork was signed, and two of the trustees (Kelly and Dan) have attended courses run by the Employee Ownership Association (EOA) in recent months.

More are planned for other staff in due course, enabling them to play a more active role in the organisation. They will also be attending an EOA conference in Liverpool at the end of November.

Utilising the resources of colleges and universities in Somerset and further afield has enabled individual staff to upskill significantly, benefiting both Somertlap and their own careers.

One staff member has qualified in NEBOSH Health and Safety through a course at Bridgwater College; whilst a member of the joinery team has taken a joinery course at Weston College. Director Kelly Jones has also completed the 'Help to Grow' management course at Cardiff University.



Yeovil College

Leonardo and Yeovil College have been working in partnership for nearly 60 years to improve the educational opportunities of young people. The two organisations are a natural fit, with Leonardo requiring a pipeline of highly skilled early careers joiners to maintain the competitive edge of its helicopters business, while Yeovil College looks to support extraordinary futures for its students.

Thousands of Leonardo trainees have been educated at Yeovil



College and many of these have stayed with the company for significant parts of their careers, in some cases achieving senior leadership positions. Recent company managing directors originally joined Leonardo as apprentices.

In one example of the two organisations' close working relationship and with the opportunities presented as a result of the West of England Institute of Technology (WEIoT), the college has worked with Leonardo to tailor its engineering degree programme curriculum to make it laser-focused on real world challenges.

In collaboration with Leonardo and the University of Plymouth, Yeovil College has set up new units designed to prepare learners for the engineering tasks Leonardo focuses on a daily basis and ready them for the digital future of the international helicopter industry, such as computer aided engineering for composites.

All of this means that Yeovil College students are exceptionally well equipped for the world of work, which is good for Leonardo and good for other local and regional organisations that need young people with skills in areas such as precision engineering and metalwork. The college is currently training over 100 Leonardo Engineering Apprentices ensuring the future skills requirements are in place.



NRL

Technical and engineering recruitment specialists NRL understand transferable skills play an instrumental role when it comes to filling job vacancies in new emerging energy sectors where direct skills and expertise are in short supply.



With NRL having supported the energy sector for 40 years, Divisional Manager, Andy Williams, knows only too well that recruiting people with transferable skills into a different power generation industry isn't a new idea, but it is one that's become vital for supporting the energy transition to net zero.

"Transferable skills are those that can be used across multiple fields,

allowing candidates to apply their knowledge across different environments and industries.

They include communication, leadership and problem-solving abilities, as well as some technical competencies - and they're incredibly valuable when energy and engineering companies need to cast wider to recruit into a new emerging sector.

"For example, if someone has worked as a HSE Advisor on construction sites for a number of years, their existing knowledge of site rules, regulations and safety procedures could prove beneficial for health and safety positions in a new energy sector.

"Net zero advances such as hydrogen, renewable energy and carbon capture are great examples of where a recruitment campaign that focuses on those transferable skills and core competencies can help our clients bring in new talent and comparable sector knowledge that can give them a real advantage."

If you need recruitment support for your engineering company, you can reach out to Andy on 07818 431925 or awilliams@nrl.co.uk.



Air-Seal Products

Wellington based company Air-Seal Products continues to support business growth by encouraging staff members to take up training opportunities. Alex Burnand, Managing Director, champions the importance of upskilling existing staff members who not only have intricate knowledge of their premier tyre sealant product,



but also share and understand the vision and ethos of the business.

“Over the past year we have continued to experience a period of positive national and international growth, which shows no signs of slowing. With this comes in house opportunities for staff members to grow their roles through certified training courses and, for us, enhancing

the knowledge and skills of our team is paramount to supporting this growth,” said Alex.

Ben Collard, Air-Seal’s General Manager, has been instrumental in implementing more efficient working practices within the business and earlier this year completed a four-month, government backed course to become their new Strategic Consultant.

Enrolled at the University of the West of England in Bristol (UWE), Ben completed a 12-module course on a variety of subjects, attending either remotely by Zoom or in person at Taunton Racecourse.

“Since obtaining my qualification, I’ve been able to use those strategic skills to identify additional products that will potentially be offered by us in the near future; embracing not only the chance to diversify but of most importance, further the promotion and opportunities for our existing premier products during this exciting time of national and international growth at Air-Seal Products,” said Ben.

For more information www.air-sealproducts.com.



Top award for complex lifting operation at Hinkley Point C

A highly complex engineering scheme at Hinkley Point C which involved placing a series of huge structures on the bottom of the Bristol Channel has won a top award - the Collaboration Award at the ICE South West Civil Engineering Awards 2023.

The work, led by a team from Balfour Beatty based at Avonmouth Docks, involved using some of the world’s largest heavy lifting vessels - the size of football pitches - to lower six enormous intake and outfall heads onto the seabed.

The heads, weighing up to five tonnes each, will connect to five miles of tunnels supplying the plant’s nuclear reactors with cooling water. The level of teamwork, coordination and meticulous planning required to complete the operation safely was praised by the judges, who felt the project exemplified the collaborative

nature of modern engineering.

Miranda Housden, ICE South West regional director, said: “The ICE South West Civil Engineering Awards 2023 showcased a strong field of entries, marking a competitive year that underlines the region’s depth of expertise and achievement. These amazing projects are taking on some of our most significant regional challenges.

“And with the talent of our apprentices and graduates, the future for civil engineering in the South West looks very promising. Congratulations to all who participated this year.”

The judges expressed admiration for the coordination, teamwork and meticulous planning that was needed to ensure the operation occurred safely.

They described the precision in



placing the heads on the seabed under challenging conditions as “nothing less than mind-boggling”.

In total, ten project awards and two individual trophies were presented at the annual award ceremony that acknowledges the accomplishments of regional engineers and project teams.

Full details of the award winners can be found at www.ice.org.uk/sw/awards.

Highlighting career opportunities key to filling workforce gaps

This edition of Somerset Voice looks closely at our vibrant manufacturing and engineering sector, which delivers 7.9% of Somerset’s total economic output – more than double the 3.4% it contributes nationally.

Meanwhile, Office for National Statistics data show that 44% of Somerset manufacturing businesses face staff shortages. So it is timely that this edition also highlights the work of our local skills and training providers.

Many factors contribute to workforce and skills supply. Somerset Education Business Partnership cannot address all of these. But we can help our local engineering sector to share its success, its aspirations and its opportunities with our young people.

The more that they are aware of Somerset’s great career opportunities, the more likely they are to stay and train with our local specialist providers.

At the recent Somerset Careers Fair students aged 14-16 were impressed by the opportunities with many local employers as the comments below show:

‘I enjoyed meeting new employers and getting new knowledge about what to do in future.’

CHAMBER NEWS

‘I found out about multiple opportunities I didn’t know existed’

The key here is that these young people simply did not know about these opportunities before attending the careers fair. 96% of the learners left the careers fair more aware of places to work in Somerset.

So, while these students may not solve today’s staffing issues, raising their awareness of your industry and business can generate a robust talent supply to meet your future needs.

Careers fairs are not the only way to engage with young people. You might prefer to offer a short careers talk at a school, to provide a site visit for interested students.

Whatever the size of your business we can explore the best option to link you with your future talent supply today. To discuss your needs please contact:

andrew.hanson@somerset-ebp.co.uk, 07912 264531
or imelda.leetch@somerset-ebp.co.uk, 07519 124546



*clarke
willmott

Proud Sponsors of Somerset Chamber of Commerce Breakfast with the Council 2024

Thursday 11 January 2024, 8:00am-10:00am
Taunton and Pickering Golf Club, TA3 7BY

Join us at the **Somerset Chamber of Commerce Breakfast with Somerset Council** where the Council will provide an annual update on the development prospects for Somerset.

In addition to this update there will be plenty of networking with like-minded business people and will be a great opportunity to catch up in person.

To book a place or to find out more information please visit the **Somerset Chamber of Commerce website**.



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Autumn Statement gives hope to business

The British Chambers of Commerce has welcomed the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and said he had listened to calls to help businesses with the current economic challenges.

