

Somerset Voice

The Official Magazine of
Somerset Chamber of Commerce

February / March
2026

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REACTOR TO HINKLEY
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“ I thought it was a great event with
an excellent speaker and I was
thrilled to represent Church House
Investment Management as
sponsors. ”

Andrea Steel
Head of Private Clients (South West),
Church House Investment Management



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Front page: Chamber member Osprey Group helps deliver Hinkley Point C's second reactor to site via Combswich Wharf. Photo: EDF

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FIRST WORD



Somerset Chamber is here to champion and support our vibrant business community. This month alone, we held a sell-out business breakfast with Somerset Council leaders to highlight the importance of devolution for local firms and the extra funding that would bring to the county. We are also holding our second event with Agratas in just four months to highlight the opportunities the battery project will bring.

But Somerset Chamber also has a voice at the national decision-maker table. It's so important the voices of our members are heard well beyond town and county boundaries. This is where county chambers come into their own.

I've been to Westminster twice this month to meet MPs, policy-makers and industry leaders to shine a spotlight on our incredible and hugely talented Somerset business community. I am proud of the role we play, building local and regional supply chains with EDF for Hinkley Point C and the conversations we are having with Agratas and their contract partners.

Our close ties with the British Chambers of Commerce also means who have a direct line to Downing Street, The Treasury and the Bank of England so our members can be assured that we really do pass on their concerns to the people who matter!

By being a member of Somerset Chamber you join the county's most influential and exciting business community – one where you can make those all-important local connections, safe in the knowledge your voice is being heard far and wide!

I'm looking forward to another exciting year working with our membership community – and I must encourage you all to join us for the biggest celebration of Somerset business in the county, the final of the Somerset Business Awards 2026!

This year it takes place at the Bath & West Showground, in Shepton Mallet on Thursday, March 26. More details can be found on pages 11 and 25. I look forward to seeing you there!

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We could tell you how safety is fun. Or cool. Or sexy. But for most people its not.

RE:assure are **safety specialists** who are **passionate** about making safety simple, practical and personal so it works for **your** business needs.

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Our flexible solutions are tailored to meet the unique needs of your business, protecting you and your employees.

We're passionate about making safety work for your business – not getting in the way of it

Our goal is to support businesses so that everyone goes home safely to their loved ones everyday.

To us that is **pretty cool and sexy...**


Need advice, have a question, or just fancy talking things through?

Let's chat about how we can support you to empower your people and strengthen your business.


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BRITISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q4 2025

Business confidence falls following UK Budget announcements. The BCC's Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) for Q4 2024 – the UK's largest independent survey of business sentiment, made up of 91% SMEs – shows concern about tax, including national insurance, has spiked. Business confidence has slipped to its lowest level since the aftermath of the mini-Budget in Autumn 2022.

Taxation is the top external factor of concern, cited by 63% of respondents

55% of firms expect prices to go up, with labour costs the biggest driver

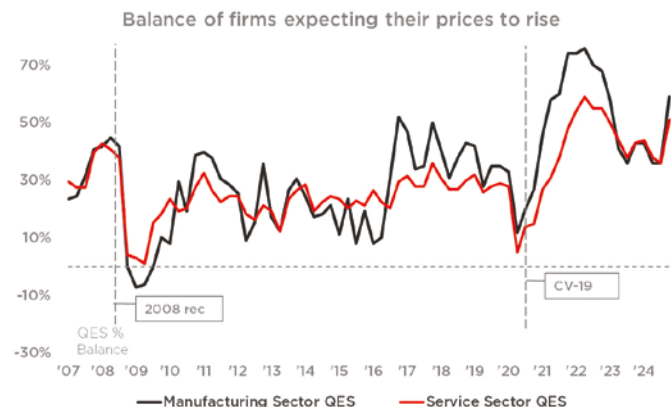
Fewer firms report increased sales, investment and confidence

AT A GLANCE

Prices

The percentage of firms expecting their prices to rise increased to 55%, a rise compared to 39% in Q3.

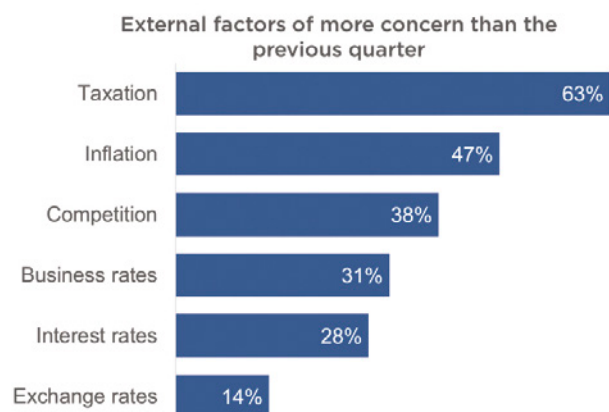
As measured as a percentage balance, the services sector stands at +51% while the manufacturing sector stands at +59%.



External factors

Taxation is now the top concern for respondents, with 63% citing this, compared with 48% of businesses in Q3.

Concern about other external issues continues to ease. Inflation concerns remain broadly similar to the previous quarter - 47% compared to 46% in Q3. Worry about interest rates has fallen slightly to 28% (29% in Q3).





SOMERSET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q4 2025

Somerset businesses continued to follow the national trend, with 52% expecting to raise prices and 80% of respondents citing taxation as their biggest concern. Some 37% said they were worried about business rates and 62% said inflation was a cause for concern – up from 53% in Q3. Business confidence took another dive with 49% expecting turnover to worsen in the next 12 months and 60% saying profits would drop, a huge increase on 46% of businesses expecting profits to be hit in the previous quarter. Labour costs were again the overriding financial pressure for most respondents, with 77% saying the cost of employing staff was the main factor in deciding whether to increase prices, down from 84% in Q3, but 45% cited ‘other overheads’ such as tax and business rates. Worryingly there was a jump in the number of businesses now operating below capacity at 68%, up from 60% in Q3, set against a backdrop of more than 58% of businesses not trying to recruit staff in the previous three months.



Clarke Willmott celebrates a year of impact through firm-wide and regional charity initiatives

Law firm Clarke Willmott is celebrating another year of charitable giving, volunteering and social mobility work, demonstrating its ongoing commitment to supporting communities across the UK through both firmwide initiatives and regionally led activity.

At the heart of the firm's national efforts is its continued partnership with the Social Mobility Foundation (SMF). Now entering its second year, the programme has expanded significantly, with colleagues dedicating time and expertise to mentoring and employability support for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

During 2024/25, 17 colleagues supported SMF through the sixth-form e-mentor programme, with 19 students supported, while two undergraduate e-mentors supported a further two students.

Volunteers also contributed their time to the Recruitment Success Service and participated in the Personal Statement Checking Service, helping students strengthen their applications and career prospects.

Building on this success, the firm scaled up its involvement for 2025/26,

with 25 e-mentors supporting 28 undergraduate mentees. Colleagues have also volunteered for the Recruitment Success Service and the Personal Statement Checking Service.

In addition, volunteers took part in an SMF Insight Panel and SMF Creating Connections events, reaching more than 100 students in total.

Alongside its national programmes, colleagues across the firm's regional offices have championed local causes and community partners.

The Taunton office delivered employability support for Women's Work Lab, helping 12 mums through mock interviews, LinkedIn insight sessions, networking opportunities and careers-in-law guidance.

Colleagues in Taunton also raised over £1,800 through a summer rounders fundraiser for Young Somerset and held various fundraisers throughout the year in support of the charity.

Across the firm in 2025/26, colleagues have raised over £3,000 for local charities, secured £1,450 in matched funding to amplify fundraising efforts, and dedicated more than 260

*
clarke
willmott



volunteering hours to supporting local communities.

Clarke Willmott CEO, Peter Swinburn, said: "We are incredibly proud of the commitment our people have shown to making a positive difference.

"From supporting social mobility through our work with the Social Mobility Foundation to backing local charities chosen by our regional offices, this work reflects our values and our belief that success should be shared. The energy, generosity and compassion shown across the firm this year has been inspiring."

UCS College Group Selected for prestigious Queen Elizabeth Prizes for Education: USA Exchange 2026

UCS College Group has been selected as one of just eight UK institutions to participate in the highly prestigious Queen Elizabeth Prizes for Education: USA Exchange 2026.

Representatives from the college group have been invited to Washington D.C. to present their insights on the role colleges can play in creating innovative healthcare solutions and training solutions that directly benefit their communities.

The Queen Elizabeth Prizes for Education are part of the UK national honours system, which recognise outstanding work in UK universities and colleges at the highest level of state. Since their inception, 337 awards have been granted and UCS College Group is a proud recipient of three of these prestigious prizes, with the latest

awarded for its groundbreaking nursing degree programmes.

"This is a huge honour for UCS College Group and a powerful recognition of



our award-winning nursing degree programmes, which earned us the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Education," said Andy Berry CBE, CEO of UCS College Group.

"We are the only college in England to be represented among some of the most prestigious education providers such as the University of Edinburgh, and I am so thrilled that we have been invited to share our pioneering model of health education on an international stage, collaborating with US academics to transform lives within our communities and beyond."

The USA Exchange provides an opportunity to further develop expertise and knowledge, by sharing experiences with US academics and learning from international best practice.

UCS
COLLEGE
GROUP
TRANSFORMING LIVES



Abandoned boat among 49,000 items found alongside motorways and A roads

An abandoned boat and fairground ride were among some of the obstructions traffic officers retrieved from National Highways' roads last year.

More than 49,000 objects were collected by National Highways teams from motorways and the agency urged drivers not to use the roadside as a dumping ground and to ensure their loads were safely secured.

In the South West, ladders, surf boards, Christmas trees and even patio doors were some of the obstructions and loads discovered by traffic officers in the carriageways.

Traffic officer Cat Martin, who discovered the abandoned boat on top of a damaged trailer with her partner Dave Wilkinson, said: "It was a surprise to see something of this size on the side of a slip road, causing a distraction and obstruction to drivers. It's fortunate it did not cause a serious accident.

"You would think someone would be missing their boat, but we were unable to locate the owner and so it made its way to the scrapyards as soon as we could get it safely removed."

National Highways traffic officers often had to close lanes or carriageways to remove large items and experience first-hand the negative impact obstructions have on drivers and their safety.

Most of the items picked up in the South West by National Highways this year were building or construction materials with 1,112 found, followed by 849 vehicle parts or accessories and 564 tyres.



Other items officers dealt with over the same period include household or garden items, bikes and animal fatalities.

Figures from National Highways show most incidents logged last year were on the M6 and M1, followed by the M25, M5 and M62.

Jack Mason, Regional Safety Programme Manager at National Highways, said: "These items left on or alongside our roads can put drivers at risk, while retrieving them puts our staff at risk and often leads to a road or lanes being closed, causing an inconvenience to other motorists.

"Our message is simple – Take responsibility to dispose of your unwanted items in the correct way and secure your loads properly before you set out on your journey.

"Following these measures could prevent a serious collision and avoids unwelcome objects from blighting the environment along our roadsides."

Huish Medical Careers Academy partners with Musgrove Park for inspiring prep evening

Richard Huish College hosted a special evening for aspiring medics in the autumn term. In partnership with Musgrove Park Hospital, over 25 doctors, led by Huish Alumna, Dr Amber Leach, delivered a rigorous and engaging preparation session.

The event welcomed students from Huish's Medical Careers Academy, alongside visiting students from Kings College, Taunton School, and



Wellington School. Participants were challenged through a carousel of activities, including a presentation by Dr Gam Ratnayake on 'preparing for your medical school interview', mock traditional interviews and multiple mini-interviews in a speed round setting.

