



'A perfect fit': Recycling firms complete acquisition deal

Regional waste management and recycling company Cawleys has been acquired by SUEZ recycling and recovery UK.

The deal for Cawleys - details have not been disclosed - is the second by SUEZ this year. The company sees the UK as a strategic growth area for SUEZ group, which has a target to reach 40 per cent turnover from international markets by 2027.

Founded in 1947, F&R Cawley Ltd is now a major provider of recycling and waste services to businesses. It employs more than 200 staff at its head office in Luton and facilities in Milton Keynes and Wellingborough, runs a fleet of 70 vehicles and handles 90,000 tonnes of waste

Cawleys purchase is part of new owner's UK expansion plans

every year from its 4,500 customers.

Strategy and communications director Anna Cawley said: "When it came to selling our business, we wanted to find a buyer who shared our values and who we were confident would maintain our excellent customer service. As a triple bottom line business with a strong track record in the industry, SUEZ is perfectly placed to take our business forward."

Cawleys' management team will continue to work with SUEZ and

will oversee the transition for both staff and customers, she added. Ms Cawley, however, is leaving the business to run waste management provider Wastesolve.

John Scanlon, chief executive officer of SUEZ recycling and recovery UK, said: "As we grow, we want to work with like-minded companies that share our commitment to putting our customers at the heart of what we do and who understand our triple bottom line approach that balances profit with

the needs of people and the planet. F&R Cawley are the perfect fit and I am delighted to welcome their team to SUEZ. This acquisition develops our footprint north of London."

Sabrina Soussan, chairman and chief executive officer of SUEZ, added: "This second acquisition in SUEZ's first year back in the UK recycling and recovery market highlights our ability to capitalise on opportunities in areas identified for strategic growth."

Cawleys complements SUEZ's offering solutions such as battery recycling, where SUEZ is already a major player in France with the development of a battery recycling facility in Dunkirk, she added.



Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce chief executive Louise Wall has issued a strong message to the UK's political leaders: Business needs economic stability, whichever party is in government after the next

General Election. She was speaking at the Silverstone headquarters of vehicle upcycling and electrification pioneer Lunaz, which hosted a visit by the Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer.

"It is vitally important that we get our message to all parties," Ms Wall (pictured with Sir Keir) said in a speech to an audience of business leaders and the national media.

Lunaz has also announced plans

to double its workforce of skilled engineers to 350 as the facility prepares to enter full production of up to 1,100 upcycled and electrified vehicles a year.

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Editor
Andrew Gibbs
news@pulsegroupmedia.co.uk



Publisher
Kerry Lewis-Stevenson
kerry@pulsegroupmedia.co.uk



Sales Director
Martin Lewis-Stevenson
martin@pulsegroupmedia.co.uk



Marketing & BDM
Devon Luffrum
devon@pulsegroupmedia.co.uk



Advertising Sales
Jan Lewis
jan@pulsegroupmedia.co.uk



Advertising Sales
Sharon Maplethorpe
sharon@pulsegroupmedia.co.uk

Feature Writers: Annie Roberts, Sammy Jones

Graphic Design: Simon Goodger

Photography: Steve Brill

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ESG matters...but employers cannot afford to create a plan

Boards are recognising that ESG - environmental, social and governance - plays a major role in perception of an organisation's brand and reputation. Yet less than one in ten have put in place a full ESG plan, new research by The Open University in Milton Keynes has found.

The number is low because of a lack of financial resources and essential skills, as well as businesses deterred by the complicated nature of the business. And more than 80 per cent of companies surveyed admit to not having the appropriate skills in each of the ESG categories.

The skills gap has been exacerbated by inflation and rising business costs which has put pressure on learning and development budgets. UK business leaders agree that ESG is a priority but they are struggling to put training plans in place to equip employees with the skills required to meet ESG, the research revealed.

The report aims to help businesses on their ESG journeys and outlines how organisations can bridge the existing skills gap. It includes insights and advice from ESG experts and encourages business leaders to educate themselves and their staff, to measure their goals and

OU study reveals limited resources are holding firms back

to use their voice to speak up in order to successfully implement ESG strategies within their businesses.

Dr Victoria Hands, director of sustainability at the OU, said: "Businesses now understand more than ever, that ESG performance is critical not only for the reputation of a modern organisation but also for success and profitability. These topics are now central to driving future success and investment to transform our society."

Among those organisations experiencing skills gaps, the most common gaps are in:

- Waste reduction (27%);
- Data analysis (25%);
- Energy tracking / usage (24%);
- Training & development (24%);
- Carbon accounting (23%).

"This report reveals that ESG conversations are happening frequently in all sizes of businesses, which is really encouraging," said Dr Hands. "While

conversations are taking place, it is crucial that strategies are put in place to help employers develop ESG-related skills and ultimately work towards future-proofing businesses, their workforces and the communities they serve.

"In upskilling for ESG, we have the opportunity to ensure that such a transition is equitable and inclusive of the diversity of people in our society. To help work towards sustainable goals, employers should explore developing long-term strategies through education, data measurement and the confidence to use a business's platform to speak up."

Training employees is one solution to addressing the ESG skills gap, added Phil Kenmore, the OU's director, corporate development and partnership.

"The survey shows that employers know how crucial ESG is for the future success of their businesses and a clear strategy for learning and development can be the right tool to help businesses get ahead with ESG and prepare for new roles that will emerge," Mr Kenmore said. "It is important that employers are aware of their options and invest in appropriate training programmes through partnering with an organisation such as the OU, to help them keep on track with achieving ESG objectives."



Avalon House

Investor buys Avalon House office building for £4m

An unnamed investor has completed the £4 million acquisition of a 30,000 sq ft two-storey office building in Milton Keynes.

The buyer now owns Avalon House on Linford Wood after completing the deal in only four months. The previous owner, a private investor, had decided to put the property on Saxon Street

up for sale after the building became vacant.

The vendor was represented by commercial property consultancy Kirkby Diamond in the negotiations. Partner and head of commercial agency Matt Bowen, who worked with senior surveyor Nick Bosworth on the deal, said: "Avalon House is

an excellent office building which represented a wonderful investment opportunity.

"Properties such as this come to the market infrequently and we therefore expected a great deal of interest from investors and owner-occupiers and we were not disappointed."

Avalon House was built in the 1980s.

Cardio contract sends pulses racing at fitness equipment company

Fitness equipment provider Dyaco UK has won a contract to install state-of-the-art cardio equipment at 11 Halo Leisure sites in the West Country and Wales.

The work is under way, with installation of the cardio machines equipped with the latest technology due to be completed by

the end of this month.