Shevaun Haviland, Director General of the BCC, said the Chamber network had called on Jeremy Hunt to offer "much needed solutions to Britain's investment problem" and his statement had provided "some welcome remedies".

She said: "The decision to make full expensing permanent will be a boost to companies wanting to invest. Our research shows that 34% of businesses have already benefited from the policy, rising to 47% for manufacturers.

"We have long called for the electricity grid to be upgraded to help companies transition to net-zero. In our recent net-zero survey, more than a third (37%) of businesses told us they were not getting what they needed from the grid, in terms of energy supply and connectivity. If we can reduce grid connection times it will make a big difference.

"We welcome the planning reforms and investment announced by the Chancellor today to help tackle this huge

infrastructure problem. Businesses trying to invest in a low carbon future will now be looking for a speedier path to grid connection.

"Smaller firms will be relieved to see a package of measures that alleviate the cashflow problems they face, such as continued business rates relief for hospitality, retail and leisure, and new rules to help them get paid on time.

"The Government's plans to support people back into work have the potential to help grow the economy. There are just under a million unfilled vacancies in the UK and three quarters of businesses tell us they cannot get the staff they need. Plans to support people suffering ill health could make a real difference, but there must be a focus on getting them into work that matches their capabilities and potential."



Somerset Chamber welcomes trio of Business Partners

Somerset Chamber is delighted to welcome Bristol Sport as a new Business Partner, while both Weston College and Strode College have renewed their existing partnerships with the Chamber.

Bristol Sport was founded by Steve Lansdown CBE, in 2012, formed with a single-minded goal to use sport for the power of good. Ashton Gate Stadium is home to Bristol City FC and Bristol Bears Rugby. It is now firmly established as the largest venue in the South-West following a £45m rebuild in 2016 and a capacity of 27,000.

Bristol Sport works with many businesses through events, hospitality offerings, partnership and venue sales, as well as providing a business networking opportunities through its Lansdown Club.

A spokesperson said: "We are delighted to become a member of the Somerset Chamber of Commerce and look forward to collaborating with our fellow members."

Weston College is an Ofsted outstanding institution in Weston-



super-Mare and is proud to be regarded as one of the top FE colleges in the UK. The college offers a diverse range of qualifications: GCSEs, A Levels, vocational, innovative T Levels and over 50 diverse apprenticeships.

Through University Centre Weston, the college extends into higher education with degrees and degree apprenticeships while the college also delivers education services to South West prisons and is the lead college for the West of England Institute of Technology.

Aside from outstanding academic success for our learners, the college, its staff, and its courses have won a string of prestigious awards, accolades, and accreditations in recent years.

Strode College in Street is Ofsted rated good and has the highest possible ratings from Ofsted and the



Quality Assurance Agency for its 16-18-year-old provision - including apprenticeships, A Levels and vocational courses, university level courses and nursery care.

The college also offers high quality, local and affordable higher education. This quality has been recently externally validated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education with a Silver Award in Teaching Excellence Framework and the highest possible rating was achieved in a recent external quality review.

The team also provides a range of adult courses, including professional programmes for people looking to upskill within their current place of work or seek new skills for future careers and job opportunities and specialist work-based training in the form of apprenticeships and work-related professional qualifications.



Sir Terry Waite receives standing ovation from Somerset's business leaders

Former envoy and hostage, Sir Terry Waite KCMG CBE, received a standing ovation at Somerset Chamber of Commerce's annual business leaders' dinner at The Castle at Taunton.

Sir Terry spent four years of his 1,763 days in captivity being held in solitary confinement after he was abducted while negotiating for the release of Western hostages in Lebanon in the late 1980s.

Addressing around 40 business leaders from across Somerset, he recounted his experiences as a negotiator and a hostage and drew parallels with the current situation in Israel and Gaza.

Sir Terry said: "Every time I have been in these tough negotiating situations, the British Foreign Office has said to me you will never be able to talk to X, Y or Z, it's impossible, you'll never be able to do it and they always advised me not to do it. But I didn't believe them and I was right not to believe them.

"I went out to see Gaddafi as he was illegally detaining innocent people. I was able to meet him. I was able to listen to him and I was able to discuss with him and I was able to bring these people home without payment or exchange largely because one worked on the personal element.

"One got to know him, got to try and understand him, got to try and understand why he was doing this and that personal encounter was so



▲ Sir Terry Waite.

important. It's particularly important in the Arab world - if you make friends they will remain loyal to you."

He secured the release of countless hostages and has since returned twice to the Lebanon and Beirut to lay to rest the ghosts of the past.

Emma Rawlings, Chief Executive of Somerset Chamber of Commerce and a personal friend of Sir Terry's, said: "Terry is the humblest man and an absolutely, true gentlemen.

"I remember watching the news with my parents and seeing him coming off the plane when he was released and

the relief my family and I felt.

"Terry now writes books, memoirs of his time in captivity and also children's books, and in 2004 set up Hostage UK to support the families of hostages."

The invitation-only business leaders' dinner, which was sponsored by Chamber member The Visa Office, attracted key decision-makers from some of Somerset's most influential employers.

They were able to meet for high-level networking before enjoying a three-course dinner.



▲ From left: David Faulkner-Bryant of sponsors The Visa Office, Emma Rawlings CEO of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, guest of honour Sir Terry Waite and Louisa Faulkner-Bryant of The Visa Office.



▲ Emma Warren of Elite Staffing Solutions, Graeme Crosbie (centre) of Level up South West and Alan Clarke of Higos Insurance.



Manufacturing, engineering and producing

M-CNC Precision Engineering

Based in Bridgwater, M-CNC Engineering has been supplying precision manufacturing since 2011, covering prestigious sectors such as rail, aerospace, defence, and oil and gas.

Continued investment in technology, staff, and resources has paid dividends, attracting interest from industry heavyweights Rolls Royce, Network Rail, and Airbus – to name just a few.

“We’re committed to maintaining Somerset’s unrivalled reputation within the engineering sector and supporting growth in the Southwest,” said Mark Wylde, Managing Director of M-CNC. “We’ve invested heavily in our



Bridgwater site, which now has capacity of over 20,000 square feet.”

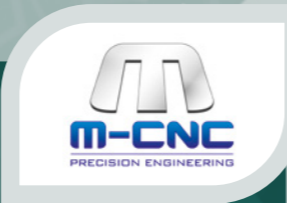
M-CNC Engineering’s impressive plant list has several twin spindle / twin turret, multi-axis lathes, including a full automation cell equipped with a KUKA robot for lights out machining, with a maximum turning capability of 750mm diameter.

This is supported by eight DMG Mori CNC 5-axis machining centres (with a maximum of 2.6 meters in the Z axis) and two DMG Mori 9-axis mill-turn lathes with CNC machining capability up to 500mm diameter x 1.5 metres.

Combined with AS9100 and ISO 9001 accreditations and state-of-the art MRP software, M-CNC’s management system ensures rigorous and diligent manufacturing, assembly and testing.

Mark is positive about the future and commented: “Demand is growing for our precision engineering and machining services and, talking to other engineering firms we know, many are also experiencing strong growth – which is good news for Somerset and its engineering sector.”

Email Dan Welham, Business Development Manager at dan.welham@m-cnc.co.uk for more information.



Rotec Hydraulics Ltd

Winners of the 2023 Somerset Manufacturer of the Year Award, Rotec Hydraulics Ltd are a leading UK specialist provider of hydraulic, pneumatic and electrical mechanical components and engineering services.

With the expertise and resources to provide fully integrated solutions at our workshops or on-site, we support a wide variety of organisations operating across both public and private sectors.

From design to build, repair to planned maintenance, Rotec is a reliable, highly skilled manufacturer and engineering business with outstanding customer feedback results.

Celebrating 45 years of trading in 2024, we have built

up a wealth of experience and expertise. Our client portfolio is particularly impressive, with numerous long-standing customers spanning across all industry sectors including National Grid, Leonardo Helicopters, A&P, Babcock International and Freightliner.

We pride ourselves on quality products, great service and competitively priced solutions to serve every industry sector and keep industries ‘in motion’.

ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certified, we pride ourselves on high operational standards.

If you seek a highly experienced engineering firm, with an excellent ability to overcome barriers and provide solutions, contact us via sales@rotec.net, call 01823 348900 or visit www.rotec.net.



Air-Seal Products

For 23 years Wellington’s Air-Seal Products have proudly offered world-class solutions, ensuring the longevity and optimal performance of tyres across the globe. Having now established a strong presence in over 80 countries, interest is in no way slowing down.

Within the past year alone Air-Seal has witnessed a rise in demand from the overseas market, most notably within the mining industry. A key part of the international growth strategy for both Alex Burnand, Managing Director and Steve Jones, Export Manager, is to actively travel and search for new distributors who share their passion for quality and commitment to customer satisfaction, further expanding their global reach.

While exhibiting at Kazakhstan’s Mining Exploration and Mining Equipment Exhibition in September, Alex and Steve successfully forged relationships with both new customers and distributors, and in particular welcomed British Ambassador Kathy Leach onto the stand.

Kazakhstan has the sixth largest reserves of natural resources in the world, so Alex and Steve were delighted to have been involved in a series of strategic meetings at the British Embassy, providing them with progressive opportunities and insights into the mining industry.

With growth comes the opportunity to diversify and in response to customer requirements, Air-Seal Products have now embarked on an exciting new chapter of their journey.

November saw the launch of the

newly branded ‘AIR-SEAL’ product range, designed primarily to offer different quantities starting from 475ml bottles up to 4l jugs. And there’s more to come . . . make sure to watch this space!

For more information, please visit www.air-sealproducts.com.



Teklagraf Ltd

Teklagraf is a market leader in labels, placards and decals across the aerospace, defence and maritime industries. We manufacture high quality labels from plastic, anodised aluminium, vinyls, stainless steel and laminates. Our labels are made for the toughest environments to the highest standards.



Working for some of the world’s leading aerospace companies, quality and safety is of utmost importance to us. We are ISO 9001 certified and provide certificates of conformity with all of our products, with material traceability for 10+ years.

We pride ourselves on being “right first time”, ensuring your labels arrive with you correct and on time, every time.

We also take our carbon footprint seriously, using sustainable packaging wherever possible, offsetting more than our carbon output through UK tree planting each year and are ISO 14001 certified.

But do not take our word for it, here is what an aerospace buyer in Poland had to say: “What characterises you is fast communication via e-mail,

deliveries on time, you meet all our requirements. Your team is very supportive, I can only congratulate you on such reliable employees.”

In 2024 we are celebrating 25 years in business, from the humble beginnings in the garage of the company’s founder to a factory in Weston-super-Mare with cutting edge technology and a highly skilled team.

If you need placards, barcoded labels, control panels, decals in tough environments – please get in touch with our friendly team – we would be happy to help.

sales@teklagraf.co.uk
01934 645485
www.teklagraf.co.uk



Up next in the February/March edition of Somerset Voice:

Sector focus: health and safety

Feature: health and wellbeing

Deadline: January 10

Afternoon tea and networking at St Audries Park



▲ Emma Rawlings (left), CEO of Somerset Chamber of Commerce and guest speaker Tracey Mortimer of event sponsor Somerset Skills & Learning (SS&L).

Construction Connections at ibis Bridgwater



▲ Scott Jenkins (left) Project Manager - Hinkley Supply Chain Lead at Somerset Chamber of Commerce and guest speaker Simon Shuker of Hafren Ousque Associates.

Connections on Tap - informal after-work networking in Weston-super-Mare



Business leaders' dinner at The Castle at Taunton



▲ Julie Grant of Blueloop and Matt Williams of Sovereign Fire and Security.



▲ Peter Swinburn of Clarke Willmott (left), Nigel Gass of SDS (centre) and Paul Lowndes of Gravity.



▲ Martin Williams of Handelsbanken (left), Georgia Beard of Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance and Dave Crew of Weston College.



Let's network over breakfast at Hornsbury Mill, Chard



▲ Erin Darling-Finan of AmicusLaw Solicitors and Helen Pulman of Milsted Langdon.



▲ Ben Grave of Mark One Consultants and Greg Rochester of CCS.



▲ Tony Pizzi of Key Person Insurance Hub, Emma Rawlings (centre) of Somerset Chamber of Commerce and Kit O'Brien of Shakespeare Martineau.



▲ Simon Forsey of sponsor AmicusLaw Solicitors and Emma Rawlings, CEO of Somerset Chamber of Commerce.



▲ From left, Lyndsay Blackshaw of Albert Goodman, Matt Featherstone of BLOCK Workspace Taunton, Isaac Patch of PKF Francis Clark and Carly Warren of Thoroughbred Marketing.

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to our newest members of Somerset Chamber.

Accounts Projects

Accountancy /business consultancy/ICT

Small business systems accountancy: bringing together systems, processes, bookkeeping and management. Accounts Projects was established in 2021 as a sole trade by James Wade, serving Exmoor, the Quantocks, the Blackdowns and the Vale of Taunton from the surroundings of Wiveliscombe.

James Wade 07520 642680
communications@accountsprojects.uk
www.accountsprojects.uk

Bunzl Greenham

Health and safety

Bunzl Greenham is a leading UK supplier of personal protective equipment (PPE), workwear, and safety products. It provides businesses with quality, compliant solutions, ensuring workplace safety, reducing risks, and enhancing operational efficiency for its customers.

Matthew Banks 01392 271770
southwest@greenham.com
www.greenham.com

ApolloIQ

RPA (Robotic Process Automation) and AI

ApolloIQ pioneers in RPA (Robotic Process Automation) and AI services, elevating operational efficiency for the NHS and private sector. Our solutions streamline admin and HR tasks, saving time and reducing costs, to enhance your business performance.

Razvan Valcu 07922 644920
contact@apolloiq.co.uk
www.ApolloIQ.co.uk

Channel Force

Marketing, media and PR

Channel Force - bringing you closer to your new customers. Q: What are the four Ms?
A: market, message, method, measure . . . and money. To find out more about how email and LinkedIn marketing can help your business get in touch.

Guy Timson 0117 4600239
guytimson@channelforce.co.uk
www.linkedin.com/in/guytimson

Aureus Wealth Management Ltd

Financial services

We are an independent financial advice and wealth management company. We specialise in cashflow forecasting to provide bespoke financial planning that enables our clients to build the life they want and deserve using investment, pension and inheritance tax planning.

Wince Chiang 07360 143759
contact@aureus-wealth.com
www.aureus-wealth.com

Distinctive Creative Ltd

Graphic design, web design, marketing and printing

Award-winning, multidisciplinary graphic design, website and marketing agency, proudly based in the heart of Taunton, Somerset. Whether you're in need of stunning visuals, a captivating website, eye-catching prints, or strategic marketing campaign, we're here to bring your vision to life.

Sam Fletcher 01823 284066
hello@distinctiveuk.com
www.distinctiveuk.com

BoonBrown

Architecture/town planning/landscape architecture

BoonBrown is an established architecture, town planning and landscape architecture design practice based in Somerset and London. We offer a personal dedicated service, and have built a reputation for consistently delivering high quality buildings and places that are innovative and viable.

Mike Payne (Business Development Director) 01935 420803
info@boonbrown.com www.boonbrown.com

Forward Space

Office and workspaces

We are transforming how and where people work. Raising the profile of regional towns and cities by creating professional, inspiring workspaces where the ambitious can thrive. We engage, energise and empower forward thinking individuals and businesses.

hello@forwardspace.co.uk
www.forwardspace.co.uk



G3 Promotions**Marketing/PR**

G3 Promotions offers over 25 years of experience in sourcing printed promotional items for business to keep their name in front of clients. From pens to mugs to umbrellas, we supply anything printed and work to help clients get the best value from their budget.

Gerry Bolt 07836 576615
gerry@g3promotions.co.uk
www.g3promotions.co.uk

George Albert Hotel**Hotel/hospitality/conference and events**

Located a short drive along the A37 from Yeovil you will find the George Albert Hotel. With over 600 square meters of flexible event space we are the ideal choice for your meetings and events. Ample on-site free parking available.