It was a fast-paced evening offering essential experience of what to expect when students seek employment in the medical profession.

Richard Jones, Careers, Exams and Learning Centre Manager at Huish, said: "The students went away feeling very well-prepared for their forthcoming university interviews.

"We couldn't be more thankful to the staff at Musgrove for making the event happen and helping to support the next generation of medics. It was



also so inspiring to see some of our returning students."

The Huish Medical Careers Academy, which supports those making applications to competitive vocational degree programmes of medicine, dentistry and veterinary science, is a specialist branch of the Academic EnRICH programme available at Huish.

In addition to specialist events, Medical EnRICH includes guidance on the UCAT admissions test, debates on medical ethics, seminars from visiting speakers, recommendations on super-curricular activities, and advice on progression opportunities and work experience schemes.



WPA announces 2026 focus on health and wellbeing to tackle growing impact of ill health

WPA has launched a comprehensive health and wellbeing focus for 2026, designed to help employers, employees, families and friends address the growing challenge of ill health and its significant impact on productivity, engagement and quality of life.

The initiative responds to estimates that employers lose £85 billion every year due to sickness absence, staff turnover and lost productivity.

The cost of ill health that prevents people from working is equivalent to around 7% of UK GDP, and the problem continues to grow, with 800,000 more people out of work for health reasons than in 2019.

A spokesperson for WPA said the challenges are compounded by biological, behavioural and socio-economic factors, despite the fact that much ill health is preventable. Physical inactivity, for example, was a significant contributor.

According to Huggle, the UK's leading fitness network, a 30-minute walk each day can deliver the equivalent of a 30% increase in productivity, a



increase cognitive function by 10-20%.

Obesity presents another major challenge, significantly increasing the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, joint problems, some cancers and mental health conditions. Prevention, as ever, is better than cure – and corporate health spending is an investment in long-term workforce resilience.

WPA's response is a year-long health and wellbeing focus throughout 2026, designed to mitigate the impact of employee ill health through practical, sustainable action. The latest content, information and top tips will be shared on WPA's social media channels and website.

Each quarter will spotlight a specific theme:

- Nutrition will focus on how nourishing food choices support

30% lower risk of depression, and a 46% improvement in stress management. Even 20 minutes of activity can



clearer thinking and a healthier body.

- Wellbeing goes beyond physical health; it is the balance between body, mind and daily habits.
- Fitness is about more than structured workouts – it is about movement that builds confidence, strength and resilience.

While New Year's resolutions often fade, sustained awareness and small, achievable changes can make a lasting difference – improving productivity at work and enjoyment at home. WPA's approach focuses on 'one step at a time', recognising that when individuals thrive, so do their teams, organisations and communities.

Mark Southern, WPA's Sales and Marketing Director, said: "Health and wellbeing is what WPA does. We've been doing it for years and we remain committed to supporting employers, employees and their family and friends. This initiative will inform, inspire and empower positive choices across the workplace and our personal lives."

Powering up the workforce: Weston College launches employer webinar series

In a rapidly changing economic landscape, aligning industry with education has never been more important. Employers are navigating skills shortages, policy reform, and evolving workforce needs, all while striving to remain competitive, resilient, and future-focused.

Weston College works closely with employers across the region to understand the critical role education plays in business growth.

To support this, Weston College has launched its new power up employer webinar series - a programme of concise, informative lunchtime webinars designed specifically for employers.

Each session explores timely, employer-focused topics that directly impact workforce planning and development.

From understanding the implications of the White Skills Paper and maximising the Growth and Skills Levy, to navigating inclusion in the workplace and changes to assessment and qualifications, we will provide practical insight employers can act on immediately.

Delivered online between 12noon and 1pm, the webinars are designed to fit into the working day. Employers should register, then simply log in to hear from our team and take the opportunity to ask questions.

A spokesperson for the college said: "More than just updates, the power up series reflects Weston College's wider mission: to shape a future-ready workforce by equipping local people with the skills industry needs now and, in the future, and supporting

employers to grow, adapt, and strengthen their talent pipelines."

Upcoming power up employer webinars:

- White Skills Paper: implications for employers - Thursday, February 12
- Maximising the Growth and Skills Levy - Thursday, February 19
- Industry placements that work for business - Wednesday, February 25
- Inclusion: what does it mean for employers? - Thursday, February 26
- Leadership and CMI HTQ promotion - Friday, March 6
- OFSTED - new toolkit for employers - Wednesday, March 11



Shortlist announced for Somerset Business Awards 2026

It was another record year for entries in the Somerset Business Awards 2026 and the judges had a tough time deciding which firms to put through to the next stage of the competition.

Run annually by Somerset Chamber of Commerce, this year is the 21st year of the county-wide business awards which are supported once again by headline sponsor Albert Goodman, plus a host of leading Somerset companies.

The shortlisted companies and charities are now being visited by the judges with the finalists due to be announced as Somerset Voice went to print.

The grand final will be held at the Bath & West Showground, Shepton Mallet, on March 26, 2026 – tickets are on sale

The shortlisted companies, charities, individuals and organisations are:

Albert Goodman Family Business of the Year Award

- A J Wakely & Sons, Yeovil
- Datel Services Ltd, Weston-super-Mare
- Junction 24, North Petherton
- Nickel-Electro Ltd, Weston-super-Mare
- Polyvine Ltd, Cheddar
- Speedy Storage, Highbridge

Small Business of the Year (turnover up to £0.5 million) sponsored by Gather Technology Ltd

- Be Astute, Nunney
- Blunt Notion, Yeovil
- Dowlas Property Group, Cheddar
- Snugs Custom-Fit Ltd, Watchet
- The FutureStrong Partnership CIC, Weston-super-Mare
- The Kiln Café, Langport

Medium Business of the Year (turnover up to £5 million) sponsored by Brown & Brown

- Chrysalis Courses, Bridgwater
- First Class Comms Ltd, Weston
- Riverside Holiday Village, Bleadon
- The Middlewick, Glastonbury
- The Sleek Easy Clean, Glastonbury
- Wrencon, Taunton

Large Business of the Year (turnover over £5 million) sponsored by UCS College Group

- Amicus Law, Taunton
- Berry & Escott, Bridgwater
- Civils Store, Shepton Mallet
- Diverse Fine Foods, Taunton
- Refresco, Bridgwater
- Stantec, Taunton

Best Use of Digital Technology Award sponsored by Westcotts

- Darren Honeywell Video + Photography, North Curry
- FHOSS, Weston-super-Mare
- Lanier South West, Cheddar
- Snugs Custom-Fit Ltd, Watchet
- Toucan Law, Weston-super-Mare

on the Chamber's website.

Somerset Chamber Managing Director, David Crew, thanked everyone who had entered the awards: "It was great to see so many entries from all corners of the county, representing a wide range of sectors and industries.

"The awards are a fantastic way to share success stories and I am grateful for the sponsorship and support of so many of Somerset's leading businesses.

"I am looking forward to the final as it is always a great opportunity to celebrate the successes and achievements of Somerset's many incredible businesses and organisations."

Charity of the Year Award sponsored by Clarke Willmott

- Aishahs Food Charity, Weston-super-Mare
- Arc, Taunton
- Samaritans of Taunton
- Watch CIO, Chard
- Weston Hospicecare
- Youth Adventure Trust

Employer of the Year sponsored by Stephens Scown

- Calleva Limited, Bridgwater
- Civils Store, Shepton Mallet
- Optimus Education Limited, Taunton
- Pro Apprenticeships, Taunton
- Refresco, Bridgwater
- Singer Instruments, Roadwater

Investing in Somerset Award sponsored by Hinkley Point C

- Channel Events, Minehead
- Imagine the Possibilities, Taunton
- Reminiscence Learning, Wellington
- School in a Bag, Chilthorne Dormer
- SS&L CIC, Bridgwater
- The Pauline Quirke Academy of Performing Arts, Weston-super-Mare

Start-up of the Year Award sponsored by Battens Solicitors

- Be Laser & Skin Clinic, Taunton
- Mini Kingdom Soft Play, Yeovil
- The Better Living Clinic, Taunton
- The FutureStrong Partnership CIC, Weston-super-Mare
- West Country Cabs Ltd, Ilminster

Apprentice of the Year Award sponsored by University Centre Weston

- Boon Brown, Yeovil – Sydney Winter
- Brookside Academy (Strode College), Street - Harvey Lavallee
- Garador, Yeovil – Ben Parkin
- Refresco, Bridgwater – Sam Araldi
- Smart Systems Ltd, Yatton – Kayleigh Bain
- Talking Stick Digital, Bridgwater – Chloe Pavey
- Thatchers Cider, Sandford – Laura Cureton



▲ The Somerset Business Awards 2026 sponsors and judges.

Environmental and Sustainability Award sponsored by Agratas

- Carymoor Environmental Trust, Castle Cary
- Channel Events, Minehead
- Louise Crossman Architects, Withycombe
- Mill on the Brue Outdoor Education Centre, Bruton
- SG Eyecare, Wincanton
- Teapot Creative, Hambridge

Service Excellence Award sponsored by Porter Dodson

- Channel Events, Minehead
- Country Knole Interiors, Bradford-on-Tone
- Elements Boutique Spa, Middlezoy
- Haskins Furniture, Shepton Mallet
- Lendology, Bradford-on-Tone
- Nest GI, Weston-super-Mare
- Riverside Holiday Village, Bleadon

Manufacturing and Engineering Award sponsored by CNC Recruitment

- Bates Product Design, Highbridge
- Calleva Limited, Bridgwater
- Needles and Pins Aerospace, Somerton
- Polyvine Ltd, Cheddar
- Refresco, Bridgwater

Business Resilience and Growth Award sponsored by Barclays

- CL Drylining Ltd, Bridgwater
- Haskins Furniture, Shepton Mallet
- Riverside Holiday Village, Bleadon
- Technical ERP Limited, Uphill
- Wrencon, Taunton

The Somerset Business Awards 2026 media sponsors are Newsquest and the Somerset County Gazette Series and Global.

Somerset Chamber calls on employers to help shape the county's workforce

Somerset's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is a Government-backed initiative designed to align training and education with the real needs of local employers. It is an opportunity for local businesses to influence the skills agenda and secure the talent their company needs.

Why should business engage?

- ✓ Influence the skills agenda to reflect your industry priorities
- ✓ Ensure future training meets your operational and growth needs
- ✓ Tackle recruitment challenges and build a pipeline of skilled talent
- ✓ Position your business as a leader in shaping Somerset's economic future

There are three simple ways to contribute:

- Complete a five-minute online survey today: LSIP survey using the QR code
- Book a 1:1 Teams meeting (10-45 mins) with Shelly Mullen, Business



Engagement Manager LSIP by emailing shelly.mullen@somerset-chamber.co.uk

- Join an online or in-person focus group

Full details of the LSIP focus groups can be found under events listings on Somerset Chamber's website at www.somerset-chamber.co.uk and include:

- Visitor economy and hospitality (online) Tuesday, February 10, 1pm
- Construction and built environment (online) Wednesday, February 11, 10am
- Clean energy industries (online) Wednesday, February 11, 1pm
- All sectors round table (at Bridgwater College) Wednesday, February 25, 9.30am - 11.30am
- Agri-food and land stewardship (online) Wednesday, February 25, 1pm

Input from businesses is vital to directly shape training provision and workforce development in Somerset, so every response counts!

Meet Shelly, Somerset's dedicated Local Skills Improvement Business Engagement Manager!

Hi, I'm Shelly - your go-to person for all things skills!

I'm currently on secondment to Somerset Chamber from my role at Somerset Council as Future Skills Lead. Here at the Chamber, I support business engagement for the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

My job is all about connecting with Somerset businesses to understand what skills and training you really need. I run surveys, host focus groups, and gather insights that help shape local workforce development - because your voice genuinely makes a difference.