"We are thrilled to partner with Halo Leisure and contribute to the transformation of their fitness facilities," said national sales manager James Denniston at Dyaco UK's head office on Wolverton Mill in Milton Keynes. "We are confident that our collaboration will

provide an exceptional fitness experience"

Halo Leisure is a social enterprise and registered charity. Its operations director Jamie Bryant said: "We are passionate about creating healthier communities. Working with Dyaco will allow us to provide the very best experience for our customers."

Tech firm celebrates innovation award

A specialist technology company in Buckingham is celebrating after success at a prestigious business awards. Litenet was named the Most Innovative Telecommunications Company 2023 in the South East category of the Southern Enterprise Awards. The company works with clients including motorsport teams, Royal Societies and government embassies and has been recognised for its portfolio of technology solutions including ecologically sustainable smart locking and access control systems, mobile signal boosting technology that can flood a building with usable mobile signal, and satellite internet connectivity in the most remote of locations.

Director Chris Thomas said: "We are thrilled to have won such a prestigious award, as it evidences our 30 years' experience in researching, becoming accredited, and learning all of the products we offer so that our customers can feel comfortable with what they are buying.

"Customer service and relationship building is at the heart of what we do."

The roll-out of 4G, 5G and satellite technologies is enabling offices to get connectivity in rural areas and at home-worker locations. Litenet works with several companies installing mobile broadband and Starlink internet into places such as construction sites, rural business parks and home offices.

Litenet has seen growth in smart access control solutions such as door locks and padlocks that require no infrastructure or batteries and can be opened with a wave of the user's phone, with centralised cloud management and a full log of movement.

"BT's shutdown of the traditional telephone network is also driving a change in the way businesses communicate, with many going for a 'mobile-first' philosophy," said Litenet director James Miller.

"For these customers, ensuring they have the right software and sturdy connectivity is key."

Litenet also provides communications and connectivity solutions for clients in industries including education, logistics, marketing, professional services and religious institutions.

Chamber CEO: Business needs stability

Business wants stability, whichever political party is in government after the next general election, the chief executive of Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce has told an audience of senior businesspeople and national media.

Louise Wall was speaking at a visit, hosted by the Chamber, by Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer to electric vehicle upcycling company Lunaz's factory at Silverstone.

"The Chamber is an apolitical body that wants the best for business so it is vitally important that we get our message to all parties and that, whoever is

Labour leader hears the message for all politicians



Sir Keir Starmer tours the Lunaz factory with Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce chief executive Louise Wall and Lunaz's founder and chief executive David Lorenz

in government after the next General Election - whenever that falls - provides stability," Ms Wall said.

She welcomed proposals by Labour to replace the current business rates system, to accelerate planning decisions to speed up investment and to introduce legislation tackling late payments.

"We listen to businesses all the time and we have also been listening to what the Labour Party has planned," Ms Wall said. "These are just some of the measures that our members have been telling us they would like to see and we look forward to hearing more."

Sir Keir told the audience of national media and businesses that he wanted to 'get Britain

building' and that a sound economy would provide the platform to deliver for the whole country.

"This is a Labour Party that has broken new ground in our relationship with business," he added. "The party gets the value of private enterprise and understands working people want success as well as support.

"We know that borders must be secured, economic stability is the foundation for everything but that in tough times like ours, we must use the power of government carefully, but decisively. We need to stoke the fires of renewal, the pride and purpose I know burns inside communities like this."

Jobs boom as firm plans for full production

Investment in net zero technologies is set to ramp up at the manufacturing headquarters of the world's only dedicated industrial vehicle upcycling and electrification company.

Lunaz has announced plans to double its workforce by 2025 from 175 to 350 skilled clean-tech specialists at its factory at Silverstone.

The company is on course to upcycle 1,100 vehicles per year and is increasing its workforce as it prepares to enter full production. A global network of facilities will follow with Silverstone placed as the permanent R&D and engineering hub for a rapidly expanding international company.

The jobs boost confirms Lunaz's commitment to the UK, said the company's founder and chief executive David Lorenz. "We are showing no signs of slowing," Mr Lorenz added.

He made the announcement

on the day of a visit to Lunaz's Silverstone facility by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer. The Leader of the Opposition toured the 250,000 sq ft factory where Lunaz is converting commercial and passenger vehicles to its proprietary zero-emissions electric powertrains.

Sir Keir met members of the Lunaz team and was shown commercial vehicles at different stages of the restoration and upcycling process, developed in-house using Lunaz's proprietary battery and powertrain technology.

The Labour leader used the visit to state the importance of the role played by clean technology companies in accelerating the global shift towards net zero. The commercial vehicle upcycling and electrification sector, in which Lunaz is an international pioneer, is predicted to grow tenfold over the next five years.



Sir Keir Starmer addresses guests and (left) chats with Lunaz chief executive David Lorenz

"Companies like Lunaz show the incredible talent, innovation and ingenuity that exists here in Britain," Sir Keir said. "We will back to the hilt the ambition and innovation of British business. The UK has enormous potential to take a global leadership position in the critical path to net zero industry. Companies like Lunaz show how it can be done."

Upcycling and electrifying an existing industrial vehicle

saves more than 80 per cent of the embedded carbon compared to replacing it with a new one. A Lunaz-upcycled refuse truck is also better equipped for safety, comfort and driver wellbeing and represents a 25pc capital saving over its as-new equivalent for local authorities and business operators, the company said.

Local authorities including Buckinghamshire County Council and Biffa, the UK's leading sustainable waste

management company, have already committed to upcycling and electrifying significant proportions of their fleets with Lunaz.

Mr Lorenz said: "We welcome all policy that supports and stimulates growth in this vital and vibrant sector. We are encouraged to see political leaders engaging with and recognising the enormous power of the circular economy practices employed by Lunaz to accelerate our critical path to net zero."



This headquarters building on the Woburn Road industrial estate in Kempston would suit warehousing, research and development work or as a manufacturing facility, say

agents acting for the owner. They will accept offers for the 14,500 sq ft Paragon House or welcome a new tenant, said commercial property consultancy Kirkby Diamond. There is planning consent for an

additional 10,000 sq ft. "This potential to extend the building may appeal to ambitious companies that could grow their business in the future without having to relocate," said agency associate Andrew Clarke.

Growing companies eye HQ building's expansion potential

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Chambers join forces to back call for East West Rail delivery

Chambers of Commerce along the route of the East West Rail line have backed calls at national level for the government to speed up full delivery of the project.

The line will provide a vital boost for local economies along its length from Oxford to Cambridge, they say.

Among those eager for the line to open is Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce, which said EWR is vital to unlocking constraints on the local economy, attracting investment, generating jobs and delivering local and national growth.