Will Sparling 01935 483430
gm@gahotel.co.uk
www.gahotel.co.uk

Hughes Isaac & Co**Accounting**

Hughes, Isaac & Co is an accountancy practice offering a full range of services and advice to help businesses grow. Partners Asem and David have many years of experience in accountancy and help many business owners with their plans.

Asem Din 01278 282185
info@hughesisaacandco.co.uk
www.hughesisaacandco.co.uk

Katie Thomson Marketing**Marketing/business strategy/design**

Katie Thomson Marketing is a marketing agency working alongside businesses within a wide variety of sectors across the South West. Our mission is focused on adding value through marketing strategies that are simple yet effective. It's our business to grow yours.

Katie Thomson 01404 819202
katie@ktmarketing.uk
www.ktmarketing.uk

Kinglake Leadership Solutions Ltd**Leadership development**

Our core leadership development revolves around Executive Coaching, HR Talent Assessment, Team Building. We believe these three core principles: leaders are grown, not made; people grow and flourish given the right environment; leadership starts with self, then others.

Terry Sanford 07813 894510
terry@kinglakeleadershipsolutions.co.uk
www.kinglakeleadershipsolutions.co.uk

Mirador Web Design**Website design**

Mirador is a family-run company that provides affordable, customised websites for small businesses across the South West and beyond.

Gary Robinson 07368 676066
info@miradorwebdesign.co.uk
www.miradorwebdesign.co.uk

Montel Civil Engineering Ltd**Engineering**

Montel is a privately-owned, customer-focused, civil engineering company covering the Southwest and Midlands. As principal contractors, we can deliver a range of projects, from small bespoke schemes to major strategic infrastructure projects up to £20m in value.

Sophie Pierre 07706 358183
Sophie.Pierre@montel-group.comm
www.montelcivilengineering.co.uk

Napier Occupational Health Ltd**Healthcare**

Napier occupational health allies with local organisations to create and maintain healthy, productive work cultures. We help you navigate the complex interactions between health and work to protect the safety and wellbeing of employees, and to restore work ability.

Dr Jenny Napier
info@napieroh.com
www.napieroh.com

Oden Services UK Ltd**Environment/waste management**

Oden Services UK Ltd is a compliant WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) company operating across the United Kingdom, known for its comprehensive solutions. With expertise in various sectors, we provide tailored services while operating with an SR2015 15 waste permit.

Paul Seward 07903 289988
pauls@odenservicesuk.co.uk
www.odenservicesuk.co.uk

Pendulum Power Consultants**Engineering**

We offer turnkey solutions for LV and HV electrical power systems. Our services include analysis, design, equipment specification, installation management and commissioning. We prioritise performance, compliance, and tailored solutions, ensuring seamless communication and optimized system performance for our clients.

Tom Williams 07494 235888
tom@pendulum-power.co.uk
www.pendulum-power.co.uk

Sovereign Fire & Security**Construction/office services**

Reliable and robust fire, life safety and security systems. Sovereign protects and supports your business or family with the latest fire, life safety and security systems

Matthew Williams 0345 1899808
info@sguk.net or matthew.williams@sguk.net
www.sovereignfireandsecurity.co.uk

Time for Inclusion**Business consultancy, diversity and inclusion**

A diverse workforce is more innovative, resilient and profitable, as long as employees feel they belong and are valued. Time for Inclusion helps you identify where and how to make your business more inclusive for your employees and customers.

Jane Finch 07877 974868
jane@time4inclusion.co.uk
www.time4inclusion.co.uk

Tracey Rickard Web design**Web design**

I am an experienced and professional web designer offering impactful and successful websites. A devil for the detail I take pride in every project, with a reputation for delivering fast responses, regular clear communications and excellent customer service.

Tracey Rickard 07990 890000
hello@traceyrickard.co.uk
www.traceyrickard.co.uk

Wright Way Training**Training and education**

We provide essential, customisable training to all industries in a fun, engaging and empowering way. Training doesn't have to be boring, with us you can be reassured everyone will enjoy their training and more importantly remember what they have learned!

Hannah Sherfield-Wright 01278 393321
info@wright-way-training.co.uk
www.wright-way-training.co.uk

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& GROW

somerset-chamber.co.uk

membership@somerset-chamber.co.uk

01823 444924

S Somerset
 Chamber of
 Commerce
 Connect | Influence | Grow



Connections on Tap - festive edition

Wednesday
13 DEC

Introducing Connections on Tap, our new, no-frills after-work networking event! This gathering is exclusively for local business professionals in and around the Weston-super-Mare area. Join us at Connections on Tap to connect, collaborate and unwind after a day's work! Please note: due to limited places available, bookings are limited to two per company.

Time: 5.30pm - 7.30pm at The Vaults, 1 South Parade, Weston-super-Mare
Cost: £10 plus VAT for members and non-members

Construction Connections at Train4All

Thursday
14 DEC

Join us for our popular construction-specific networking group aimed at businesses in the construction and property industry and enjoy a behind-the-scenes tour of the Train4All academy. Attendees will also be given an insight into how training programmes are delivered for a wide range of sectors. Relaxed networking and a buffet lunch also included!

Time: 12 noon to 2pm at Train4All, Units 1-4 Jubilee Park, Badgers Cross Lane, Somerton
Cost: £18.50 plus VAT members; £23.50 plus VAT non-members

Somerset Chamber Christmas drinks and nibbles

Tuesday
19 DEC

Christmas is fast approaching and as a thank you for your support over the past year and in a bid to spread a little Christmas cheer, Somerset Chamber of Commerce is inviting members to join us for some light refreshments and festive nibbles. Pop in for a quick coffee or stay for the morning, we look forward to seeing you. Christmas jumpers encouraged but not essential! With thanks to our event sponsor Go2 Couriers.

Time: 10.30am to 12.30pm at BLOCK Workspace, Blackbrook, Taunton
Cost: £12.50 plus VAT for members

Breakfast with Somerset Council

Thursday
11 JAN

We will be hosting our annual breakfast update with Somerset Council, giving an opportunity to find out about the council's plans for 2024 and to ask senior council officers questions on a range of topics. We will be joined by Paul Hickson - Service Director for Economy, Employment and Planning, and Dr James Gilgrist - Head of Economic Prosperity at Somerset Council.

Time: 8am to 10am at Taunton and Pickering Golf Club, Corfe
Cost: £20.99 plus VAT members; £24.99 plus VAT non-members



Workshop: Excel pivot tables - beyond the basics

Tuesday
16 JAN

Pivot tables are an essential tool for data analysis in Excel. This workshop, which will be delivered by Sally Williams of SJM Training, covers intermediate and advanced features of pivot tables. It will introduce functionality that is "hidden" behind menu options. Attendees will gain an insight into how pivot tables work in Excel and how best to design them to show the results they need.

Time: 9.30am to 1.30pm at Somerset Chamber of Commerce, Equity House, Blackbrook, Taunton
Cost: £49.50 plus VAT for members; £54.50 plus VAT for non-members



Workshop: sales unwrapped

Tuesday
23 JAN

During this workshop, Stuart Martin, founder of business consultancy Ethical Sales Pro, will show you how to attract your ideal clients and customers to do business with you. How to differentiate yourself in a competitive market and how to win business for the long term. The introduction will cover moving away from selling a product or service to focus on the consumer, instead.

Time: 9.30am to 1.30pm at Somerset Chamber of Commerce, Equity House, Blackbrook, Taunton
Cost: £49.50 plus VAT for members; £54.50 plus VAT for non-members



*Prices are plus VAT unless otherwise stated
Please note due to high demand, some of these events may be fully booked by the time of printing.

Please note, prospective members are permitted to have two tickets to our events before being asked to become a Chamber member.

Latest member-to-member offers

As a member of Somerset Chamber why not take advantage of our great range of member-to-member offers?