If you've got ideas, challenges, or just fancy a chat about skills in your sector, I'd love to hear from you. Think of me as the friendly bridge between your business and the bigger picture for Somerset's future workforce. Drop me a line - let's make things happen together!

A little about me . . . before this role, I managed Exclusions and Attendance at the council and before that worked for The King's Trust for 12 years managing employability programmes.

I have a degree in costume design and am a qualified art and textiles teacher, have travelled whilst working in America, France, Africa and India but the best job I've ever had was a magical season working as an elf in real-life Lapland!



Outside of work, I love getting crafty or heading outdoors with my two awesome kids (aged four and seven). I try to escape to the beach in the caravan I renovated, and in a moment of madness, I signed up for the Taunton Half Marathon this March - despite never having run further than my fridge before!

Back to the work stuff - what is LSIP and why does it matter? LSIP stands for Local Skills Improvement Plan - a Government-backed initiative designed to make sure local training and education align with the real needs of businesses.

In short, it gives employers a stronger voice in shaping the skills system, so Somerset has the right people with the right skills to thrive. The last LSIP was joint with Devon and led to some great outcomes, like expanding short modular training through Skills Bootcamps, which have been hugely beneficial.

This time, the LSIP is focused solely on Somerset and will be written based on your needs and the challenges within our county.

By sharing your insights, you help influence training provision, close skills gaps, and future-proof your workforce. It's practical, collaborative, and focused on making Somerset a great place to do business.

I look forward to connecting with you soon!

Shelly Mullen

shelly.mullen@somerset-chamber.co.uk



Training and skills experts become latest Somerset Chamber Business Partner

Somerset Chamber is delighted to welcome SS&L as its latest Business Partner, a Community Interest Company rooted in Somerset and dedicated to changing lives through learning.

The team delivers apprenticeships, training, programmes for young people and adult learning opportunities that remove barriers, build confidence and develop skills for meaningful careers.

By working in partnership with employers and communities, SS&L empower learners, strengthen the local workforce and helps people thrive.

Heidi Oliver, Director of Business Development and Partnerships at SS&L, said: "I am delighted that SS&L is formalising our relationship with Somerset Chamber of Commerce.

"Authentic collaboration is at the core of what we believe in – working together with employers to create long-term, sustainable solutions to the workforce and skills challenges they face.

"My team and I are passionate about building those partnerships and delivering apprenticeships, education, and training that truly empower the businesses at the heart of Somerset's economy.

"We're excited to work even more closely with the Chamber and its members to develop the county's future talent."



Somerset Chamber celebrates an incredible year at 2025 AGM

Somerset Chamber Managing Director, David Crew, welcomed members to the Chamber's annual general meeting, which was held at Albert Goodman in Taunton, at the end of November.

He said he had wanted to bring a spirit of collaboration to the Chamber – one example was the partnership between the Chamber and Spark Somerset. Jenny Hannis, of Spark Somerset, was able to explain about the two organisations' link-up for SkillShare, a project to bring together the business and voluntary sector.

The idea was to share skills and workforces to enable smaller charities to grow and flourish, while helping businesses with their CSR aims.

Mr Crew said it had been an incredible 12 months for Somerset Chamber:

- Achieved a 15% growth in membership – the highest since 2017
- Formed even more wide-ranging stakeholder relationships
- Welcomed a record number of Business Partners
- Had even more proactive engagement through our events diary
- Represented a network of more than 45,000 people through our members and their workforces
- Averaged 40,000 monthly digital interactions on our social channels
- We are proud to be one of 51 UK Chambers accredited to the British

Chambers of Commerce

- Now secured a total of £400 million in contracts through the Hinkley Supply Chain
- And launched the 21st annual Somerset Business Awards

The team said a sad farewell to Board Chair Emma Warren and to Board Directors Lizzie Tottle, Jerome Timbrell Evelyn Adfield and Matthew Ruddle after each serving the maximum six years on the board.

New Board Directors were appointed - Sam Harper of Stantec, Sarah Young of Porter Dodson, Nick Porter of Barclays and Kate O'Sullivan of ADPR. The Board also appointed Joe Routledge of Sycamore Process Engineering Ltd as new Chair with Rosie Wicks of Blossom HR Consultancy as Deputy Chair.

Mrs Warren said it would be hard to step away at such an exciting time for the Chamber. Membership was growing, events were well attended and valued and partnerships were flourishing.



▲ Somerset Chamber's 2025-26 Board of Directors and Chamber MD David Crew.



▲ Somerset Chamber Managing Director David Crew (centre) presents 10-year membership certificates to Anthony Heaton-Jones of CHASE Consulting and Emma Warren of Elite Staffing Solutions.

She said the Chamber continued to give businesses a voice and being part of such a pro-active business community was vital for local firms.

Congratulations were given to business which had been members of the Chamber for ten years: CHASE Consulting, Elite Staffing Solutions, West Country Blacksmiths, R T Keedwell

A & R House, The Quedam Shopping Centre, Enlightened Business, Hornsbury Mill, Cable Grips Minehead, Somerlap Forest Products, White Knight Marketing, Wilmotts Transport, Superior Powders, Growth Technology and Air-Seal Products

Mr Crew thanked everyone for attending the AGM and said the Chamber had a clear vision for the future.





Health and wellbeing

Bates Product Design

Health and wellbeing sit at the heart of modern product innovation, spanning preventative healthcare, recovery, fitness and mental wellbeing. At Bates Product Design Ltd, we work with SMEs, start-ups and inventors to turn health-focused ideas into practical, manufacturable products that genuinely improve people's lives.

As a friendly, independent and award-winning consultancy—recognised as Product Design Agency of the Year 2024 by SME News—we are known for our highly collaborative, hands-on approach.

This is particularly valuable in the health and wellbeing sector, where user trust, safety and ease of use are just as critical as technical performance. We work closely with clients, reducing anxiety and uncertainty for both those new to product

development and the end users of the product.

Our recent projects reflect this balance of human-centred design and engineering rigour. We supported the development of Optimus Lumina, a UV and infrared light therapy device, delivering concept design, detailed CAD, prototyping and getting the product into manufacture to ensure both clinical credibility and a reassuring user experience.

We have also worked with innovators in cold water therapy, holistic drug delivery and more, focusing on safety, durability and user confidence in demanding environments.

Looking ahead, we are currently developing next-generation exercise equipment due for release in 2026, designed to encourage inclusive movement, rehabilitation and long-term wellbeing through thoughtful ergonomics and space-efficient design.

With in-house prototyping, growing micro-manufacturing capabilities and strong UK manufacturing partnerships, Bates Product Design helps clients reduce risk and manage budgets.



South West Heritage Trust

South West Heritage Trust has been bringing the power of creativity directly to young people who need it most. In collaboration with Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, the Trust has taken artwork from its museum exhibitions

into hospitals — reaching children and teenagers unable to access everyday education due to illness.

Over four uplifting, artist led workshops, paediatric wards at Musgrove Park Hospital and Yeovil District Hospital were transformed into vibrant creative sanctuaries. Colour, imagination, and hands on making turned clinical spaces into places of exploration and calm. Participants explored the creative output of nature writer and artist Hope Bourne (1918-2010), whose work was on display at Somerset Rural Life Museum (Sept 25-Jan 26.)

By weaving creativity into healthcare settings, the project opened doors, built connections, and proved that culture can be a vital source of comfort, curiosity, and hope — wherever young people may be. Following a session on the ward at Musgrove, a parent of a participating child said: "It's the happiest I've seen them since they were admitted."

The project was made possible through the Arts Council England-funded museums and schools programme.



WPA

Your team's health impacts their productivity and, the recent Mayfield Review highlighted that employers are estimated to lose around £85 billion per year due to sickness absence, turnover and lost productivity. This is compounded by biological, behavioural, and socio-economic factors highlighting that much ill health is preventable.

According to Hussle, a 30 minute walk each day is the equivalent of a 30% increase in productivity, 30% lower risk of depression and 46% improvement in dealing with stress. If 30 minutes is too much, even 20 minutes will increase cognitive function by 10 to 20%.

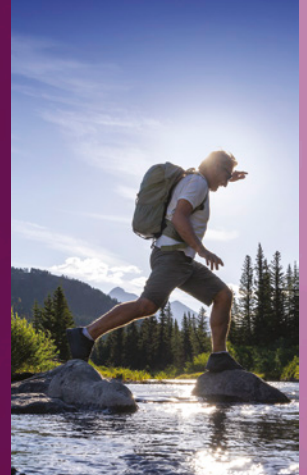
Health is something WPA has built a successful business around over that last 125 years. The latest initiative is our 2026 focus on Health and Wellbeing. With quarterly themes including nutrition, wellbeing, fitness and community, we'll be sharing the latest facts, figures and tips for improving personal health and corporate productivity.

Health starts 'at home' so we're doing lots for the team in Taunton. One example is our outside space for meetings, breaks and refreshments. With walking in mind, it includes a 200m walking track to help staff take a break with the added benefit of exercise, fresh air and natural daylight.

Business Leaders across the UK are recognising that employee health and wellbeing is not a cost but an investment, creating the conditions for people to thrive at work. Our 2026 Health and Wellbeing initiative will inform, inspire and empower positive choices by employees and their employers. Small steps can, and will, make a big difference



FOCUS



Young Somerset

Young Somerset offers fully funded parent wellbeing information sessions to support parents, carers, and the young people they care for, across Somerset.

As the county's primary youth work charity, Young Somerset has been working since 1997 to help children, young people and families with their personal, social, economic and educational development.

The wellbeing sessions sit alongside this wider work, creating calm, practical spaces where adults can reflect on the pressures of parenting and consider their own emotional needs.

There are three main session themes:

- Supporting your child with everyday challenges
- Raising confident children who bounce back
- Under the Bonnet" sessions designed specifically for dads

Each session combines information with discussion, including how to; notice early signs of anxiety or low mood, promote resilience, recognise when it might be time to ask for extra help, and approach everyday self care. Formats are flexible, ranging from a one hour introduction to longer two hour or half day workshops.

For businesses, bringing this training into the workplace is a powerful way to show staff they are valued as whole people, not just employees. When parents and carers feel supported at work, they are more engaged, resilient and focused, which strengthens overall organisational performance.

A recent corporate partner described the training as "invaluable", highlighting reduced stress, improved focus and overwhelmingly positive staff feedback.

By hosting Young Somerset's wellbeing sessions, employers can boost mental health, enhance work-life balance and directly benefit the families at the heart of their workforce.



Somerset Passenger Solutions

Somerset Passenger Solutions (SPS) isn't just moving passengers - it's moving the needle on workplace wellbeing. As the exclusive transport provider for Hinkley Point C, SPS operates 24/7, managing thousands of passengers daily. In such a high-pressure environment, looking after our people is non-negotiable.

That's why we relaunched our health and wellbeing committee as the Culture Club - a colleague-led group representing every corner of SPS. Meeting monthly, the club drives initiatives that promote mental and physical wellbeing, engagement, and inclusivity.

From charity events and wellbeing campaigns to creating safe spaces like our "Time to Talk Room," the Culture Club has made a significant impact.

Recent successes include upgrading welfare facilities, hosting free flu clinics and health checks, launching an on-site health kiosk where colleagues can easily monitor key health metrics such as weight, BMI, blood pressure, and heart rate and hosting a monthly Wellbeing Wednesday event to bring colleagues together. With a team of Mental Health First Aiders, a dedicated chaplain and access to 24/7 occupational health and confidential counselling, SPS ensures every colleague feels supported.