The Chamber's chief executive Louise Wall said: "This project is an essential catalyst to a wealth of benefits and has our strong support."

The organisation, along with Bedfordshire, Thames Valley and Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce, have united to bolster the existing strong support for EWR from businesses across the entire route.

Milton Keynes has one of the highest start-up rates in the UK and healthy growth. However, said the Chamber, this has led to crowding which is limiting its potential. A large number of job vacancies are low-skilled and low-paid, transport costs are high and the city lacks academic links to expand and become a 'triple helix' model of private sector,

New line will drive regional and national growth, said CEO

public sector and academia necessary to drive forward growth.

East West Rail will improve connectivity and significantly reduce travel times, making jobs more accessible for people in Milton Keynes and Bletchley and widening the future workforce pool. The railway will bring businesses closer to their supply chains, research centres, and other sectors, creating a hub for innovation and enabling organisations to expand to accessible and affordable locations along the route.

Ms Wall said: "Milton Keynes is a thriving and growing business hub with great access to leisure activities yet is constrained by the existing transport network and a lack of space for businesses to expand. This is preventing people from accessing job opportunities and limiting inward investment. It is imperative that Bletchley and Milton Keynes are connected to the full route of East West Rail and that this transformational project gets delivered as quickly as possible to drive local and national growth."

Milton Keynes Chamber said that the National Audit Office's report, while acknowledging the inevitable issues around delivery, recognises the substantial benefits East West Rail will bring both regionally and nationally. The NAO report and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt's recommitment to the project in the Autumn Statement, are high-level endorsements for the project. Now EWR needs to be delivered at pace to ensure that the improved connectivity the railway will bring to Milton Keynes and Bletchley can generate wider economic growth for the region.

East West Rail includes an extensive upgrade of Bletchley station which will provide direct and faster connections to Oxford, Cambridge and Bedford. This will increase growth with more businesses drawn to Milton Keynes, bringing more high-quality jobs to the area.

Stu Young, co-founder of Independent MK, which supports local independent businesses, said: "Extra footfall is a key ingredient to keeping high street shops and small independent businesses thriving in our local area. Connecting Milton Keynes (Bletchley) to Oxford and Cambridge will help increase the number of visitors, strengthening the independent business scene even more."



Silver success at SME nationals

Business transformation specialist Yellowyoyo celebrates after winning a Silver award at the SME National Business Awards at Wembley Stadium. Directors Bryan and Amanda Wright are pictured (above) with Damian Cummins, managing director of awards organiser Events & PR.

George Davies Turf, based in Olney, was also among the businesses celebrating national success, bringing home a Silver award in the Service Excellence category. Pictured (below) with the award is managing director George Davies.



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VW goes carbon literate to tackle climate change

Employees across Volkswagen Group UK's offices have taken part in the annual International Carbon Literacy Action Day.

It is The Carbon Literacy Project's first and largest mass training event, where learners participate in and complete their day's worth of Carbon Literacy training simultaneously to become certified as Carbon Literate.

As part of the training, they pledge to reduce their own carbon footprints, using their new understanding of climate change in both their personal and professional lives.

Carbon Literacy training has been running in Volkswagen Group, whose UK head office is in Milton Keynes, since 2022, with 60 employees now certified as Carbon Literate. It teaches awareness of the cost and impact of carbon dioxide on everyday activities. VW Group UK has also tailored an Automotive Carbon Literacy programme for its employees, covering the science, impacts and actions to take against climate change and the relationship between the automotive industry and the environment.

The initiative is in addition to the group's global Project1Hour, which coincides with Earth Day in April, and encourages every VW employee worldwide to spend one hour taking part in a huge corporate climate workshop.

Phil Korbel, co-founder and director of advocacy at The Carbon Literacy Project, said: "We are getting on with the job of mobilising people from all walks of life, all over the world, to play the biggest part they can to minimise damage from the climate crisis. This is no

tick-box exercise. Everyone trained on the Carbon Literacy Action Day will come away with actions that they have devised, that maximise their carbon savings, whatever their position or skills.

"Most of all, we want to inspire the world with what Carbon Literacy does and invite all organisations and communities to pick up and use these unique tools."

Volkswagen Group UK, which comprises the Volkswagen Passenger Cars, Audi, SEAT, CUPRA, Škoda and Volkswagen Commercial

Vehicles brands, is responsible for almost one in five cars and vans sold in the UK and around one in four battery electric vehicles.

Volkswagen Group UK has taken significant steps to reduce its carbon emissions in 2023. These include the increased use of HVO fuels made from vegetable oils, LED lighting at the group's parts warehouse in the West Midlands and beginning to electrify its fleet of vehicles supplying trade parts centres across the UK. The group plans to fit solar panels to a number of UK sites.

MP hails breakthrough in electric vehicle range fears

Engineering company Samad Power is showcasing its work developing an answer to motorists' fears over the range of electric vehicles.

The company, based at Kiln Farm, has developed a portable EV charger that adds 60 miles of range to an EV within 20 minutes of plugging in.

Iain Stewart, MP for Milton Keynes South and chair of Parliament's Transport Select Committee, is pictured on a visit to Samad Power's factory to learn more about the device, how it works and how it can best be deployed for the benefit of EV drivers.

Electric vehicle ownership is forecast to increase in the run-up to 2035, by which date the government has banned the sale of new petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles in the UK. However, EVs currently have a limited amount of mileage before needing to be recharged and users remain anxious about potentially failing to reach their destination or a charging point.

A spokesman for Samad Power said: "The entire team takes pride in developing sustainable energy solutions to support the adoption of electric vehicles by addressing gaps in the charging infrastructure and thereby reducing range anxiety. We are excited to be contributing to the advancement of a sustainable economy and a

reduced carbon footprint in our community."

Samad Power was founded in 2010 by its current chairman Dr Seyed Mohseni and a group of Cranfield University's doctoral students in gas turbine engineering and technology. Its core expertise lies in design, development, and build of high speed direct drive turbogenerators.

In early 2018, the company invested in Electric Vertical Take-off and Landing programmes and has expanded its development activity to become a propulsion technology specialist in the high-value emerging market of hybrid electric aircraft.

The spokesman said: "Our dream is to offer a meaningful contribution to the improvement of our living environment and the quality of people's lives. Our goal is to provide cost-effective, reliable, efficient and environmentally friendly products that can transform the target markets through significant reduction of carbon emissions compared to existing technologies."

Mr Stewart said: "It was great to visit Samad Power at their facility in Milton Keynes and learn about how they are developing a portable electric vehicle charger. As we strive to be net zero, it is companies like Samad Power who are providing the solutions for future problems."