Optimise Workplace Wellbeing

Free wellbeing health check

FREE
HEALTH CHECK

50%
DISCOUNT

Cricket St Thomas Golf Club

50% off venue hire for conference and business bookings

George Albert Hotel

10% off delegate rates for members

10%
DISCOUNT

5%
DISCOUNT

The Gorge Outdoors

5% discount in online store

BidVantage

£50 off online bid writing training sessions

£50
OFF

10%
DISCOUNT

Impeccable Care Funeral Services

10% funeral discount to all members and extended family

If you have an offer you would like to add to our list, visit somersetchamber.co.uk/membership

Employer obligations for wellbeing at work

As a member of Somerset Chamber, businesses automatically receive membership of Quest, a national British Chambers of Commerce scheme which offers Chamber members access to advice on HR, legal, health and safety, tax and VAT at no additional cost to their annual membership fee.

Here, the Quest experts consider an employer's responsibility for staff wellbeing at work.

All employers have a duty to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of their staff - including their mental health in the workplace. These duties are governed by Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

High levels of prolonged stress can lead to headaches, disturbed sleep, anxiety, depression, mood swing, weakened immune system, high blood pressure and heart conditions.

Not only does this impact the health and safety of the sufferers, but it will also impact the business itself with increased absences, loss of production, financial losses, low morale, and risk of ET claims connected with personal injury and capability terminations.

With fast-paced and demanding work activities and practices - not to mention domestic family and financial worries, stress is a common and very real health and safety issue.

Encourage staff to talk and be open. Employers should adopt an open and transparent environment under which workers can freely talk to management about mental health issues without fear. They should adopt a Stress at Work Policy, both under their HR and Health & Safety policies.

Provide and maintain absolute confidentiality to encourage cooperation. Take a liberal and lenient approach towards flexible working, allowing for a balanced work/life

policy. It's also worth adopting simple workstation/desk exercises to relieve build-up of muscular tension and relieve work-related stress during office hours.

Ensure staff take regular breaks away from their workstation to allow their muscles, eyes, and brain to refocus. It also allows employees to converse with colleagues, boosting staff morale.

Furthermore, employers could also provide Employee Assistance Packages (EAP) to access free counselling services or direct staff to seek advice/guidance elsewhere.

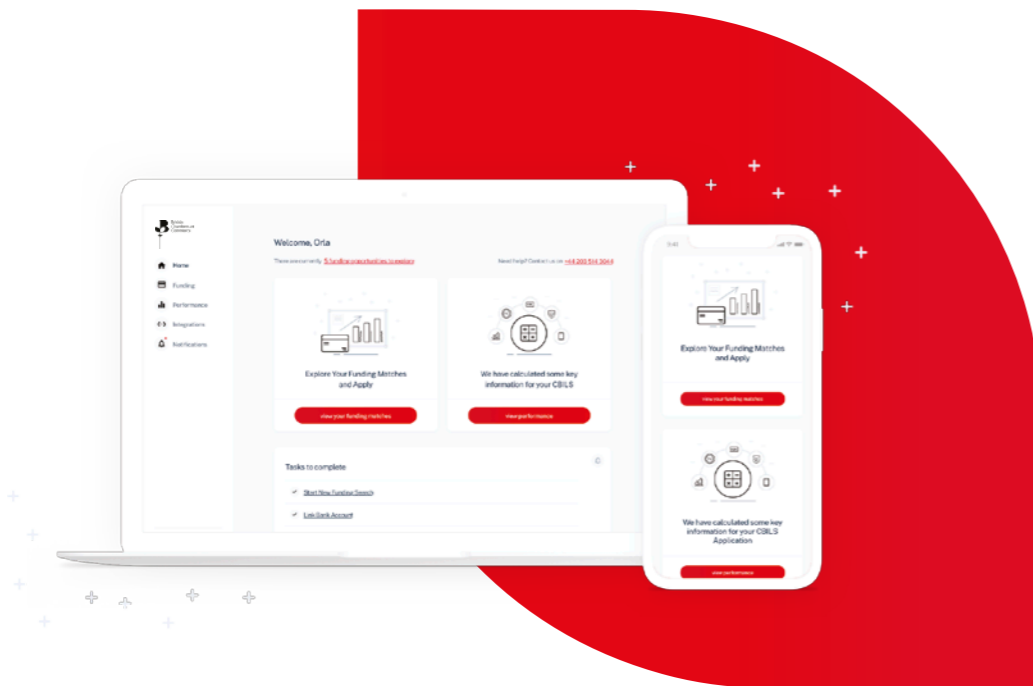
For further assistance, contact the Quest HR/Legal Advice Line on 01455 852 028.



CHAMBER FINANCE FINDER

Grow your business faster with the best funding solutions on the market

Somerset Chamber of Commerce have partnered with Swoop to bring you access to funding across grants, loans, equity with our new Finance Finder platform.



Access, compare, and select the best option across grants, loans, equity investment and commercial mortgages.

Exclusive benefits for our members



Dedicated Chamber Hotline - 5 days a week from 9am to 5pm



Free Financial Health Assessment to find cost savings and efficiencies



Templates and tools to speed through applications



Finance Updates and Alerts to make sure you never miss an opportunity



Finance News via your Chamber with the breaking stories that matter to your business

Simply register for a free account, provide the relevant information, and within minutes you'll be matched to all available finance opportunities on the market.

Access the Chamber Finance Finder or call +44 20 3966 7585



Cooper Associates Mortgages celebrates double win at ESTAS awards 2023

COOPER ASSOCIATES MORTGAGES

Cooper Associates Mortgages, the multi-award-winning mortgage broker whose head office is based in Taunton, is celebrating two fantastic achievements from the 20th annual ESTAS.

The division received the regional Gold award for Best Mortgage Broker in the South West and Silver for the Best Mortgage Broker Office in the UK.

The awards, hosted by Phil Spencer, the TV property expert, are powered by the ESTAS own customer review platform which recognises the best mortgage brokers and estate agents for customer service, based on ratings from clients who have been through the whole moving experience. This year's results were calculated from



over 300,000 customer review ratings.

Speaking about the double award win, Thomas Jackson, Managing Director for Cooper Associates Mortgages, said: "To bring back not one, but two awards is brilliant."

"This is testament to the hard work and dedication of the whole team who have supported clients faultlessly throughout what has been one of the most volatile years for the property market.

"I must also thank our clients who have taken the time to vote for us, showcasing unwavering loyalty. To know that we make such a profound impact on those we support makes coming to work even more rewarding.

"We look forward to what the next 12 months brings. As always, we will strive to continue delivering first-class support and advice to everyone who chooses Cooper Associates Mortgages."

Ferne Animal Sanctuary celebrates new charity shop in Wellington

Ferne Animal Sanctuary, the local animal rescue, rehabilitation, and rehoming sanctuary, celebrated its new store opening with a ribbon cutting ceremony November 3 in Fore Street, Wellington.

The new store is the charity's seventh shop to open its doors in Somerset and Devon, reflecting the animal sanctuary's ambitious growth plans to trade twenty stores by 2027.

All profits from the Wellington charity shop will directly contribute to Ferne Animal Sanctuary's efforts in rescuing, rehabilitating, and rehoming animals.

Kevan Hodges, Chief Executive Officer at Ferne Animal Sanctuary and local MP for Taunton Deane, Rebecca Pow, cut the ribbon for the grand opening in Wellington's town centre.

Kevan said: "Our newest charity shop in the heart of Wellington marks a significant step forward for us and our commitment to providing shelter, care, and support for animals in need.



"By offering a selection of high-quality items generously donated by the community, the store not only provides an opportunity for customers to sustainably shop and find one-of-a-kind items, but also helps fund life-changing chances for rescue animals.

"Each purchase made will support the sanctuary's vital operations, from animal rescue and adoption services to rehabilitation and extensive medical care needed by long-term residents."

Karen, Store Manager for the new Wellington shop, added: "We're very excited to be opening up this new store. It's in a great location and we're looking forward to welcoming shoppers local to Wellington and from further afield.

"The shop has been fitted to a very high standard and we know customers will love our diverse range of items including clothing, accessories, household goods, books, and more, all of which will directly help animals in need."