"Our strategy is simple: put people first," said Emma Warr, Head of Communications, "When our team feels valued and connected, they perform at their best - and that benefits everyone."

Visit www.spsbus.co.uk and discover how we're making SPS a great place to work.



Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP)

SASP, NHS Somerset and partners are encouraging people across the region to celebrate how they move as part of the South West 'Every Move Matters' campaign. The message is simple but powerful: all movement counts.

In the South West, 22% of the population are classed as inactive, meaning they do less than 30 minutes of movement a week. For many, the idea of achieving the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity a week can feel daunting.

However, starting with simple movements - such as standing up more often, taking short walks, stretching, or simple exercises whilst you wait for the kettle to boil - can be the first step towards long-term change.

Encouraging movement doesn't always have to mean gym memberships or intensive fitness programmes. Workplaces are uniquely placed to support this, whether you are working from home or in the office. To begin with, it can be as straightforward as:

- Walking meetings
- Movement or stretch breaks during long periods of sitting
- Promoting active travel where possible - can you walk to work, can you cycle?
- Having movement breaks during longer meetings

Movement can also offer valuable moments of connection - whether that's a Somerset Health Walk, a netball team or a Walking Football session.

More information at www.sasp.co.uk



Chrysalis Courses

Chrysalis Courses is transforming how UK organisations support and develop their teams with a flexible, affordable employee wellbeing and training platform. Designed for business owners, managers and HR professionals who prioritise people, Chrysalis Courses offer expert written, self directed courses and resources that enhance both personal and professional development.

At just £5 per employee per month, this innovative platform delivers expansive training, from stress management and communication skills to confidence building and workplace therapy support, giving staff access anytime, anywhere. Its mission is simple: happier, healthier employees are more engaged, motivated and

committed, which contributes directly to stronger business performance and reduced recruitment costs.

Developed in partnership with trusted experts, Chrysalis Course's resources are particularly well suited to small and medium enterprises looking for high-impact, cost-effective solutions that don't compromise quality. The platform also emphasises mental health awareness, helping employees navigate both work and life challenges with confidence.

Success stories from users reflect real change, better communication, improved morale, and a workplace culture where people feel genuinely cared for. For organisations committed to nurturing talent and fostering resilience, Chrysalis Workplace offers tools that make a meaningful difference for staff and for business growth.



SWALLOW Charity

SWALLOW Charity supports teenagers and adults with learning disabilities to live healthy, full lives.

The charity enables accessible sports and wellbeing activities for its members, as well as encouraging healthy eating through cookery sessions and education about healthy food choices.



SWALLOW Charity supports over 170 individuals, giving them opportunities to participate in sports and wellbeing activities, including weekly dance sessions at its popular Boogie Nights disco evenings, weekly football training sessions, swimming groups and cycling sessions.

Last year the cycling sessions culminated in a sponsored cycle event, where members took on the fantastic challenge of cycling either 4km or 8km, which was a huge achievement for those new to the sport.

SWALLOW recently ran a series of group swimming sessions, which has been transformative for members, particularly those with mobility issues who have been nervous to access the pool previously. One member now goes every week with her support worker as a result. We also support people to access local gyms and support them to achieve their training goals.

In order to make these activities possible the charity needs to raise money, if you or your company are in a position to support SWALLOW, please contact Nicky at nickyt@swallowcharity.org or go to - www.swallowcharity.org.



Weston College

At Weston College, we believe that great education begins with a supported and valued workforce. That's why we hosted our first-ever staff wellbeing day, welcoming more than 600 colleagues to a day focused on wellbeing, connection and personal growth.

The event was designed to provide a positive and energising start to the new term, giving staff time to recharge after the festive period while reconnecting with one another. Colleagues took part in a varied programme of short, engaging wellbeing activities, including mindfulness sessions, creative workshops, nature-inspired experiences, and interactive talks delivered by wellbeing



professionals. The flexible format allowed staff to explore new ideas and practices in a relaxed and inclusive environment.

The morning began with inspiring talks from two expert guest speakers. Dr Claire Plumbly, Clinical Psychologist, Amazon bestselling author of *Burnout: How to Manage Your Nervous System Before It Manages You*, and founder of Plum Psychology, shared practical insights on managing the nervous system and supporting mental wellbeing.

Dr Mandy Gardner, representing VANS, highlighted how staff can use the College's voluntary day allowance to support local communities, demonstrating the positive impact of collective action on economic, health, and wellbeing outcomes.

Staff wellbeing days form part of our wider commitment to creating a positive, inclusive, and supportive workplace. They help to foster collaboration across teams, support mental health and work-life balance, and create a welcoming return to work where wellbeing is a shared priority.



Teals

At Teals, health and wellbeing extend far beyond what's on the plate. As a destination rooted in community, we believe supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of both our team and our guests, is essential.

Wellness is woven into everyday life at Teals through a programme of weekly classes that are open to all, creating opportunities to move, connect and reset. Our outdoor bootcamp sessions run whatever the weather, offering an energising start to the day in the fresh Somerset air. Pilates classes take place four mornings a week, a restorative option with a focus on strength, flexibility and balance.

Health and wellbeing are also reflected in the fresh, seasonal produce available in the food market. By championing wholesome food, Teals encourages guests to cook from scratch, eat well and reconnect with where their food comes from.

Beyond food and fitness, Teals Somerset is a welcoming hub for the local community. The Arc provides a flexible, free space to work or relax over a proper coffee, while the light-filled restaurant overlooks the apple orchard and serves seasonal dishes from breakfast through to lunch. For visitors with dogs, the fenced Dog Jog is a safe, open space to unwind outdoors.



Halo Protection

It's a little known fact that a growing number of life insurance companies now offer some form of mental health support as an added value benefit.

The availability of these benefits is a rising trend, with usage of remote psychological services seeing massive increases in recent years. Many of these services are available at no extra cost to policyholders and can sometimes extend to their family members.

Accessing therapy or counselling sessions has been made easier with some insurers offering video or phone psychotherapy sessions. Others offer some CBT/counselling sessions as standard.

Mental wellbeing apps have increased in number and in usage, some apps can now offer personalised

recommendations. Some insurers use apps that include mood journaling tools and guidance.

Some policies can offer on-demand 24/7 consultations where anxiety and depression can be addressed, helping people access help sooner than the NHS wait times, and when they feel the need for support.

This shift reflects a cultural change in seeking support, which also helps alleviate the pressure on public health services, with some insurers reporting a 61% rise in demand for mental health support through their value-added services in the last year.

You may already have access to these benefits with your existing policy/s, it's well worth checking your policy details. If you are unclear whether your policy carries these benefits, we are happy to review the policy with you as part of our free advice service.



The Youth Adventure Trust

As we kick off the new year, many of us are still juggling the same wellbeing goals as last year. But it doesn't have to be complicated!

Getting outside, moving more and connecting with each other: sometimes the most effective solutions are also the simplest.

We know time outside can have a powerful impact on wellbeing, in fact 44% of people say that being in nature helps them feel less anxious and more happy.

Fresh air, natural light and green spaces help reduce stress, lift mood and improve focus - the kind of mental reset we could all do with.

Providing opportunities for teams to get together outside the usual work environment encourages conversation,

collaboration and, most importantly, connection.

Barriers are broken down and trust is built, creating an environment where relationships are stronger, colleagues become friends and everyone feels more energised and part of something. When movement is added, the benefits extend to improved physical health and longer-term resilience.

Including a charitable element makes all these experiences so much more meaningful; supporting a worthy cause like the Youth Adventure Trust, reinforces company values and also helps the communities we live and work in, prosper and thrive.

If you want some help with your team's wellbeing, the Youth Adventure Trust is bringing back its fantastic event 'Somerset Cycle' on Saturday, May 9 and it's a brilliant way to check off your wellbeing goals: get outside, experience nature, challenge yourself and connect!





Happy Leaders

At the beginning of every year organisations talk about employee wellbeing. Initiatives appear, policies are refreshed and benefits are added, then in no time at all many quietly return to business as usual. The uncomfortable truth is simple: if wellbeing only exists in perks and programmes, it isn't wellbeing at all.



Happiness at work is no longer a "nice to have", nor something employees should manage alone. In a post-pandemic world where work and life are deeply intertwined, organisational happiness has become a leadership responsibility.

Unhappiness at work rarely looks dramatic and more often, it shows up as silence: silence in meetings, bullying

and toxic behaviours are "just how things are", silence when people are overwhelmed or afraid to make mistakes. This quiet disengagement fuels absenteeism, low trust, risk-aversion, fractured teams and poor health. People may show up physically, but emotionally they've already checked out.

Wellbeing isn't created by fruit bowls, apps or insurance schemes alone. They treat symptoms, not causes. Real wellbeing is built in everyday moments: how leaders respond to mistakes, handle conflict under pressure, and create safety for people to admit when they're struggling.

There's still a myth that happiness is "fluffy" and lowers standards. In reality, psychologically safe workplaces see engagement rise, absenteeism fall and productivity strengthen, with performance and profit following closely behind.

To find out more please send an email and book a free consultation to heather@happyleaders.co.uk or take our free happiness test by going to our website www.happyleaders.co.uk.

Edge Coaching

Whether working at the strategic or the operational level, it is common for people to feel that they are burning the candle at both ends as they try to match too few resources to too many demands. To foster healthy workstyles and general life balance, I often refer to a Māori metaphor for wellbeing, known as Te Whare Tapa Whā.

I invite clients/ teams to imagine that their wellbeing is a house (whare), whose stability depends on four essential walls (tapa):

- Physical (Tinana): health and vitality - ergonomic environment, active breaks, good diet, sleep, exercise, hydration and a balanced diary
- Psychological (Hinengaro): mindset,



clarity, emotional resilience -mindful, reflective breaks, clear, constructive communication and feedback, stress management and learning opportunities

- Family/community (Whānau): belonging, relationships, and social support - team building/ community engagement, including others, collaborative spaces, family flexibility and peer support
- Spiritual (Wairua): faith, purpose, values, identity - mission alignment, shared values and mission, cultural respect, meaningful work and personal growth/ connection to nature

If one wall is neglected, the entire structure becomes unbalanced. Nurturing each ensures that individuals/ teams remain resilient, connected, and high-performing.

This holistic approach reminds us that professional success is inseparable from our physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. And that strengthening these walls together creates a foundation where every individual can thrive.

Sam Farmer is a Coaching Psychologist and Accredited Coaching Supervisor. His business is Edge Coaching.





Business breakfast with Yeovil Town Football Club, at Huish Park



▲ The breakfast was a sell-out event!



▲ Yeovil Town Football Club Director, Bhavna Vohra and Somerset Chamber Managing Director, David Crew.



▲ Harry Turner and Emma Bisset of Jones Building Group.



▲ Justin and Lisa Palmer of Imprints Workwear.



▲ From left, James Rooney of Struktis, Matt Huggett of Stephens Scown, David Stone of Milsted Langdon and Daniel Cree of Qube Construct Ltd.



Somerset Chamber of Commerce 30th anniversary dinner at RNAS Yeovilton



▲ Debra Spurway of The HR Dept Somerset and Somerset Chamber's David Crew.

▼ Nigel Beacom, one of Somerset's Deputy Lord Lieutenants, helped to organise the event.



▲ Somerset Chamber Managing Director, David Crew (left) re-signs the Chamber's Armed Forces Covenant with the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, Mohammed Saddiq.



▲ From left, Charlotte Humber of Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance, Emma Warren of Elite Staffing Solutions, Alastair Warren of Somerset Healthcare Ltd and Mike Cahill of Albert Goodman.

▼ Guests enjoyed a formal mess drum beat and bugle call to dinner, before being entertained by HMS Heron Royal Navy Volunteer Band.