Iain Stewart (fourth from left), MP for Milton Keynes South, with his Samad Power hosts

Broker launches commercial division

Mortgage broker Mortgage Light is expanding with the launch of a new commercial division.

Services include finance for property purchase, refurbishment, invoice financing, asset finance, buy to let and business insurance.

The move is in response to a growing market, said Mortgage Light's director Siobhan Holbrook.

"We have taken the next step in our company's expansion," she added.

The commercial division is headed by Alex Stoyles, head of commercial lending and high net worth. He said: "Our clients will know us for assisting with the purchase of their own home or investment properties but many will not be aware that we also help customers with other areas of finance too."

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APPOINTMENTS



Nick Lloyd pictured with his predecessor as The Parks Trust chair Zoe Raven

The Parks Trust elects new chair

Law firm chair Nick Lloyd is the newly elected chair of the organisation that manages and maintains the parks and green spaces in Milton Keynes.

Mr Lloyd, chair of Knowlhill-based EMW, was voted in to succeed Zoe Raven as chair of The Parks Trust at its annual meeting. He has been vice chair since 2020 and on the board of trustees for five years.

"It is somewhat daunting to take on this role over

such a brilliant organisation with such a wide remit, from management of the parks to education to maintaining heritage sites to protecting wildlife and biodiversity to public art to flood defences," Mr Lloyd said. "We are all very proud of what the Trust is and does and very determined to make it even better."

The Parks Trust has also welcomed five new trustees: marketing professional Rupa Green; Joe Kingston, assistant director of parks and cleansing

at City of London; Martina Gorla, woodland officer at the Forestry Commission; Carla Veletrop-Martin, programme manager (heritage data) for Historic England and IT development specialist Graham Webster.

Paying tribute to Mr Lloyd's predecessor as The Parks Trust chair, chief executive Victoria Miles said: "Over the last decade Zoe has helped govern and guide our work in an objective, inspiring and selfless way."



Gary Savage

part of the Global Business Management.

He became head of smart Germany in 2013 and was promoted to global head of brand, product management and sales at smart until 2016 when he became chief executive of car2go. He moves to Milton Keynes after four years as chief executive of SHARE NOW.

Mercedes-Benz UK MD to retire after 14 years

Mercedes-Benz Cars UK chief executive and managing director Gary Savage is to retire in June.

He has been head of the marque's Milton Keynes-based UK operation since 2014, having joined the company four years earlier. His successor Olivier Reppert will join the company in March for a three-month handover period.

Karl Schregle, head of region Europe, Mercedes-Benz AG, said: "Under Gary's leadership Mercedes-Benz in the UK has gone from strength to

strength over the past 14 years. On a personal note, I have always valued the different perspectives that Gary brings to the business. I would like to thank him for his tireless efforts, outstanding contribution and excellent results and wish him a very happy and healthy retirement."

Mr Reppert began his career at DaimlerChrysler as an after sales product manager in 1998. From 2004 to 2008 he directed the dealer network development at MB Schweiz AG and was responsible for leading the MB regional strategy for China and Russia as

New trustee hails youth organisation's 'brilliant projects'

Young people's charity Action4Youth has appointed three new trustees to its board.

Actuary Louise Eldred, local government director Simon Sharkey-Woods and businessman Andrew Peters bring a wealth of expertise and a shared commitment to empowering youth through their diverse professional backgrounds, said Action4Youth's chief executive Jenifer Cameron.



"Their extensive expertise and shared passion for youth empowerment will strengthen Action4Youth's mission to improve all young people's lives."

Mr Sharkey-Woods (inset), who lives in Milton Keynes, said: "I visited brilliant Action4Youth projects during my time on the senior team at National Citizen Service Trust and it is now great to be able to contribute to their inspiring work as a trustee."

Trainees qualify as solicitors

Graduates Georgia McKenna and Ayesha Begum have started new positions with law firm Woodfines after completing a two-year training contract.

Both qualified as solicitors in November. Ms McKenna is now working in the litigation team while Ms Begum has joined the private client department.

Mike Hayward, partner and training principal, said: "We are excited to watch their progression."

Campaigners for greater investment in research into brain tumours have sealed a three-year fundraising partnership with London livery company the Worshipful Company of Feltmakers.

The Milton Keynes-based charity Brain Tumour Research has welcomed the company's decision to support its work, which will also contribute to the charity's UK network of Brain Tumour Research Centres of Excellence.

Estate agent Simon Wilkinson, owner and senior partner at The Wilkinson Partnership which has offices in Winslow, Leighton Buzzard and Bletchley, was elected Master Feltmaker by the Worshipful Company in October. Following his father John, he joined the Livery in 2000 and the Court in 2006. His association with the hat trade dates back to his great-grandfather who owned hat factories in Luton from the late 1880s to the 1920s, where he was also Mayor.

"I am delighted that we are able to support the vital work of this important charity which is the leading voice of the brain tumour community," said Mr Wilkinson. "One in three people know someone affected by a brain tumour



Master Feltmaker Simon Wilkinson (left) with Brain Tumour Research's chief executive Dan Knowles and the charity's founder and trustee Sue Farrington Smith

Hats off to charity's livery company link-up

and our members are working on creative ways in which we can raise funds."

Those will include ways to support the charity's annual Wear A Hat Day in March at the end of Brain Tumour Awareness Month. "The Feltmakers Company is a thriving and relevant influencer of the modern trade and business of millinery across the UK and internationally so it is particularly fitting that we can support Brain Tumour Research, a charity which has

become synonymous with the hat."

Mr Wilkinson and Company fellow members were at a reception hosted by Brain Tumour Research at its head office in Shenley Wood. "I am excited to see what we can achieve together," said the charity's chief executive Dan Knowles. "Brain Tumour Research has a long and successful track record of working with milliners and having the support of the Feltmakers will be an amazing boost for the charity."

Maximising R&D tax credits through pension contributions

Pension contributions and Research and Development tax credits may seem like separate financial considerations, but a strategic alignment of the two can yield substantial benefits for businesses in the United Kingdom. This synergy not only aids businesses but also stimulates innovation and economic growth.

R&D tax credits are a pivotal incentive in the UK, encouraging businesses to invest in innovation by offsetting R&D-related expenses. However, the connection between pension contributions and R&D tax credits lies in their impact on a company's taxable profits.

When a company makes pension contributions for its employees, it reduces its taxable profits. This reduction in taxable profits directly diminishes the corporate tax liability. As a result, businesses can free up more capital that can be redirected into R&D projects, amplifying innovation efforts.

Moreover, pension contributions serve as deferred compensation for employees, demonstrating a commitment to workforce well-being. Attracting top talent, which is vital for innovation, is made easier through such contributions.