Ferne Animal Sanctuary is a non-government funded charity that has provided refuge and rehabilitation to its animals for more than 80 years. Located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, nestled in the Blackdown Hills near Chard, Somerset, Ferne Animal Sanctuary houses and cares for more than 300 animals on its 72-acre site.

For more information about Ferne Animal Sanctuary, please visit www.ferneanimalsanctuary.org.



Cognique celebrates 20 years

September saw Cognique celebrate 20 years of business. When the agency started in 2003 (the same year that WordPress launched) social media did not exist: the world had to wait another year for Facebook!

The marketing industry may have changed massively in those two decades but, as Cognique Managing Director, Nigel Reece, explains, there is one vital element that has remained consistent: "It's relationships.

"The relationships we built while networking with other businesses, the relationships with our clients and the relationships formed in our team. That's where trust is nurtured and loyalty is built.

"We're a results-focused agency and we keep our clients' business goals in sight and their best interests at heart. We reward them with honesty, expertise and sustained growth."

Cognique is looking forward to 2024 and another year of growth! www.cognique.co.uk

COGNIQUE



▲ Pictured, from left, are Dave, Hannah, Amy, Kim, Jim and Nige.

AMH Commercial Projects raise money for dementia charity

Throughout September the team at AMH Commercial Projects (design and build) took on the 20km over 20 days challenge for local dementia awareness charity and fellow Chamber member, Reminiscence Learning.



This involved the AMH team, cycling, running, hitting the cross trainer, playing netball and walking to hit these targets.

Jason Sanders, Business Development Manager, said: "It was great fun internally and actually a good rapport building exercise as I am fairly new to the business so good to get to know the team, but most importantly, raising £625 for Reminiscence learning, a local dementia charity was a great achievement and we really do hope it helps."



Evelyn Adfield achieves Band 1 Ranking from Chambers and Partners

Evelyn Adfield, Partner and Head of Department for Corporate Commercial at Porter Dodson has been ranked as a Band 1 Lawyer for Corporate Commercial in the South West by Chambers and Partners for 2024.

Evelyn's increasingly high profile and complex work for commercial clients across the South West and beyond, including Cooper Associates, Toolstream Limited, Barton Law, Coombe Farm Retail, Ashridge Capital, Complete Aircraft Holdings and Unison Triumph Investments (UK) Limited, has seen her reputation for delivering top quality results continue to grow over the last 12 months. As such, the firm is delighted that this hard work and commitment to clients has been recognised with such an excellent result in the rankings.

Evelyn has received some exceptional feedback from clients as part of the research process, including:



"Evelyn was fantastic and will remain a key adviser to us on anything in the future. I would recommend her to anyone."

"Evelyn is an exceptional lawyer. She has amazing drafting and review skills."

As a Partner, board member and line manager within the firm, David Culshaw, Partner, said Evelyn was an extremely valued part of the team.

He said: "It is great to see Evelyn has been ranked in the top tier and it is recognition well deserved. Evelyn is great to work with, and as head of the Corporate Commercial team has built a level culture where all members of the team are able to contribute to the team and to develop."

Sara Townsend, Paralegal, added: "Evelyn has always been hugely supportive and fair during my time in the Corporate Commercial team, encouraging and enabling me to progress my career and therefore to enjoy the work which I do within the team."

Evelyn's wealth of experience and expertise, along with that of her colleagues working in Corporate Commercial has given rise to some rapid growth within the department over the last few years, both in terms of the calibre and volume of the workload, as well as the headcount in the team.

It is a busy and exciting time for the Corporate Commercial team at Porter Dodson as they continue to expand their offering and our client base and as a firm, we look forward to supporting the continued success of Evelyn and her team.

More information is available at www.porterdodson.co.uk.

PORTER DODSON

Mploy Staffing Solutions makes the final 10 for top award

Following a reaccreditation as a We Invest in People Platinum Employer earlier in the year, Mploy Staffing Solutions is proud to announce it has been shortlisted as a finalist in the Investors in People top 10 in the UK Employer of the Year (Platinum) category for businesses employing two to 49 people.

Investors in People assessed how the organisation was performing in areas around employee engagement, communication, organisational culture and work practices. They also explored performance in leading, supporting and improving people and culture strategy, comparing against other organisations in the industry and sector globally.

A spokesperson for Mploy said: "Only a small percentage of businesses in the UK achieve the Platinum standard, so to be shortlisted in the top 10 businesses for UK Employer of the Year is a remarkable achievement for Mploy, that we can be rightly proud of.

"It is a fitting testament to the efforts of our hard-working teams across the business, who clearly share the companies vision and work together to create a really special working environment.

"Our people continue to be at the very heart of everything we do and we are so pleased that their ongoing contribution to the business is acknowledged by making the shortlist for this prestigious award."

MPLOY

Mploy was established in 2001 and is one of the South's leading privately-owned recruitment agencies, with a network of eight branches and a team of 40 recruitment professionals. They provide recruitment services within manufacturing, food production and processing, warehousing and distribution, engineering, marine, hospitality, healthcare, digital and marketing, as well as the commercial/office sector.

More information is available on the website www.mploystaff.com.

COGNIQUE

"I'm very impressed with the work Cognique have done and continue to do - it makes a refreshing change compared to the service I was getting before. Thank you so much."

Maxine Easingwood, Director, Heritage Heating & Cooling

Hannah | Content Writer



Historic signing heralds united new approach to support health and wellbeing

Leaders from the voluntary sector, NHS and Somerset Council, gathered in Taunton to sign an historic document outlining a shared vision and commitment to work more closely together to achieve better health and wellbeing for the people of Somerset.

The event, attended by over 60 representatives from the county's charities, NHS and Somerset Council, was the first time that leaders have come together at such scale, to demonstrate their shared commitment to working together.

The signing of the agreement formally recognises the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector as an equal and strategic partner and the important role it plays in providing key services and activities.

Angela Kerr, Chair of the Somerset Group of Charities and CEO of Citizens Advice Somerset, said: "Charities and community groups have long been a valued partner to the public sector; delivering key services, connecting with communities at a grass roots level, and acting as the first port of call for people in need.

"But, given the demand we are seeing for health, social care and charity support services, it's absolutely vital that we come together to pool our resources



and skills and find new ways of working together. We want to be part of identifying and informing the priorities for action and to shape decision making, so this agreement is extremely welcome."

Jonathan Higman, Chief Executive of NHS Somerset, said: "The VCFSE sector makes a substantial and valued contribution in supporting and improving the lives of people living across Somerset. This agreement is a clear statement of our intent to work much more closely with VCFSE partners in the planning and delivery of local services.

"It represents a real milestone in our relationship. The agreement sets out our commitment to create a more equitable relationship between the VCFSE and statutory sectors, increasing collaboration and recognising the vital role people and communities play in

people's lives."

Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council added: "Improving the health and wellbeing of Somerset's population cannot be achieved by one organisation alone. The voluntary sector provides a vital lifeline to our communities, and I am delighted to be formally signing up to this agreement.

"We cannot get away from the fact that there will be some tough decisions which need to be made but in these challenging times, it is important that we recognise and build on each other's strengths. We need to listen to our communities. Change takes time and is built on relationships and trust."

Katherine Nolan, CEO of Spark Somerset, the infrastructure charity which coordinated the process, added: "We are all united in our vision for the people of Somerset to be happy and healthy and to live as well as they can for as long as they can.

"By working together, we can make sure that Somerset residents get the right support when they need it. This agreement is just the start though and we're looking forward to working in partnership with colleagues from health and the council to provide the best possible support for local people."

Taunton music festival shortlisted in national awards!

Test Fest Music Festival has been shortlisted in the UK Festival Awards 2023 in the category Brand Activation.

The Testicular Cancer music festival started in 2017 by the charity It's in the Bag. The charity is well known for its quirky images, bright colours and tongue in cheek slogans, so Test Fest needed to reflect that in order to stand out.

The team had previously asked local artist Jonathan Dixon (Dixon Does Doodles) to design an awareness campaign based on the SAS, called SAS Who Checks Wins. The campaign was a big success and the video was shortlisted for Charity Film of the Year.