Let's network over breakfast with Taunton Chamber at UCS College Group, Taunton

UCS
COLLEGE
GROUP
TRANSFORMING LIVES



▲ Rosie Wicks (far left), of Blossom HR Consultancy and Vice Chair of Somerset Chamber's Board of Directors, hosted the event with Bethan Turner (far right) of Taunton Chamber of Commerce.



▲ Tony Pizii of Halo Protection (left), Josh Nicholson of Jatech Limited and Rosie Hather of Arc.



▲ Ian Colio, Somerset Chamber's Membership Account Manager and Jane Finch of Time for Inclusion.

Weston business brunch at Weston College

WESTON
COLLEGE



▲ Greg Van Laun (left) of Astron Fire and Security and Gareth Ireland of Cadbury House.



▲ Somerset Chamber Managing Director, David Crew and Antonia Travers of Weston College.

**Meet the Neighbours
- Business West at
Leigh Court**



▲ David Goodall (left) of Somerset Chamber sponsor FW Capital with a representative from Sytner Mercedes-Benz, Bristol, who sponsored for Business West.



▲ Matt Tudge of neighbouring Chamber Business West (left) and Somerset Chamber's MD David Crew.



▲ Business West's headquarters, Leigh Court, in Abbots Leigh near Bristol provided a grand backdrop for the networking lunch.

**Somerset Engineering
and Manufacturing Forum
at iAero Centre, Yeovil**



**Somerset Chamber Christmas
drinks and nibbles**



▲ The first Somerset Engineering and Manufacturing Forum heard from speakers at Leonardo and Yeovil College.



▲ It was festive woollies at the ready for Somerset Chamber's annual Christmas drinks and nibbles event held at Chamber HQ in Taunton.



Somerset entrepreneurs' group

Thursday
12 Feb

The Somerset entrepreneurs' group gives all attendees the opportunity to introduce themselves to the room, highlighting their company or organisation and giving delegates more information about themselves and what they do. There will also be a chance to meet other business owners one-to-one and network.

Time: 9.30am - 11am at The Activity Warehouse, Bridgwater, TA6 5AZ

Cost: £15 plus VAT members
£20 plus VAT non-members

Yeovil Breakfast Circle

Thursday
19 Feb

The Breakfast Circle is where business creativity meets diversity in a welcoming and supportive setting. This isn't your typical gathering dominated by a single profession—our attendees come from a vast array of industries, each adding their unique flavour to the mix.

Time: 8.30am - 10am at Yeovil Town Football Club, Lufton Way, Yeovil, BA22 8YF

Cost: £10 plus VAT members
£15 plus VAT non-members

Somerset international trade roundtable with HSBC

Tuesday
17 Feb

Our new international trade roundtable forum is designed to support Somerset businesses that are already trading overseas or looking to expand into international markets. We will be joined by William Bain, Head of Trade Policy at the British Chambers of Commerce, who is a respected authority on international trade, frequently chairing panels with senior politicians and contributing to national TV and radio discussions.

Sponsored by:



Time: 9am - 11.30am at Clarke Willmott, Blackbrook Park Avenue, Taunton, TA1 2PG

Cost: £24.99 plus VAT members
£34.99 plus VAT non-members

Skills for business workshop - Safe to fail, ready to thrive

Wednesday
25 Feb

Join us for an interactive workshop led by Heather Bellin, Founder of Happy Leaders, and Jane Finch, Founder and Diversity & Inclusion Specialist at Time for Inclusion. In this lively and liberating session, we'll explore why mistakes aren't disasters but data: valuable clues that help us become smarter, kinder and more adaptable. We'll identify common challenges and barriers, unpack how to recover from missteps and learn how to help our teams do the same.

Hosted by:



Time: 9.30am - 11.30am at Somerset Chamber HQ, Blackbrook Business Park, Taunton, TA1 2PX

Cost: £10 plus VAT members
£15 plus VAT non-members

Somerset directors' forum

Wednesday
18 feb

This roundtable is specifically for senior decision-makers to discuss common challenges, growing pains and to share good practice in business. There will be opportunities to network both before and after the discussions, however, this is not just a networking event. Please note attendance criteria applies.

Time: 9.30am - 11.30am at Yeo Valley HQ, near Blagdon, BS40 7YE

Cost: £35 plus VAT members
£40 plus VAT non-members

Business breakfast with Agratas

Thursday
26 Feb

Find out more about the procurement portal and work packages for the construction phase, plans for recruitment and information about skills partnerships! Somerset will soon be home to the biggest electric vehicle battery manufacturing facility in the UK and we are inviting invite local business to find out more directly from the company behind the scheme, Agratas.



Time: 9.30am - 11.30am at Yeovil Town Football Club, Lufton Way, Yeovil, BA22 8YF

Cost: £24.99 plus VAT members
£30 plus VAT non-members



Somerset AI summit

Tuesday
10 Mar

This one-day summit will bring together business leaders, decision-makers, researchers, and innovation experts to explore how AI is transforming organisations today, what the future holds, and where businesses can access practical local support. A must attend event for business looking to turn AI opportunities into reality.

Sponsored by:



Time: 8.30am - 4.30pm at the Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation, Trenchard Way, Taunton, TA1 1FH
Cost: £24.99 plus VAT members
£34.99 plus VAT non-members

Somerset marketing professionals' forum

Wednesday
6 May

Chaired by Albert Goodman's Director of Marketing, Robin Clempson, and sponsored by Teapot Creative, this is an opportunity for the leaders of in-house marketing team to discuss current challenges, seek solutions and share ideas. Attendance criteria applies.

Sponsored by:

Teapot.

Time: 9.30am - 11.30am at Yeo Valley HQ, near Blagdon, BS40 7YE
Cost: £25 plus VAT members
£35 plus VAT non-members

Somerset Business Awards 2026 - grand final

Thursday
26 Mar

The Somerset Business Awards are organised annually by Somerset Chamber of Commerce - celebrating excellence, uniting teams and honouring individual achievements. The final is the county's largest annual black-tie awards ceremony, recognising companies across Somerset for exceptional accomplishments. It's a unique opportunity to network with a variety of businesses and celebrate local talent.



Time: 5.45pm - 12 am at The Bath & West Showground, Shepton Mallet, BA4 6QN
Cost: £115 plus VAT per ticket or
£995 plus VAT for a table of 10

Somerset directors' forum

Wednesday
13 May

We will be joined by the Dean of Wells, Toby Wright for the May directors' forum, which gives senior decision-makers the opportunity to discuss common challenges, growing pains and to share good practice in business. There will also be the chance for networking, too! Please note attendance criteria applies.

Time: 9.30am - 11.30am at Wells Cathedral, Cathedral Green, Wells, BA5 2UE
Cost: £35 plus VAT members
£40 plus VAT non-members

Hinkley Point C site tour and networking

Wednesday
20 May

Hinkley Point C will be the first new nuclear power station in a generation. Somerset Chamber has partnered with project developer EDF to deliver free site tours to give local businesses the chance to see progress on site at first hand. The event will also include networking, a presentation and the opportunity to explore the Hinkley Point Visitor Centre.

Hosted by:



Time: 1.30pm - 5pm from HPC Cannington Park and Ride, Cannington, TA5 2JA
Cost: Free of charge

County Connections with Frome Chamber

Tuesday
5 May

Guests will be able to enjoy some informal networking over breakfast, before hearing from Paul Hargreaves, one of the UK's most influential advocates for using business as a force for good. Paul has championed the idea that truly successful organisations put people and the planet before profit - and heads up Cotswold Fayre, one of the UK's earliest B Corps and Flourish, a thriving retail and restaurant venture.

In partnership with:



Time: 9am - 11am at Flourish, Farleigh Hungerford, BA2 7NG
Cost: £17.50 plus VAT members
£27.50 plus VAT 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.

10 Years Ahead

Communications, PR, public affairs

The UK's first communications agency built around people working with AI. Our tools spot patterns and track public conversation in real time; our team builds trust and relationships. Together, we help you anticipate change, tell your story, and manage risk.

Ruth Edwards 0800 2465907
ruth.edwards@10yearsahead.co.uk
www.10yearsahead.co.uk

John Hodge Solicitors LLP

Law

John Hodge Solicitors are a leading firm of legal experts, based in the South West. We are proud to use our expertise to build strong client relationships, saving clients time and money whilst offering clear, jargon-free and straightforward advice.

James Gass 01934 410910
mailbox@johnhodge.co.uk
<https://www.johnhodge.co.uk>

Children's Hospice South West

Health

Children's Hospice South West provides hospice care for babies, children and young people with life-limiting conditions and their whole family from their 3 hospices: Little Bridge House in Devon, Charlton Farm in Somerset and Little Harbour in Cornwall.

Sophie Lerwill 01271 325270
Sophie.lerwill@chsw.org.uk
<https://www.chsw.org.uk>

School in a Bag

Charity

School in a Bag is a Somerset-based charity providing SchoolBags filled with stationery, learning tools and eating utensils to disadvantaged, disaster-affected and displaced children worldwide. Each bag is traceable to its recipient, with over 166,000 SchoolBags delivered across 62 countries through education-focused humanitarian partnerships.

Luke Simon 01935 849160
hello@schoolinabag.org
www.schoolinabag.org

Cooper and Tanner

Commercial property agents

Cooper and Tanner are estate agents, auctioneers, and surveyors, offering specialist advice on rural, residential and commercial property, livestock, and antiques. Established over 100 years operating throughout Somerset and Wiltshire. RICS regulated firm with NAEA qualified staff.

Jake Smith 01761 411010
jake.smith@cooperandtanner.co.uk
www.cooperandtanner.co.uk

Techosaurus LTD

EdTech

An award-winning EdTech and technology consultancy in Yeovil specialising in digital transformation, automation, and applied AI training. We deliver practical, hands-on courses and tailored support that help people and organisations use technology effectively, strengthen capability, and make confident progress with modern tools.

Ellie Quilter 0845 8520039
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Dynamic Diagnostics Ltd

Manufacture

Dynamic Diagnostics Ltd is a UK-based diagnostics company specialising in innovative in-vitro diagnostic kits and AI-enabled readers for microbiology, combining strong scientific expertise, quality-driven manufacturing, and regulatory compliance to deliver reliable, affordable solutions to laboratories worldwide.

Jason Griffiths 07931 864812
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The Awards Company

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The Awards Company supplies trophies, medals, and engraved gifts for clubs, schools, and businesses. From football and rugby to cricket, golf, hockey, netball, and padel, we help celebrate achievement with quality products, fast turnaround, and friendly support nationwide today.

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We are Gen X

Business consultancy

As one of the UK's only Gen X-focused advisors, we help founders aged 45-60 build and grow with confidence, and equip companies with the generational training, insight and strategic support needed to engage Gen X and unlock their significant purchasing power.

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Second nuclear reactor arrives at Hinkley Point C



The twin nuclear power station at Hinkley Point C has taken delivery of its second nuclear reactor. The first arrived in 2023 and is already installed and welded in place on Unit 1 of the power station.

The delivery of the second “reactor pressure vessel” is a major moment for the identical Unit 2. The pressure vessel harnesses nuclear fission to make heat and steam for the world’s largest turbines. Each one will power around 3m homes around the clock.

The high strength steel cylinder weighs in at 500-tonnes and is just 13-metres long.

Work on Unit 1 has moved onto the fitting out of pipes, cables and

equipment, while Unit 2 is focussed on the completion of its buildings following the successful dome lift in July last year. Thanks to innovation and the experience gained from constructing Unit 1, teams are building Unit 2 20-30% faster, with prefabrication now approaching 60%.