Critically, pension contributions increase the

overall qualifying R&D tax credit expenditure as staff costs. This means that the value of the R&D tax claim increases in direct proportion to the pension contributions made on behalf of employees. By strategically navigating this complex interplay between pensions and R&D tax credits, businesses can optimise their financial planning.

In conclusion, the strategic alignment of pension contributions and R&D tax credits in the UK presents a mutually beneficial opportunity. Businesses should recognise that reducing taxable profits through pension contributions frees up resources for R&D, enhancing innovation and competitiveness. Additionally, by increasing the qualifying R&D tax credit expenditure through staff costs, businesses can amplify the value of their R&D claims. This synergy is not just about financial planning; it is a strategic tool for progress.

As we advance towards an innovative and sustainable future, pension contributions should be viewed as a crucial component in a business's growth strategy. By aligning pension planning with R&D tax credits, businesses can secure their financial future, foster innovation, and contribute to the nation's technological advancement and economic prosperity.

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Cyber security specialist sold in landmark deal

BID funds emergency kits at venues

Life-saving bleed control kits have been provided to 14 venues across Central Milton Keynes by the MyMiltonKeynes Business Improvement District.

The kits are designed to control bleeding in an emergency where someone is suffering from a catastrophic bleed, whether it is from an assault, a fall or a road traffic collision. Each kit contains dressings, chest seals, tourniquets, gloves, scissors and an instruction guide and can be used to stem bleeding until the paramedics arrive.

The City Centre Barwatch group requested that the kits be provided to bars and pubs in the city centre. Staff will receive training on how to use the kit should an incident occur at or near their venue.

MyMiltonKeynes



Find the full list of venues housing the bleed kits at www.mymiltonkeynes.co.uk

BID chief executive Jill Farnsworth said: “These kits really can save lives and, while we hope they are never needed, we now can be confident that if someone is seriously injured at or near one of these venues, the staff will be able to assist and help prevent the tragic loss of life.”

The provision of the bleed control kits is as a result of campaigning by Jason Fathers who lost his son Jay in a knife attack in 2021 and Joe McMahon, from the nightclub Pink Punters, who has worked with Mr Fathers to champion the importance of the equipment.

Tom Miell, chair of Barwatch in Milton Keynes city centre and general manager of Popworld said: “We are really pleased to work with the BID to make this project happen and would like to thank Jason Fathers, who has dedicated so much time and energy to raising awareness of the difference the kits make.”

Members of the public who witness an incident should always call 999 and ask for the ambulance service in a life-threatening emergency. The kits are designed to be easy to use in the moments immediately after a medical emergency.

Cyber security and IT specialist Bluecube has been sold to cloud solutions and managed services company Ekco.

The acquisition is the largest in the Dublin-based company’s history and its fourth in the past 12 months as Ekco continues its expansion programme.

The deal doubles the size of Ekco’s UK operations and takes the company’s revenue beyond €150 million.

Bluecube, founded in 2003 by its current chief executive James Hawker, has grown to become a mature and robust managed service business. Its security operations centre in Milton Keynes will enable dedicated IT security services to be delivered in the UK on behalf of Ekco’s local clients.

The acquisition will also add enhanced critical recovery capability to Ekco’s portfolio of services, which will further bolster its incident response offer - many organisations struggle to respond to cyber incidents such as ransomware, phishing and malware.

The ‘transformative’ acquisition positions Ekco as a key player in the UK MSP

space. Mr Hawker said: “At Bluecube our team has built a reputation on providing customer-centred services that address the ever-changing requirements of a diverse range of organisations.

“There is a close cultural fit between the two companies and we see multiple benefits from the deal for both staff and customers alike.”

Ekco has undergone rapid expansion across all its major markets in Europe in recent years, fuelled by a mix of organic and M&A-led growth. It also has a US office in Boston and currently employs more than 860 people, almost 600 of whom are engineers.

Its co-founder and chief operating officer Jonathan Crowe said: “This deal forms a key part of our overall

growth strategy, which is driven by a vision of unlocking the full potential of insightful and responsive IT and cyber security solutions to our growing customer base.

“Having access to Bluecube’s 200-plus people, all with specialist skills, as well as their impressive list of customers, made this an easy decision for us.

“As soon as we met the Bluecube team, we knew they would be a great operational and cultural fit for Ekco and would significantly enhance our ability to serve our UK customers.”

The managed service space is a rapidly expanding part of the IT sector globally. The sector is expected to grow to a global value of almost \$1 trillion in the next ten years.



Bluecube’s founder and chief executive James Hawker (left) with Ekco chief operating officer Jonathan Crowe

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ASKtheEXPERT

SHAREHOLDER AGREEMENTS

Each month we invite readers to submit questions on a burning issue they face in their business. We then turn to an expert in the field for the answer. This month the **Company Commercial team at Neves Solicitors** assesses an issue affecting a business with more than one shareholder: **The importance of a shareholder agreement.**

Directors in deadlock... and business sale is lost

The Question
I trust my business partner, why do we need a shareholder agreement?

The Answer
Running a business with someone can be very rewarding but it is important that you and your business partner have comprehensive documentation in place to deal with situations that can arise in the future. Using the case study of Debbie and Richard, let us explain why protecting your business interests with a shareholder agreement is essential.

Debbie and Richard ran a successful printing business. They had worked together for 25 years. Debbie was 58 years old and Richard was 50 years old.

Debbie held 75 per cent of the issued shares. Richard held the other shares and both were directors.

Debbie had decided that she had had enough in the printing industry. She wanted to sell the business. Richard, however, felt that he still had at least another ten years until he was in a position to retire.

A competitor had expressed an interest in acquiring the business but only if he acquired all the shares so that long-standing contracts the company had with key customers would remain without having to be assigned or novated as part of a sale of the assets and goodwill. For obvious reasons, he was also

not interested in acquiring only part of the shareholding.

Richard would not agree to sell his shares, particularly to this competitor, as they had fallen out over a customer years before.

Debbie, however, had always understood that with 75pc of the shares in the company, she could control it and make all the decisions. She needed the money from the sale of the business to be able to retire and was extremely frustrated to discover that she could not retire when she wanted to.

Without a shareholder agreement in place, there was very little that Debbie could do. A shareholder agreement could have included a provision that if the majority shareholder wanted to sell the business, the minority shareholder could be forced to sell their shares, provided that the same terms were offered to that minority shareholder, such as price per share. This is known as a ‘drag along’ clause and is very commonly used by majority shareholders.

Do you need to set up a shareholder agreement?
Talk to Neves Solicitors. Our specialist commercial solicitors will explain how the agreement works, what is expected of each business partner, what happens if a partner dies or decides to leave and how to deal with disputes.