They then set about revamping Test Fest using five themes: blue sky, pants balloons, monsters, the stage and the words Test Fest.

From there, they set about telling the story, using the new images for videos, reels, T-shirts, stage and event banners.

Organisers Sue and Bill Brand from It's in the Bag thanked



everyone who supported the festival, including Graphic Mill, VMR Publicity and sponsors: "It was a risk and we really did mix it up, but it has definitely got us noticed!"

Test Fest music festival is the only one of its kind in the UK and aims to raise awareness of Testicular Cancer, and the importance of self-checking and early detection.

Test Fest will be up against big brand names including Brewdog, Amazon Fashion and Lidl at the awards final in Manchester.

National award success for Positive Wealth Creation



Long-standing Somerset Chamber member, Positive Wealth Creation Ltd, is celebrating success for one of its team at a recent national award ceremony.

Held as part of the Verve Group's Evolution 2023 Summit in Central London, paraplanner Sioned James beat off fierce competition from rivals at larger national companies to win the Emerging Award. The honour recognises rising stars within financial services.

Sioned began her career in 2018 after completing her degree, with Burnham-on-Sea based Chartered Financial Planners, Positive Wealth Creation Ltd. The award was presented to Sioned at a glittering ceremony by comedian

Jamie Sutherland and the Verve Group's Natalie Bell.

The judges said that Sioned's continued studying for the Regulated Diploma in Financial Planning during the COVID lockdowns, participating in Positive Wealth Creation Ltd's ongoing work to give opportunity to University of the West of England finance students, as well as learning British sign language, were all the reasons for success.

Sioned said: "I am so proud and honoured to be chosen as the winner of the Emerging Award. Thank you to the Verve Group an amazing evening. It really does feel incredibly special to have my achievements throughout the years recognised."



Earlier in the year, Positive Wealth Creation Ltd Director and Chartered Financial Planner, Alex Turco, was featured in the 2023 Top Rated Financial Adviser Guide in The Times, produced in conjunction with VouchedFor, the UK's leading financial adviser rating website.

Be Astute joins forces with digital firm

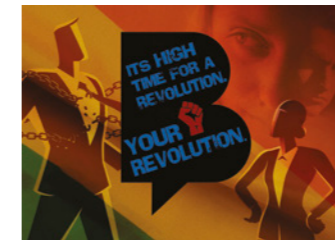
Be Astute has announced a new partnership with Snook Digital, a creative digital marketing company specialising in e-commerce, website optimisation, and process improvement.

Bill Stock of Be Astute, has worked with Snook Digital for the past two years and said it was a natural decision to formalise the partnership.

Bill and his wife Julia are business-focused IT specialists: "This partnership means that we can offer clients more services than ever, allowing businesses to grow in ways that they did not even think were possible without our help," said Julia.

Snook Digital build fast, intricate sites, with years of experience in software development, testing, real-world customer experience, transforming a business's front-end and enhancing their back-end process.

While Snook Digital specialise in digital marketing, Bill is an expert in databases with the ability to see a business's IT and data needs. He believes that better data means better business and is looking forward to the new collaboration.



Networking cream tea helps to launch of new Education and Support Service

Education and Support Services (ESS) was joined by representatives from local schools, councils, parishes and other local businesses to celebrate its launch and charity status with a tour of its new premises in Langport followed by a networking cream tea.



ESS offers alternative bespoke educational packages to young people and their families who have disengaged or at risk of disengaging with mainstream education.

The charity will also be launching a series of parent workshops providing support advice and guidance to parents, carers and guardians in finance, budgeting, healthy eating, home-schooling and wellbeing.

As part of these workshops ESS will also be opening a café and community hub in Langport designed to bring families and the local community together.

ESS has also been working with children's charity and fellow Somerset Chamber member, bibic, following an introduction through the Chamber, to provide further opportunities and support for young people and their families throughout the South West.

bibic has provided support and advice to ESS during its charity application and even helped find suitable business premises to create a holistic classroom environment. The children's charity has also helped the training and induction of new staff at ESS, by providing a short workshop on common learning disabilities and conditions affecting many young people.

For more information about ESS or supporting the community hub contact the team by emailing info@myess.co.uk.



Westcotts marks year of growth with 15 new team members

Fifteen new members of staff have been appointed to work across the business of leading South West chartered accountants and business advisers, Westcotts.

The cohort of new recruits, spread throughout six Westcotts offices across the region, are a mix of roles from trainees up to managers.

The firm places significant importance on career progression for employees, offering training opportunities and career pathways where people can join as an apprentice, find support for their studies and work their way up the firm.

A spokesperson for the company said the latest new members of the Westcotts family mark a continuation of the growth journey the firm had been on this year and would enable the company to deliver on the growing demand for its services.



The Plymouth office is joined by two AAT trainees, Harriet Knott and Abbie Smith, two ACA trainees, Emily Hill and Taylor Bracher alongside Tax Manager Helen Cross.

The Axminster team will be joined by AAT trainee Ellen Bugler, Manager Caroline Young and Bookkeeper Jessica White.

The Bridgwater office will see AAT trainees Ellen Ashford and Dexter Nichol join their ranks.

Exeter colleagues will be joined by ACCA trainee Abida Islam and credit controller Mark Warren. Just down the road, the Honiton office will see Lisa Court join their ranks as an Accounts Assistant.

Finally, the Weston office will be joined by Swathi Ramesh as an ACCA Trainee and Jenny Kilburn as a Financial Management Administrator.

Shona Godefroy, Managing Partner at Westcotts, said: "Our decision to welcome 15 new team members across the firm is a testament to the strength of our recruitment strategy. We believe in nurturing fresh talent who will help us to deliver our aspiration for growth and at the same time and most importantly, help us deliver exceptional service to our clients.

"As a firm, we continue to invest heavily in training, providing everyone with the right tools and equipment to do their job to the best of their ability, whilst at the same time reviewing emerging trends. This is something that will never change."

For more information about Westcotts visit www.westcotts.uk.



Director appointment strengthens PKF Francis Clark's business advisory team

PKF Francis Clark has bolstered its business advisory team with the appointment of director Ashley Luxon.

Based in Taunton, he joins from another Somerset firm of accountants and brings over nine years' experience of advising owner-managed and family businesses.

Ashley said: "I was attracted to PKF Francis Clark by the opportunity to work for a bigger firm and collaborate with a wide range of in-house specialists on projects for clients, whether it's inheritance tax when thinking about succession planning, share for share exchanges or other technical tax matters.

"There's a good team spirit and everyone gets on really well, which is very important to me because work is a big part of your life.

"The thing I enjoy most about my role is becoming embedded in family businesses, helping them navigate the challenges they inevitably come across and seeing them grow and succeed."

PKF Francis Clark's business advisory team provides technical knowledge, strategic support and commercial insight, as well as accounts preparation and processing, to clients across a wide range of sectors.

Partner Paul Bray, who heads up the firm's business advisory team across Bristol and Taunton, said: "It's great to welcome Ashley to the firm. As soon as I met him, I could see he would be an excellent addition to our team, helping to extend our offering across the patch.

"He lives in the centre of Taunton, knows the local market and has experience of running a team. He has already fitted in well with the team and met some of his new clients, as well as joining me in networking locally."

When not at work, Ashley enjoys spending time with his young daughter and watching or playing a variety of sports.

Since being certified as a Great Place to Work, this year PKF Francis Clark has been ranked among the

UK's Best Workplaces for Wellbeing, Best Workplaces for Women and Best Workplaces in Consulting and Professional Services.

The firm is also ranked among England's Top 100 Apprenticeship employers, claiming 28th place on this year's list produced by the Department of Education and High Fliers Research.

More information can be found at pkf-francisclark.co.uk.



Wincanton shortlisted for five leading industry awards

Wincanton is celebrating a remarkable five award nominations in 2023 for its work as the official warehouse and transport service partner for the construction of EDF's Hinkley Point C nuclear power station.

In a first for the business, Wincanton was shortlisted for the Partnership Initiative of the Year at the British Construction Industry Awards.