The reactor was shipped from the Framatome Saint Marcel factory in France to Avonmouth Docks in Bristol, before being transported by barge to Combwich Wharf on the River Parrett in Somerset. The final journey was a six-hour road trip for four miles by a transporter to the construction site.

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Skills and training

Growing Vision Ltd

When your best people get promoted into management, something often goes wrong. The technical expert who delivered brilliant results now struggles to get results through others. The pressure builds. Confidence drops. Performance suffers—theirs and their team's.

Growing Vision has spent over 25 years helping Somerset businesses solve this problem. We transform capable professionals into confident leaders who engage their teams and deliver consistent high performance.

Our approach is practical, not theoretical. Every session focuses on immediate application—participants implement what they learn from day one. We work with aerospace manufacturers, pharmaceutical companies, the NHS, local authorities, and SMEs across the region.

As an accredited Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) centre and Association of Coaching member, we bring professional rigour to leadership development. But what our clients value most is the transformation they see: managers who stop firefighting and start leading, teams that take ownership, and organisations that perform.

Managing Director John Garland works directly with leadership teams to anchor lasting behavioural change. Both challenging and supportive, he enables individuals to build the self-awareness and skills that turn management struggles into leadership success.

Ready to develop your leaders? Let's talk. Contact: John Garland, Fellow of the Institute of Leadership, 07811 372038, info@growingvision.com, www.growingvision.com.



Sandler South West

Across Somerset and the South West, many business leaders are rethinking how to scale their operations.

Recent changes in UK employment law have increased the costs, complexities, and risks associated with recruitment, particularly when hiring salespeople or sales leaders.

At Sandler South West, we partner with progressive B2B organisations that prioritise quality, by helping them make the right hiring choices and through providing on-going training and coaching.

With over 50 years of global expertise in performance development, we assist companies in building high-performing leadership and sales teams through a data-driven approach and developing best practice in sales processes and methodologies.

Our support includes interactive workshops at our Southwest training centre, live virtual coaching sessions, and AI-enabled reinforcement tools. We are dedicated to helping organisations establish new habits and ensure sustained behavioural change.

"Over a three-year period of working with Sandler, we've seen a 40% return on our sales manager's figures year-on-year," - Jim Taylor, Managing Director at Cobalt

To find out more about Sandler and how we can support your strategic goals and objectives call 01395 203050, email tom.nation@sandler.com, or ask us about booking a free 30-minute consultation.



Weston College

As organisations look ahead to 2026, one thing is clear: a healthy business starts with a confident, capable workforce. Investing in skills is no longer just about productivity, it's about wellbeing, resilience and long-term sustainability.

Apprenticeships remain one of the most effective ways for businesses to grow and upskill their teams. Far from being just for school leavers, apprenticeships are suitable for people at any stage of their career.

They allow employers to develop talent from within, improve retention and build the skills they need, while



employees gain recognised qualifications and increased confidence in their roles.

For many businesses, apprenticeships are a practical solution to skills shortages and succession planning.

Alongside apprenticeships, short business-focused courses offer a flexible way to respond quickly to workforce needs.

Leadership and management programmes help new and existing managers support their teams more effectively, improving communication, morale and performance.

Digital skills training, including Microsoft 365, enables staff to work smarter and reduce everyday pressures, while people management qualifications such as the CIPD Diploma support healthier workplace cultures.

Courses in project management (APM), emergency first aid at work and accounting (AAT Certificate) provide essential skills that strengthen compliance, efficiency and confidence across organisations.

As employers plan for the year ahead, now is the time to review workforce priorities. With the right training in place, businesses can power up for 2026, supporting staff wellbeing while building a stronger, more resilient future in partnership with Weston College.



SBA CIC

SBA CIC is a not-for-profit organisation specialising in skills development, training delivery and workforce support, working with partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Our core focus is helping individuals and organisations build capability during periods of growth, transition and change. We design and deliver practical, people-centred training programmes that support leadership development, team effectiveness, wellbeing, employability and organisational resilience.

A distinctive feature of our approach is the use of personality profiling as a baseline. This enables individuals and teams to develop a deeper understanding of communication styles, motivators and behaviours, providing a strong foundation for more effective collaboration, improved performance and positive workplace culture.

From this starting point, we tailor learning pathways that respond to real-world challenges rather than off-the-shelf solutions.

We work in close partnership with employers, local authorities, education providers and community organisations to co-design programmes that align with strategic objectives while remaining accessible and inclusive.

Our delivery models range from short workshops and accredited training to longer-term development programmes supporting change management, wellbeing, leadership capability and workforce readiness.

SBA has a strong track record of delivering funded and commissioned programmes, supporting diverse teams and communities across Somerset as well as on the national and international stage.

Our work is rooted in practical outcomes: improved confidence, stronger teams, enhanced employability and organisations better equipped to adapt and succeed.

We believe that investing in people is fundamental to sustainable growth and that effective skills and training begin with understanding how people work best together.



hgkc

South West-based consultancy firm, hgkc, which supports UK owner-managed businesses with leadership, growth, innovation and preparation for exit, has today launched a DIY toolkit downloadable for business owners who want to work through exit planning at their own pace.

Priced at £299, the toolkit gathers over 50 years of combined experience in preparing for and managing successful business exits.

Peter Quintana, Director and co-founder of hgkc, said: "I have been both sides of a transaction many times over the years, and have seen some done well, and many that have gone badly wrong.

"Almost every time they went badly, it was because the preparation was flawed - the owners weren't ready, their

leadership teams couldn't run the business without the owners in it, or the final value received for business fell short of the owners' expectations. All of this is avoidable."

The toolkit sets out six stages - discover, analyse, communicate, lead, plan, act - and provides information and detailed guidance through each stage to help business owners develop the confidence that they can achieve a successful exit, on their terms.

Sarah Chilcott, Director of hgkc, added "This is a very exciting point in the evolution of hgkc. We believe in levelling the playing field. Every business owner - whether they are a sole trader or chair of a mid-cap - will exit at least once, and for most it will be the first time they have ever done so."



SS&L

SS&L is a Community Interest Company rooted in Somerset, changing lives through learning. We deliver apprenticeships, programmes for young people, and adult learning opportunities that remove barriers, build confidence, and develop skills for meaningful careers.

As we move into 2026, employers are thinking about skills gaps and staff retention, especially in the early months of the year when people may be considering a change. Apprenticeships offer a practical solution, not only for bringing new talent into organisations but also giving existing staff the chance to grow and develop.

Our Level 5 Operations Manager, Level 3 Team Supervisor, and Level 3 Business Administrator apprenticeships enable staff to develop leadership, management, and

operational skills aligned with organisational goals.

In specialist sectors such as early years and schools, our programmes provide clear progression pathways, supporting workforce stability and long-term development.

Our bold, people-centred approach sets us apart. We support all learners and create opportunities that everyone can access. By working alongside employers and local communities, we help people develop skills, build confidence and achieve their potential, while also helping businesses grow stronger teams.

At SS&L, supporting people and making a positive impact isn't just what we do - it's who we are.

sslcourses.co.uk, 0330 332 7997.



Level Up (South West)

2026 sees Level Up (South West) is entering its 20th Year supporting the growth of independent businesses and organisations across Somerset and the wider South West.

In that time, founder Graeme Crosbie has supported over 270 SMEs on coaching and training programmes, giving business owners and their senior teams the skills, tools and confidence to grow their organisations and their people.

A key part of that is overcoming the most common barriers to growth that every organisation will face at various points on their journey - Financing Growth, Accessing new Markets, and Growing Management Capacity.

Level Up offers customised Leadership and Management Development programmes to SME Business Owners across the county, using a combination of training, coaching and mentoring support for emerging, middle and senior management teams.

Since 2022 alone, over 250 managers have enrolled on these programmes. They are actively enabling business owners to grow management capability, plan for succession, shape the culture of their organisations and drive higher levels of performance and productivity.

Because all of our programmes are bespoke to the individual business, our first step is to understand what your business needs; for a free, no-obligation exploration of what we can offer, contact Graeme on 01458 253366 or via the website at www.levelupsouthwest.co.uk.

Chrysalis Courses

As demand grows for skilled professionals in mental health and wellbeing, training provider Chrysalis Courses are playing a vital role in supporting workforce development across the UK.

Specialising in high quality vocational training in counselling and hypnotherapy, Chrysalis Courses offers a structured progression of fully accredited, nationally recognised qualifications.

These range from Level 3 introductory courses through to Level 5 professional counselling qualifications and, subsequently, a wide range of continued professional development options. Courses are designed to equip learners with both the theoretical knowledge and practical skills required to work ethically and confidently in the field.

A key strength of Chrysalis is its flexible learning model,

enabling students to balance training with employment or caring responsibilities. Learners benefit from both face to face and online study resources, including extensive tutor support.

Their offering includes clear pathways into professional practice, alongside guidance on setting up in private practice or progressing into further training.

By focusing on real world application, reflective practice and personal development, Chrysalis supports individuals seeking meaningful career change as well as those already working in health, care or support roles.

In a sector where skilled practitioners are increasingly essential, Chrysalis Courses continues to contribute to local and national skills development, empowering people to retrain, upskill and build rewarding careers in counselling and therapeutic practice.



Re:assure Safety & Risk Management

At Re:assure, we deliver safety training in a way that aligns with your organisation's unique needs.

Every course is shaped around your working practices and the specific risks in your environment, helping your team connect with the content and build the knowledge and confidence to make a positive impact at work.

Our professional trainers bring extensive industry experience, using real-world examples and practical insights to engage learners and strengthen understanding.

Our safety training solutions include:

- Re:assure Safety Training: A range of essential in house courses designed to protect

your people, your workplace and the environment

- Re:assure Safety Influencer: An interactive session focused on human behaviour, helping attendees understand how to encourage and influence safe practices across the organisation
- IOSH Safety Training: Nationally recognised qualifications that highlight the importance of personal and shared responsibility in maintaining a safe, healthy workplace
- Online Safety Training: Cost effective and flexible e learning with over 100 sessions, allowing your workforce to develop skills with minimal disruption to productivity

We can combine or tailor any of our courses to meet your specific requirements, helping you empower

your people and strengthen your business.

For more information, call 07577 621177 or email training@reassure-safety.co.uk.



BOP

BOP (Behavioural and Observational Practise Training) is an interactive training company which challenges and informs their clients, giving them many instantly usable communication skills and techniques.

BOP empowers clients to be their very best when sharing information with clients or colleagues; increasing their status and charisma, while identifying how people like to be presented to and what helps them make decisions and fashion relationships.

BOP sessions give attendees an understanding of how to maximise presentation skills and enjoy doing it.

With a background in theatre that includes award-winning spells at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre team BOP has created a split training offer for 2026 that covers the journey from 'the stage to the screen'; from face-to-face presentations to remote meetings.

Session 1 looks at the way actors use nerves as a positive and not debilitating force and draw on their individual experiences and authentic personalities to engage with customers.

Often the customer is a casting director or a producer, with the opening relationship building challenge being synonymous across industries; one of engaging with people and creating a relationship with their clients before having the opportunity to share their content with the 'audition' itself.

Session 2 is a follow up on-screen session that helps clients develop remote relationships and use the discipline of the camera to maximum effect.

Learn where to place yourself on the screen, how to create an appropriate online energy and how to exploit the asset of the camera to ensure your message lands most effectively.



Pitman Training Taunton

Pitman Training Taunton is proud to celebrate Isobel Fitzgerald-Pollard as its Student of the Year, recognising her exceptional commitment to professional development and the impact of skills-based training on her career progression.

The achievement was highlighted at the Somerset Chamber Business Skills Summit, where Isobel confidently addressed an audience of 150 delegates shortly after her Pitman graduation.