Meet the Company Commercial team at Neves Solicitors: (from left) Jessica Williams, paralegal; Stewart Matthews, managing partner and head of company commercial; associate Kim Sayers; senior associate Simon Porter

The Company Commercial team of experts have many years of experience in a broad range of company/commercial matters including company sales and acquisitions, investment, fundraising and lending agreements, corporate reorganisations, shareholder protection, employee incentives and options (including EMI options), franchise agreements, management agreements and partnership matters.

Neves also assist a number of clients with wider ranging commercial documents including IT/Software licences/agreements, general commercial agreements and commercial property related documentation.

Contact the team on 0330 0945 500, at info@nevesllp.co.uk or visit www.nevesllp.co.uk



Entrepreneur’s breath of fresh air after award

The founder of a health technology company has won a major national award for entrepreneurship.

Jay Vitale, chief executive of air purification specialist Air For Life, has been named Global Entrepreneur of the Year, South East, at The Allica Bank Great British Entrepreneur Awards.

His was one of more than 5,000 applications and Mr Vitale, who set up the company after leaving medical school in London in 2006, follows in the footsteps of previous winners including Brewdog founder James Watt and BBC TV ‘dragon’ and social media mogul Steven Bartlett.

Mr Vitale said: “Receiving the award is a humbling and incredibly gratifying experience. This recognition is not just a personal triumph but a testament to the collective efforts of the entire Air For Life team. We are committed to pushing boundaries, fostering innovation, and making a positive impact in the world.”

After leaving medical school 17 years ago with the ambition to improve and protect the public and to find a solution to poor indoor air quality, Mr Vitale discovered a technology developed by NASA that eliminates ethylene gas produced by fresh fruit and vegetables. He



Jay Vitale moved to Texas to further his research at the home of NASA in Houston, where he founded Air For Life.

The company relocated to the UK and its current base at Wolverton Mill in 2017 as a health technology business approved by the UK government. Its products, which are designed for commercial and domestic premises and for vehicles, clean the air of bacteria, viruses and other impurities.

Tony Byrne, managing director of Wealth & Tax Management, argues that you get what you pay for when you appoint a tax specialist to maximise your tax savings.

Wealth & Tax Management
Designing your future
www.wealthandtax.co.uk

How to minimise your taxes

Let’s face it... once you have achieved business success in your life and built wealth, suddenly your biggest expense is tax - both business and personal, and guess what, taxes are going to rise substantially. So what are you going to do about it?

In my experience, it is a good starting point to appoint a tax accountant, not an accountant. A tax accountant is a qualified accountant who is also a qualified tax professional. So is a Chartered or Certified Accountant, who is a qualified tax consultant by examination of the Institute of Taxation. Your tax accountant should also be experienced so not a recently qualified accountant.

It does not stop there. You then need a tax accountant who recognises their strengths and weaknesses and who is willing and able to work with other tax specialists in their areas of knowledge such as VAT, Capital Allowances, property, research and development, Stamp Duty, offshore pensions etc. It is the equivalent of having a great GP who can refer you to various health specialist consultants.

Will the tax specialist be expensive? Yes, of course. Will the tax specialist give you great value for money? Almost certainly. If the tax advice costs a lot but the tax saving is a multiple of a number of times the fee you have paid, will it have been worth it? Yes, of course.

So what’s stopping you? Get your house in order. Make those large tax savings. You know it makes sense.

If you are interested in ways to save tax, why not take advantage of a one-hour Discovery Meeting either at our offices or via a video conference call at our expense worth £270 to each of the first three readers who contact us before 31 January 2024? You know it makes sense. We offer a great cup of coffee too.

Ring us on 01908 523740 or for free on 0800 980 4516 or email wealth@wealthandtax.co.uk and quote JANUARY 2024 OFFER to book your free discovery meeting.



Tony Byrne

RISK WARNING The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate tax planning. The information contained within this article is for guidance only and does not constitute advice which should be sought before taking any action or inaction. All information is based on our current understanding of taxation, legislation, regulations and case law in the current tax year. Any levels and bases of relief from taxation are subject to change. Tax treatment is based on individual circumstances and may be subject to change in the future. This article is based on my own observations and opinions.

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**WHERE WILL THE BUS
TAKE YOUR BUSINESS?**

Concerns over skills levels among the current and future workforce are an ongoing issue. But employers are developing links between business and the education sector to tackle the crisis.

>> Pages 10-13

Back in the classroom to bridge the skills gap

Business volunteers from companies based at Silverstone Park are to resume their work advising local secondary school students on career options and pathways.

The Silverstone Park Schools Programme worked with more than 800 students in 2023 and volunteers from employers based at the park are preparing to begin their series of activities with partner schools The Buckingham School, Sponne School in Towcester and Kingsthorpe School in Northampton.

They will visit the schools for a series of in-class career workshops and host visits by the students to their premises.

Silverstone Park occupiers Carbon Composite Solutions, CoFiGi Performance, Ducati UK, Fibonacci, Hexagon, Lunaz, Performance Projects, PUNCH Flybrid, Silverstone Composites and TD Group have all volunteered to take part in the programme. So have Silverstone Technology Cluster members engineering consultancy EES Solutions in Coventry, Luton-based electronics manufacturer Jaltex Systems and brake system designer NS85 in Warwick.

Silverstone Composites managing director Marcus Trofimov adds: "It is a really important initiative that is helping to address concerns about the skills gap in the local area.

"Our area of work, in manufacturing carbon fibre componentry for Formula 1 and advanced engineering sectors such as space and automotive, definitely falls under 'jobs of the future' and the career possibilities are exciting and many.

"Young people can often bring new ideas and fresh thinking to a project. We firmly believe companies should,

where possible, be supporting them through work experience, apprenticeships or full-time roles and opening their eyes to the opportunities through the Silverstone Park Schools programme is a great start."

CCS, which makes composite components for the motorsport and wider automotive sectors, is taking part in the programme for the first time.