The nomination recognised Wincanton's collaborative approach to security in its capacity as the Tier one warehousing and transport partner for EDF. Wincanton was shortlisted alongside some of the most prestigious infrastructure projects in the UK, including Thames Tideway Tunnel, HS2 and Sellafeld.

Run in collaboration with the Institution of Civil Engineers and New Civil Engineer, the British Construction Industry Awards are the most prestigious awards in infrastructure

and construction.

Carl Meewezen, Managing Director, Public and Industrial, Wincanton said: "Wincanton has worked collaboratively and innovatively with EDF Energy and fellow HPC Tier-1 contractors to successfully generate and embed a security culture that protects its colleagues, their working environment, and the project's supply chain, removing risk from the build and disruption to its schedule."

Embedding a people-orientated culture on a project of such scale, where individual colleagues are risk-aware, has also seen Wincanton recognised at the Supply Chain Excellence Awards with a nomination for the Supply Chain Operations (People) Award.

Furthermore, Wincanton's collaborative work with Hinkley Point C has seen it shortlisted for Logistics Partner of the Year at the Logistics

Wincanton

UK Awards. Logistics UK is one of the biggest business groups in the UK, supporting, shaping and standing up for efficient logistics.

This year, Wincanton has been recognised at the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) 30th Awards for Excellence, where its focus on guaranteeing accuracy, security and transparency for EDF's £32 billion construction project saw it shortlisted for the Operations Management Award.

Wincanton was also proud to be shortlisted for Employer of the Year at the Business Leader South-West Awards, which acknowledge and celebrate outstanding business achievements in the region in September.

Surviving Winter Appeal launches to help Somerset's pensioners

Local charity Somerset Community Foundation has launched its annual Surviving Winter appeal to raise vital funds for low income pensioners this winter. An estimated 10,000 pensioners in Somerset are living in fuel poverty – almost double the figure from just a year ago.

With the high cost of energy and no plans for additional Government help with bills this year, the charity expects huge demand for help this year.

Laura Blake, Philanthropy Director at the charity, said: "We're gravely concerned about the number of older people who will be too frightened to put their heating on. Many of those we support have disabilities or long-term health conditions



and staying warm is crucial to keeping them safe and well as the winter hits.

"We know times are tough for so many people, but if you can afford to help, your donations will be an absolute lifeline for hundreds of older people in the county."

Around 800 older people in Somerset get help from the Surviving Winter Appeal every year, with a cash grant of up to £500 to support their energy bills. A Surviving Winter grant can also provide help for people to buy essential items to stay warm, make their homes more energy efficient, and access specialist support and social activities in their communities.

Surviving Winter encourages local people to make a personal gift or donate their winter fuel payment to help older people in need. The donation will make a huge difference to the lives of hundreds of local people and for many it is a lifeline.

Anyone who would like to donate to Surviving Winter should visit www.somersetcf.org.uk/winter or telephone 01749 344949 (donation lines are open Monday – Friday between 9am and 5pm).

A donation form is also available to download from the Somerset Community Foundation website, where information on which partner organisations deliver Surviving Winter grants can also be found.

Surviving Winter



Bank of England summary – recruitment issues ease for some but investment intentions remain subdued

By Malindi Myers, Bank of England Agent for the South West



BANK OF ENGLAND

Over the past three months economic activity has remained subdued while there were growing concerns about the outlook – most notably from contacts in consumer-facing businesses, but also from the business services sector.

Employment intentions softened and pointed to broadly stable employment levels over the coming year. Recruitment difficulties had eased further. Pay settlements were expected to come down gradually over the rest of the year and further in 2024.

Easing cost pressures were feeding through to lower consumer price inflation. Contacts expected price inflation to fall for many goods (including food, cars, clothing, and furniture) and also for some services, such as leisure and hospitality.

Nominal growth in consumer spending on goods and services remained quite strong. Spending growth was almost wholly driven by inflation, however, as volume growth was still weak.

Pubs and restaurants were hit by wet weather in July, but customer numbers picked up as the weather dried in August. Spending per customer was lower than last year, as customers traded down to less expensive menu options.

Contacts were increasingly pessimistic about the effect of higher mortgage payments and wider cost of living pressures on consumer spending over the coming year.

Fee increases remained the main driver of steady growth in business services revenues. It was becoming more difficult to increase fees and some contacts reported a reduction in their order pipeline.

Strong nominal revenue growth continued in the IT, insurance, law, and audit sectors.

Activity picked up towards more normal levels at insolvency and restructuring businesses, which contacts in part attributed to tighter credit conditions and less forbearance from HM Revenue and Customs.

Businesses in the wholesale, logistics and warehousing sectors continued to see reductions in volume, as demand returned to normal levels after booming during the pandemic.

The fall in construction activity further reduced demand for construction-related services.

Demand for recruitment services had reduced in recent months, in line with the reduction in businesses' employment intentions.

Manufacturing volumes remained broadly stable. The weakness of domestic consumer and construction demand contrasted with the strength of exports.

Export-focused manufacturers reported higher output, especially in the defence, pharmaceutical and energy sectors. Contacts said the outlook for output was also positive, based on substantial order books.

Investment intentions remained subdued in general, although they varied across contacts.

Many contacts reported that pressure on cash flow and margins was increasingly deterring them from investment.

Investment in the construction sector was still being held back by planning delays, higher building costs and finance costs, in addition to the further weakening of demand.

Credit supply remained tight for businesses in all sectors and lenders were scrutinising affordability more conservatively. Credit demand was still weak, with some businesses making early repayments because of concerns about the higher cost of credit.

Lenders remained cautious and concerned about the ability of businesses to repay borrowing, even in sectors where demand was relatively strong. They continued to favour lending to larger, well-established businesses, while small businesses reported that it was difficult to raise finance.

Levels of bad debts were rising, but from a low base. Contacts expected insolvencies to rise further over the coming year. Business failures were expected to stem from cash-flow issues and rising debt costs, especially in the retail, construction, and hospitality sectors.

Employment intentions had reduced over the past couple of months. Recruitment conditions had eased significantly since the start of the year. Pay settlements were expected to ease gradually over the rest of this year and further in 2024.

Recruitment remained very difficult for businesses in sectors with persistent skill shortages, such as IT, engineering, and finance.

Umbrella companies responsible for 700,000 contractors

Off-payroll (IR35) reforms have increased the number of umbrella company contractors by 100,000, to reach 700,000 in 2023. Since the reforms were introduced in 2021, HMRC has received an extra £4.7 billion in income tax and an extra £3 billion in National Insurance contributions but this has been offset by a fall in corporation tax.

Read more about the figures at:

https://www.contractoruk.com/news/0016142uk_umbrella_company_sector_responsible_700000_umbrella_contractors_and_ps118bn_tax_and.html

Inquiry to examine statutory sick pay

The Government has launched an inquiry to examine the effectiveness of statutory sick pay (SSP) and how it might be reformed to better support the recovery and return to work of people who claim it. The inquiry will consider whether the current level of SSP is sufficient and explore the best way for the Government to support businesses.

Read more about the inquiry at:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7991/statutory-sick-pay/news/198340/new-inquiry-work-and-pensions-committee-to-examine-statutory-sick-pay/>

Sole traders unsure of tax thresholds

Around 75% of UK sole traders are unsure of the current tax thresholds that apply to them. A survey of 800 sole traders also revealed that 73% believed they needed to pay corporation tax and only 31% knew when they needed to submit their self-assessment tax return.

Read more about the survey at:

<https://www.theaccountant-online.com/news/over-75-of-sole-traders-unsure-of-tax-and-vat-thresholds/>

Tool to help businesses address work-related stress

The Health and Safety Executive is encouraging businesses to sign up to a free-to-use interactive tool designed to prevent work-related stress. The tool provides simple and effective guidance employers can follow to meet their legal duties and begin to understand how to include stress in their workplace risk assessments.

Read more about the tool at:

<https://press.hse.gov.uk/2023/11/08/new-online-learning-tool-helps-businesses-address-work-related-stress/>

Source: BAD News (Business Advisers News)




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