Speaking about her career journey, she said she had chosen a practical, employment-led route rather than

university, developing her skills while working at Junction 24, a unique multi-sector venue in the South West.

Isobel completed the Pitman Training Event Management Diploma through Pitman Training Taunton, combining structured learning with hands-on experience. The programme supported her growth in confidence, capability and professional maturity, enabling her to excel in event planning while gaining exposure across hospitality, agriculture, transport and wedding services. Her development was made possible through the active support of her employer and Pitman Training Taunton's dedicated learning team.

"This is exactly why we do what we do," said Debbie Frankland, Centre Manager at Pitman Training Taunton. "Isobel's journey demonstrates how focused, flexible skills training can open doors, build confidence and create real career momentum."

Pitman Training Taunton operates at the heart of the skills and training sector, working closely with employers and individuals to deliver practical, industry-relevant qualifications. Celebrating Isobel as Student of the Year reflects Pitman's mission: to champion alternative pathways, close skills gaps and empower people to succeed in today's evolving workplace.

PITMAN
TRAINING



Pardoes Solicitors celebrates the opening of a permanent Yeovil Office

Pardoes Solicitors was delighted to welcome around 70 clients, professional referrers, local businesses, colleagues, friends and family to a drinks reception held to celebrate the opening of the company's new Yeovil office.

The event took place at The Old Post Office on King George Street (next to Barclays, opposite the library) which has recently undergone a full renovation to transform the landmark building into a vibrant, contemporary workspace for the growing team at Pardoes, while retaining its original character.

Guests were able to enjoy an exclusive look behind the scenes at the refurbishment, with before-and-after photography showcasing the scale of the project and the care taken to breathe new life into one of Yeovil's iconic buildings.

The atmosphere on the night was warm and celebratory, marking both

the company's long-term commitment to Yeovil and the opportunity to bring together members of the local business community over the festive period. Attendees enjoyed festive drinks, canapés and the chance to meet the Pardoes team based at the new office.

Bhavani Hogarty, CEO of Pardoes Solicitors, said: "We are absolutely delighted to open our doors in Yeovil. The Old Post Office is a much-loved local landmark, and it has been a privilege to restore it and create a



welcoming home for our team and our clients.

"We are very grateful to everyone who joined us to celebrate. The warmth and support from the local community has been wonderful and we are excited to continue building strong relationships here in Yeovil."

Pardoes' move into the town centre reflects its commitment to being accessible and visible within the communities it serves. The location strengthens the company's presence in South Somerset and supports its ongoing growth across the region.

Pardoes thanked everyone who joined the celebration and contributed to the evening. The firm said anyone who was unable to attend was welcome to visit the new office, meet the team and take a look at the renovated space.

Pardoes
Solicitors

Carly Press expands production capabilities for customers

carlypress

Carly Press has recently expanded its production capabilities with the installation of a Canon Colorado M5, marking a significant investment in the future of the family-run print and design business.

The new large-format printer has been installed at the Carly Press site in Wellington and represents a major step forward in both capacity and quality.

With production speeds of up to 159m² per hour, the Canon Colorado M5 enables the team to deliver high-volume projects more efficiently, while maintaining exceptional colour consistency and finish.

For customers across Somerset and the wider South West, this investment translates into faster turnaround times, greater reliability, and the ability to take on larger, more ambitious print projects with confidence.

It supports Carly Press' ongoing commitment to designing and printing high-quality products, delivered with

outstanding customer service, even as demand continues to grow.

With over 40 years as a family-run business, Carly Press continues to evolve alongside its customers.

This latest addition reflects a long-term approach to investment, strengthening production capability while enabling the team to handle greater volumes and more complex projects without compromising on quality.



Rae & Co Creative opens a new chapter of growth and creative collaboration in Langport

Building on continued success, Rae & Co Creative has opened a new studio at Great Bow Wharf in Langport. Previously, the team was home-based and worked remotely.

Creative Director Kirsten Rae, who founded the agency in 2018, said the company had grown into a trusted creative partner for businesses, helping them to strengthen their brand presence.

She said: "Our new space marks a bold step forward - a dedicated hub for creativity, collaboration, and connection.

"From here, we'll continue to help businesses across Somerset and beyond bring their brands to life through brand strategy, development and creative direction, graphic design, brand content creation and photography amongst much more."

Kirsten said the team was already planning a new programme of creative events and workshops for 2026 and thanked everyone who had supported the business over the years.

National recognition for Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance at excellence awards

The team at Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance (DSAA) has been recognised at this year's Air Ambulances UK Awards of Excellence, coming out winners in two categories and earning high commendations in two others.

The awards celebrate the exceptional achievements, commitment, and expertise of those who bring specialist lifesaving skills and support to the air ambulance sector.

Specialist Practitioner in Critical Care, Steve Westbrook, won the 'Practitioner of the Year' category. His outstanding leadership, exemplary patient care, support for colleagues at incident scenes, contribution to major incident planning and the creation of a voluntary responder scheme were all key factors in securing this prestigious award.



Steve said: "I am very honoured and humbled to receive this award and it was a big shock to have won. I would like to thank the amazing team at DSAA I work with and of course my wonderful wife and family for their unwavering support for the job I do."



Captain Kev Rutherford was the winner of this year's 'Air Ambulance Pilot of the Year' after going above and beyond his core role as a pilot for DSAA. He was recognised for his technical skill, calm leadership, compassion, and the wide range of voluntary

responsibilities that demonstrate his dedication to others.

Kev said: "I was humbled and honoured to be nominated for this award by DSAA. To go on to win is special but is really a recognition of the exceptional standards that the entire aviation team at DSAA demonstrates every single day."

Chloe Riley, Patient and Family Liaison Nurse at DSAA was highly commended in the 'Aftercare Supporter of the Year' category. Her work over the past year has touched on every aspect of aftercare - supporting patients and families, empowering clinicians, fostering regional collaboration and shaping national practice.



Chloe said: "With patients and families at the heart of everything we do, I am proud to work in a role dedicated to supporting all those who have been treated, affected, or touched by such a wonderful air ambulance charity."



Dr Matt Taylor has worked for DSAA for the past six years and was highly commended in the 'Critical Care Doctor of the Year' category. Matt demonstrates extraordinary impact for the region's patients and their families.

Matt said: "The award recognised the work of all of us at DSAA, who provide the best possible care to patients who are critically ill or injured across Dorset and Somerset. Every day I am inspired and humbled by the patients I meet working on the helicopter - it's a great privilege to be part of this team."

Jack crowned Apprentice of the Year at national awards

Degree Apprentice Jack Lewis has been crowned the Association of Colleges (AoC) Apprentice of the Year at the annual AoC Conference and Exhibition, an event that celebrates exceptional students from colleges across England.

The national awards recognise individuals who have excelled academically while making significant contributions to their colleges, workplaces, and communities. As always, the competition was fierce, with a high volume of outstanding applications from across the country.

Jack is currently studying at University Centre Weston (UCW), following in the footsteps of UCW alumnus Kam

Stevens, who previously won the Higher Education Student of the Year award at the AoC Awards in 2023.

Jack is Level 6 Manufacturing Engineering degree apprentice working at Singer Instruments and studying at University Centre Weston. He distinguished himself through the substantial real-world impact he has had on the organisation.

He introduced advanced 3D-printing technologies that transformed manufacturing processes, reduced environmental impact, and significantly cut production costs. His redesign of microscope components not only removed the need for hazardous chloroform but also



reduced the unit cost from £24 to just 17 pence, dramatically improving both safety and efficiency.

Last year, Jack also won the Somerset Business Awards Apprentice of the Year, hosted by the Somerset Chamber of Commerce — and it's fantastic to now see him receive UK-wide recognition, positioning him as the top apprentice across all participating colleges in the country.

Westcotts marks 40 years of supporting South West businesses

Westcotts, one of the South West's leading firms of Chartered Accountants and Business Advisers, has celebrated its 40th anniversary - marking four decades of providing trusted advice and specialist expertise to individuals, SMEs and organisations across the region.

Founded in Honiton in 1985 by Richard Thomas, Westcotts has grown from a single office into the major regional firm it is today - with a team of more than 300 working across a network of offices across Devon, Somerset and now Wiltshire.

To mark the anniversary, Westcotts brought together team members from all its offices for a firm-wide celebration event held at Sandy Park, Exeter.

Shona Godefroy, Westcotts Managing Partner, said: "Reaching 40 years is a significant milestone and reflects four decades of trusted relationships, the expertise of our people and the resilience and ambition of the South West's business community.



"We are grateful to our clients, colleagues and partners who have been part of our journey so far. As we look ahead, our focus remains the same - being present where and when it matters, supporting businesses to build strong, successful and resilient futures and contributing to the prosperity of the region we are proud to call home."

Westcotts' approach centres on being embedded in the communities it serves. Over its 40 years, the firm has continually expanded its specialist services to meet the evolving needs of clients, building specialist teams across audit, tax, advisory, payroll,

corporate finance, digital accounting and business recovery, all working together to provide integrated, practical solutions that add real value.

The firm is also winning national recognition for its business practices and as an employer of choice, having achieved Investors in People Gold and been shortlisted for UK Employer of the Year in the 2025 Investors in People Awards. It has also appeared in The Sunday Times Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers for a third consecutive year, reflecting a commitment to developing and retaining talent across the South West.



Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital awarded GOLD by the National Joint Registry

Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital is celebrating being named as a National Joint Registry (NJR) Quality Data Provider after successfully completing a national data quality audit programme for their hospital.

The NJR collects and monitors high-quality orthopaedic data on the performance of hip, knee, ankle, elbow and shoulder joint replacement in order to support patient safety, standards in quality of care, and overall

value in joint replacement surgery, as well as to provide feedback on surgical performance to orthopaedic clinicians and joint replacement implant manufacturers.

The 'NJR Quality Data Provider' certificate scheme was introduced to offer hospitals a blueprint for reaching high-quality standards relating to patient safety and to reward those who have met the registry's high targets in the achievement of the quality of the data collected.

The annual NJR Data Quality Audit compares the number of joint replacement procedures submitted to the registry to the number of procedures that have been carried out and recorded in the local hospital Patient Administration System.

The audit ensures that the NJR is collecting and reporting the most complete, accurate data possible in all hospitals performing joint replacement operations, including Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital



Heidi Finney, Director of Clinical Services at Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital, said: "Improving patient safety through all possible mechanisms and data reviews is of the utmost importance and all staff at Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital take this very seriously.

"We fully support the National Joint Registry's audit work in enabling improvement in clinical outcomes for the benefit of joint replacement patients and we're delighted to be awarded as an 'NJR Quality Data Provider'."

Medical Director of the National Joint Registry, Mr Tim Wilton, added: "The Quality Data Provider Award received by the team at this hospital demonstrates the high standards that are being met in ensuring compliance with the registry and is a reflection of the strong departmental efforts to achieve such status."



Lottery funding secured for ambitious Chew Valley Hoard project

The South West Heritage Trust has secured a £993,345 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver an ambitious two-year engagement project to celebrate the Chew Valley Hoard and mark the 1,000th anniversary of William the Conqueror's birth.

Comprising 2,584 silver coins, the Chew Valley Hoard is the highest-value treasure acquisition on record and comes from the period of turmoil immediately following the Norman Conquest. Thanks to the grant award, an exciting new gallery will be created at The Museum of Somerset dedicated to the permanent display of the remarkable collection.

The project includes a dynamic two-year community engagement programme featuring activities, exhibitions, learning opportunities and events.



The award will also support improved access and visitor facilities at the museum, housed in Taunton Castle.