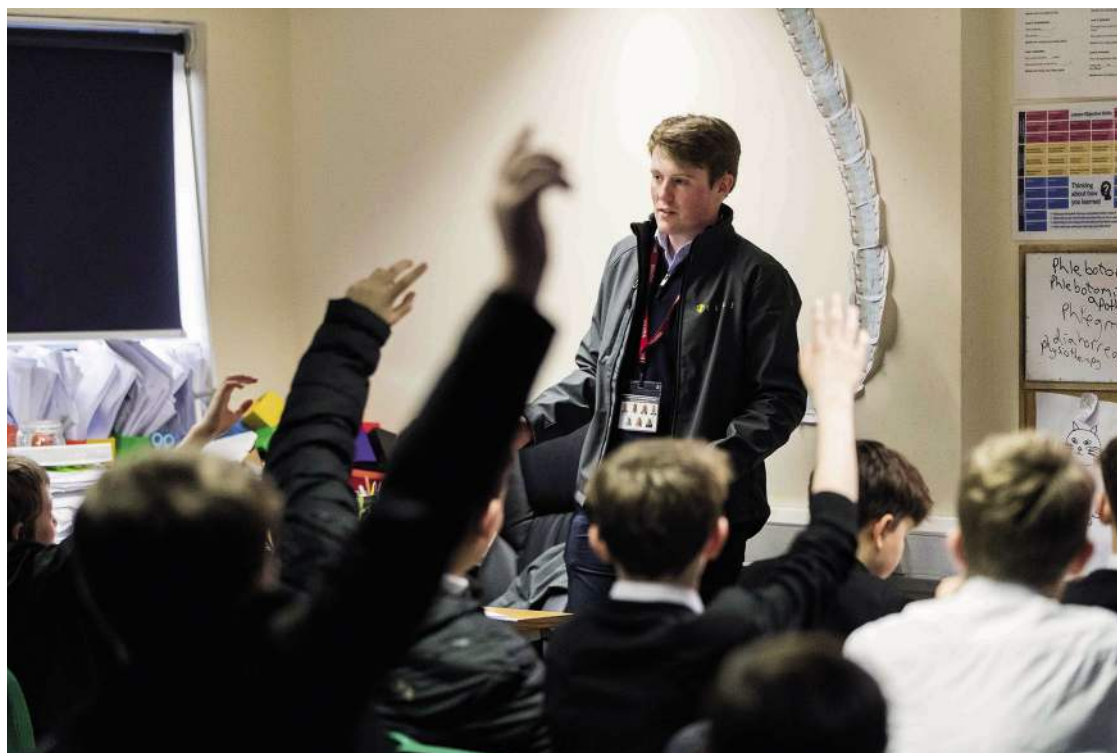
"We have decided to volunteer because the programme is delivering young people with the best careers advice possible - direct from employers," said director Scott Noon. "Conversely, this can only be of benefit to employers by helping them build a potential skills pipeline for the future.

"The minds of students - and also teachers and parents - are being opened to career possibilities that they otherwise might be unaware of, thereby helping to address issues surrounding a skills gap on both a local and national level."

CCS will send along at least one female engineer to the workshops. "We want to reach out to female students and help them realise that our type of work is very definitely not a 'male only' environment," Mr Noon said.

The programme is managed by careers outreach specialist Ahead Partnership and sponsored by Silverstone Park and developer MEPC.

"We convey a huge thank you to the network of business volunteers who are giving up their time to go into schools and run workshops for the students and who are also hosting the youngsters for a tour of their own businesses here at Silverstone Park," said MEPC's Ruth Williams, asset



The Buckingham School students with questions during a session with vehicle upcycling company Lunaz

manager at Silverstone Park.

"As the number of businesses locating to Silverstone Park increases, so does the number of people being employed here - many of whom are in their youth which is great to see. The feedback from schools and students themselves shows how much of a positive impact the Silverstone Park Schools Programme has had on young people and we look forward to building on that success during the 2023/24 academic year."

Added Leonie Matthews, Ahead Partnership's programme manager: "Silverstone Park's occupiers have

demonstrated their commitment to support local young people through their participation in our programme onsite. We are delighted to continue to deliver such impactful events and hope to build on the successes from this year."

The participating schools recognise the value of the programme. "The Silverstone Park Schools Programme gives students the opportunity to learn about new career paths that they might not have known about before, giving them the means to spark conversations with their parents at home," said Clodagh Shanahan, curriculum leader of business at The

Buckingham School.

Sponne School's PSHE learning leader Ann Warner continued: "The business volunteers demonstrate how it is possible to go from the classroom in your early teens to successfully running a business or holding a senior management role. This is giving our students a head start and is surely to the advantage of the local business community."

■ *Businesses wishing to volunteer for the Silverstone Park Schools Programme can email leonie.matthews@aheadpartnership.org.uk to find out more.*



Volunteers taking part in the Silverstone Park Schools Programme

'This is real conservation work, making a real difference'

Curator Carl Groombridge and his team are celebrating after the Zoological Education centre at Shuttleworth College near Biggleswade earned full membership of the British and Irish Association for Zoos and Aquaria

The achievement means recognition that the college, part of the Bedford College Group, is delivering the highest standards of training in the zoological field.

"This not an easy thing to achieve," said Carl (pictured). "It has taken us four years to prove that we are providing the very

best standards of training to meet the demands of industry and as a result we are collaborating with the best zoo collections across the UK,"

ZEC trains students aged 16-plus who hope to work in animal welfare, go into veterinary work or be employed in zoos, collections or on conservation projects all over the world.

"It starts with the basics, which is keeping animal enclosures and environments clean and free of contamination, includes helping prepare meals for animals with exotic tastes, and progresses on to



breeding programmes where we have actually helped produce some offspring of rare species which are under threat of extinction," said Carl. "This is real conservation work, making a real difference to animals in the wild. Students must know it does involve getting

your hands dirty but also requires serious study about the science behind the needs of the variety of species we have here.

The £4 million ZEC brings the Amazon and the Outback to the campus at Old Warden Park. Students to engage with the modern learning environment and develop hands-on skills with a range of species.

The ZEC is unique in UK further education, with a state-of-the-art tropical biome housing species of birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals in environments that replicate their natural habitat.

Ministers hears how study benefits career aspirations



Government minister Robert Halfon with MK:U's pro-vice-chancellor and chief executive Professor Lynette Ryals

Robert Halfon, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, is pictured on his visit to MK:U, the city's new university.

Mr Halfon and Milton Keynes North MP Ben Everitt toured MK:U's business innovation hub and teaching facilities before joining an online teaching session with more than 60 students in their second year of data science and digital technology apprenticeships.

They then met students working at companies including Santander, Grant Thornton, Volkswagen, Howdens, Thames Water, Travis Perkins, Nationwide and Zurich to hear about their Level 5 studies and their career aspirations.

MK:U's pro-vice-chancellor and chief executive Professor Lynette Ryals said: "I felt really proud to show the work we do at MK:U which is helping companies address the urgent skills gaps they have."

"Our students were fantastically engaging and talked to Robert Halfon about their study experiences and how they are able to apply learning from MK:U in their workplace straight away."

MK:U has more than 350 students registered and is on track to grow to over 400 by mid-2024. It is preparing to open in a second location in Unity Place and is working with employers to develop new courses.