The project is timed to coincide with international plans in

2027 to commemorate the 1,000th anniversary of William the Conqueror's birth, highlighting the Norman Conquest and its lasting impact on the nation's history.



South West Heritage Trust Chief-Executive, Sam Astill, said: "We are tremendously grateful to have received this support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, audiences will have the chance to explore this national treasure through an exciting and diverse programme of engagement activities.

"This award also signifies a major investment in the museum's future, helping us improve access, broaden participation, and ensure this remarkable collection can be enjoyed for generations to come." Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Somerset Council's Executive Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, said: "The Chew Valley Hoard is a hugely significant treasure in every sense of the word and we cannot wait to welcome it back home to Somerset."

From spring 2027, a special exhibition will open at The Museum Somerset, Taunton, offering the public a unique opportunity to explore the remarkable story of the Hoard and its discovery.

£50,000 boost helps Somerset communities cut waste

Over £50,000 has been awarded to nine Somerset-based groups dedicated to reducing waste through the Waste Not Somerset Fund, managed by Somerset Community Foundation (SCF).

Jointly funded by Somerset Council and its collections contractor SUEZ recycling and recovery UK, the Fund reinvests income generated from the sale of recyclable materials to support local groups to reduce waste, increase reuse and repair, and encourage sustainable behaviour.

"The grants go directly to community groups who are making a difference on their doorstep," said Kirsty Campbell, Senior Programmes Manager at SCF.

"From holding clothes swaps for disadvantaged families to setting up a repair shop and collecting donated tech – we're pleased to support the many creative ways that our communities are helping reduce waste and boosting sustainability in Somerset."

Last year, four groups received grants from the fund, with a further five groups supported in the latest round.

This year's grants were awarded to projects across the county, including:

- able2achieve – helping set up a Yeovil Repair Shop and expanding its reach
- Bridie's Farm – establishing a community composting loop and recycling hub in Glastonbury
- Donate IT – funding one staff member to manage donated tech and reduce digital exclusion across Somerset
- Wellington Methodist Church – expanding a clothes and equipment swap for babies and children under five, aimed at disadvantaged families in Wellington
- Weston Hospicecare – creating an upcycling and repair zone in Burnham-on-Sea

Successful applicants were chosen by a panel with representatives from SUEZ, Somerset Council, Community Action Groups Somerset and SCF.

Since the first round of funding in 2024, the programme has diverted over 20 tonnes of waste from being thrown out.

**Somerset
Community
Foundation**



Samuel Fisher, Senior Community Liaison Manager at SUEZ recycling and recovery, said: "Diverting unwanted items from disposal is a priority for Somerset.

"We have awarded grants to projects that will have a positive impact for sustainability, the environment and the communities we serve. We were impressed that each project showed an innovative approach to introduce reusable items back into the local economy."

Somerset Community Foundation is a grant-making charity that helps build strong communities by funding local charities and facilitating local giving.



Stephens Scown's Somerset Success Story

As a regional heavyweight law firm with a reputation for doing things differently, Stephens Scown LLP is proving that leading on values-led legal services is a recipe for success in Somerset.

Employee Ownership: a decade of empowered growth

Becoming the UK's first large employee-owned law firm in 2016 wasn't a branding exercise; it was an intentional shift in the firm's DNA. The structure empowered colleagues at every level, giving them a real stake in the business and a voice in its direction. The result? A surge of collaboration, innovation, and accountability that has propelled year-on-year growth and helped the firm deliver even stronger client service.

Ten years after its transition to employee-ownership, Stephens Scown continues to benefit from the long-term impact of that choice, maintaining its place as one of the Sunday Times Best Places to Work in 2025 and recently reporting another year of robust financial performance for 2024-25. Delivering double-digit growth and reinforcing its commitment to values-led, sustainable business, profit before members' remuneration and profit share reached £12.2m, a 26% increase, while turnover rose to £31.1m, up 13%.

Commenting on the results, Richard Baker, Managing Partner, said: *"This year's financial performance and robust profit growth, coupled with retaining our Sunday Times Best Places to Work for 2025 placing, puts us in strong position for the future and an attractive proposition as a leading South West employer."*

"Our growth enables us to continue investing in our people, our clients, and the communities we're proud to be part of, cementing our position as a heavyweight South West law firm."



Richard Baker, Managing Partner

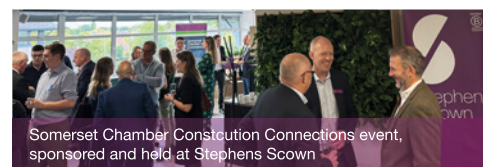
Achieving Net Zero

As a proud B Corp Certified organisation, Stephens Scown is committed to meeting the highest standards of social and environmental performance. Four years on from setting an ambitious goal to reach net zero carbon emissions by the end of 2025, the firm has now successfully delivered on that promise.

This milestone has been driven by the leadership of Sustainability Lead Verity Slater, supported by Facilities Manager Jaime Thornton, whose work has ensured the firm's offices operate with sustainability at their core. Their efforts were amplified by an innovative Net Zero Hero employee engagement campaign, which empowered colleagues to make meaningful changes, from choosing low carbon travel options to reducing waste, electricity consumption, and paper use.

Together, these collective actions significantly cut the organisation's carbon footprint, enabling Stephens Scown to responsibly offset its remaining emissions through certified removal credits. It's a powerful example of how ambitious targets, collaborative culture, and genuine commitment can create real environmental impact.

Are you passionate about delivering exceptional service to clients, while making a positive impact on your colleagues, local communities, and the environment? If you're ready to take the next step in your legal career, we'd love to hear from you. Please send your CV to **Izzy Shannon** at I.Shannon@stephens-scown.co.uk.



Somerset Chamber Constitution Connections event, sponsored and held at Stephens Scown

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Bank of England summary – businesses hope for a modest pick-up in activity in 2026

By Malindi Myers – Bank of England Agent South West.



@BoESouthWest



Intelligence continues to describe a lacklustre economy, with contacts' sentiment affected by concerns over what the Autumn Budget would bring. Most expect, or at the least hope for, a modest pickup in real activity in 2026.

Early reactions to the Budget announcement suggest the clarity it brought is unlikely to unlock a major rebound but might allow a more gradual and marginal increase in activity in some segments of the economy.

Employment intentions are slightly negative with further risks to the downside. Firms have been cautious amid the uncertainty around the strength of Christmas trading and that surrounded the Budget. More firms report not replacing leavers, looking for efficiency gains instead.

Contacts expect pay pressures to ease slightly in 2026. Reported pay settlements for 2025 average 3.9%. Early indications for 2026 average around 3.5%. The Agents' pay survey, launched in early December, will provide a more comprehensive view of contacts' pay expectations early in 2026.

There is little change to contacts' inflation outlook, which is for gradual disinflation to continue in 2026. Many of the contacts spoken to post Budget say it has not significantly changed their 2026 pricing plans.

Consumer goods inflation remains modest for most components other than food inflation, which is thought to be at its peak. Consumer services firms continue to drive efficiency to moderate price increases as far as possible, given fragile demand and rising concerns about affordability. These are expected to moderate consumer services price inflation.

Goods and services sales volumes are stagnant, with demand inhibited by weak consumer confidence. Most contacts expect demand and confidence to remain subdued into the new year. It remains challenging for service providers in the face of weak consumer confidence.

Investment intentions have deteriorated further since the November ASBC, mostly due to domestic policy uncertainty, much of it linked to the Budget, weak and uncertain demand, and constrained financial headroom.

Contacts are uncertain about Government policy in areas such as tax incidence/rates/breaks, regulation, planning,

business rates, employment rights, and labour costs. They commonly cite these uncertainties as leading to delaying of investment and a low appetite to borrow.



Bank of England

Manufacturers continue to report lower export volumes on the same period last year owing to US tariffs and weakness in automotive and metals. Aerospace and defence sectors are the exception. EU demand remains subdued and contacts report difficulties holding onto market share, with some now growing their EU manufacturing capacity in response to Brexit.

Professional, financial, IT and construction related services report positive – but decreasing – revenue growth. This is attributed to rising uncertainty and reducing levels of foreign direct investment. US tariffs had negatively impacted export values for a range of wholesalers.

Annual revenue growth in business and financial services has eased, with Budget uncertainty offsetting a slight recovery in some subsectors. Contacts expect continued very modest turnover growth, with improved demand from Q2 as current sources of uncertainty ease and weaker subsectors recover from a low base.

Construction sector output continues to contract on last year. Construction activity is down, with new house building and commercial projects remaining below last year's levels due to high build and funding costs. Larger infrastructure and public sector schemes provide some support, and repair and maintenance activity is steadily increasing.

Credit availability remains steady for large firms, while smaller businesses continue to face tighter supply, reflecting ongoing caution among lenders and borrowers.

Recruitment difficulties remain around normal, on average, with persistent pockets of tightness for some roles and skills. Employee churn remains low, with staff reluctant to move given the uncertain environment.

Many firms continue to report squeezed profit margins and ongoing efficiency initiatives as mitigation.



Implementation of Employment Rights Act to cost £1bn per year

A Government impact assessment has estimated that once the Employment Rights Act 2025 is fully implemented, it will have a direct cost to business of £1 billion per year. The British Chambers of Commerce claims that the cost is likely to be a “massive underestimate” and many businesses are deeply concerned about the cumulative financial impact of the legislation.

Read more about the assessment at:

<https://www.britishchambers.org.uk/news/2026/01/era-impact-assessment-is-a-massive-underestimate/>

Small business confidence at lowest level since pandemic

Research by the FSB has revealed that small business confidence fell in the final quarter of 2025 to the lowest level since the Covid pandemic. The hospitality, accommodation and food sector recorded the worst confidence score, with 58% of respondents expecting a fall in revenues. A record 64% said taxation was the main cost pressure.

Read more about the research at:

<https://www.fsb.org.uk/media-centre/press-release/sort-out-the-cost-hikes-facing-small-firms-chancellor-told-MCFKKNLSWMRNDJRCIIVVCLLKFTXMM>

Plans to support smaller farms

The Government has announced plans to provide more support for smaller farms to drive growth, secure a thriving future for the sector and deliver high-quality, affordable food. The plans include reforms to the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and a £30 million Farmer Collaboration Fund to support farmer groups to grow their businesses.

Read more about the plans at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reynolds-backing-farmers-with-a-new-era-of-partnership-to-boost-farm-profitability>

Free occupational health training for small businesses

Occupational health training will be funded by Government for small businesses across England between January and March 2026. The free training, provided by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, will provide employers with the practical skills needed to recognise the early signs that an employee needs additional help and support to avoid sickness absence.

Read more about the training at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drive-to-tackle-workplace-sickness-with-small-business-occupational-health-training>

Source: BAD News (Business Advisers News)

AI advice could result in financial losses

Research by Dext has revealed that 31% of accountants and bookkeepers have encountered client mistakes on a weekly basis, caused by wrong or misleading AI-generated financial or tax advice. The most common errors reported include incorrect interpretation of business expenses, incorrect VAT claims or charges, flawed personal tax planning, payroll errors and incorrect business tax planning advice. Around two-thirds of businesses use public AI chatbots for advice before consulting their accountant.

Read more about the research at:

<https://www.cityam.com/businesses-are-suffering-financial-losses-from-faulty-ai-advice>

Inheritance tax reliefs threshold to rise

The Government has announced that from April 2026, the level of the Agricultural and Business Property Reliefs threshold will be increased from £1 million to £2.5 million. This will allow spouses or civil partners to pass on up to £5 million in qualifying agricultural or business assets between them before paying inheritance tax.

Read more about the change at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/inheritance-tax-reliefs-threshold-to-rise-to-25m-for-farmers-and-businesses>




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