Its Innovation Hub opened in March 2022 and brings together businesses, educators and innovators. It has almost 700 members who access co-working spaces, networking events and facilities such as podcast rooms and photography suites.

Mr Halfon and Mr Everitt also visited The Open University to hear from staff, students and apprentices about their distance learning experiences and how the OU approach has enabled them to access higher education.

OU vice-chancellor Professor Tim Blackman briefed Mr Halfon on the university's work to open access to education from a variety of routes including apprenticeships. He also discussed the OU's Gold award in

the Teaching Excellence Framework and a Queen's Anniversary Prize for its OpenSTEM labs initiative. "Government support for lifelong learning matters now more than ever," Professor Blackman said.

Mr Halfon said: "Distance learning at The Open University is a catalyst for social justice in education, allowing people to study and gain qualifications around the demands of life. It is a pathway that transcends boundaries, making quality learning accessible to diverse communities."

"By championing flexibility, they are not just imparting knowledge but also fostering a more inclusive educational landscape, ensuring the ladder of opportunity is extended to all."



... and joining an online session with MK:U students and MP Ben Everitt

Entrepreneurs 'to culture a new generation'

Six Entrepreneurs in Residence have begun work at The Open University helping aspiring business owners on the OU's Open Business Creators project.

Their appointment aims to provide support to staff, students and alumni looking to grow their businesses and ideas. By equipping participants with tools and resources, facilitating virtual events and offering a mentorship programme, the initiative aims to cultivate a new generation of business creators, the OU said.

Professor Kevin Shakesheff, pro-vice-chancellor for research and innovation, said: "We know

that among our staff, students, partner organisations and the wider public there are a multitude of commercial ideas that could drive innovation forward and help society. The Open Business Creators and Entrepreneurs in Residence projects helps to deliver the skills, mentoring and support needed to make these ideas a reality."

The Entrepreneurs in Residence are:

- Julian Hall, business mentor, author, winner of a British Citizen Award for Education and founder of the CIC Ultra Education which delivers entrepreneurship training.

- Safaraz Ali, chief executive of training company Pathway Group.

- Mags Byrne, lawyer and former chief executive at the English Premier League, Football Association England and England Boxing

- Christian Kumar, chief executive of Capital Kinetics and MedTech Makers Lab.

- Ravinder Gino Hoonjan, a Neuro Linguistic Programming practitioner and mindset coach specialising in company culture and mental health.

- Alex Cole, chief executive of Tin Ventures.

Yiannis Koursis is the new chief executive of the Bedford College Group, taking up his new role this month and replacing Ian Pryce, who retired at the end of 2023 after 25 years at the helm. Here, Mr Koursis outlines his vision for the group and pledges to align the curriculum at every level with the needs of employers and the regional community.

Curriculum will align with the needs of a rapidly evolving world

At the heart of the South East Midlands, The Bedford College Group is more than an educational institution. We are a catalyst, igniting the region's potential to thrive and transforming it into a dynamic powerhouse of talent and skill.

Providing an expertly trained workforce is crucial to the success of the region, government, regional partnerships, local authorities, employers, and businesses. Whether it is school leavers seeking T-Level, A-Level, Apprenticeships or Higher-Level qualifications such as Higher Technical Qualifications, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, or traditional paths to Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees, The Bedford College Group offers a comprehensive range of educational and skills pathways.

As the new CEO of The Bedford College Group, which is one of the nation's largest further education colleges, I will leverage our scale to influence the curriculum and courses and ensure we are fully aligned with the needs and demands of our communities and businesses.

The Group is not just raising the bar in education by improving attainment. It is also raising aspirations for all. The Bedford Sixth Form, with its growing population of 1,000 students, is a testament to this effort, solidifying the group's record

of sending more young people to university than any other institution in the region. This success is mirrored in the recently opened Sixth Form in Corby.

The group's reach extends to Leighton Buzzard and Luton, to Kettering, Silverstone and Wellingborough, providing a steady stream of skilled candidates for organisations across the UK and abroad.

Our commitment to innovation is showcased in the newly opened eco-refurbished riverside campus in Bedford. The campus offers state-of-the-art training in health sciences, engineering, construction, and digital fields, alongside degree-level arts and care.

Bedford College also includes the Gas and Heating Centre, where recruits are trained in the green technologies of tomorrow.

The group's Advanced Motor Vehicle department is pioneering the way in educating car maintenance staff on handling electric cars.

Further south, in a recent development, Central Bedfordshire College was integrated into the University Centre provision for the group, offering degree-level learning and pathways to university for learners of all ages.

In every location, we are leveraging our state-of-the-art assets to align, modernise and refresh our curriculum offer in a rapidly evolving world.

We are a catalyst, igniting the region's potential to thrive



Yiannis Koursis

Transport research wins Royal approval

Prince Daniel of Sweden and The Crown Princess headed a high-level delegation from Scandinavia to visit the latest in sustainable transport development taking place at Cranfield University. The visit included a Business Sweden industry showcase and an executive round table discussion on the future of transport with academic experts and UK and Swedish business leaders. Andreas Carlson, Sweden's Minister for Infrastructure and Housing and His Excellency Stefan Gullgren, Ambassador of Sweden, were also in attendance along with Lord Byron Davies of Gower, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Transport. Their Royal Highnesses visited Cranfield's world-leading Digital Aviation Research and Technology Centre and boarded the flying classroom, a Saab 340B.



The Swedish delegation, including Their Royal Highnesses, visit the Saab 340B flying classroom for aviation students at Cranfield University

A showcase of Swedish solutions for sustainable transport followed, with involvement from Einride, Scania, Volvo Trucks and Volvo Buses. Delegates also visited Cranfield's digital air traffic control centre, which was the first of its kind in the UK and which was supplied by Saab Digital Air Traffic Solutions. A round table discussion on the future of sustainability in transport solutions was hosted by Professor Anna Smallwood, head of Centre for Air Transport Management at Cranfield. With involvement from UK and Swedish

business leaders and policy makers, the discussion centred around creating a sustainable transport ecosystem, supporting innovation and developments and what businesses need from policymakers to do more. Professor Dame Helen Atkinson, pro-vice-chancellor of the university's School of Aerospace, Transport and Manufacturing, who welcomed Their Royal Highnesses with HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Susan Lousada, said: "It was truly a pleasure to host Their Royal Highnesses

at Cranfield along with distinguished visitors and many key industry leaders from Swedish businesses. It illustrates how Cranfield University is a key convenor, bringing together industry, academia, government, and amazing ideas - all to drive a sustainable future." Mrs Lousada added: "I was very proud to showcase the amazing research and teaching that takes place here. Cranfield is a global leader in sustainable transport, aviation and aerospace and it is a badge of pride to have this very special university in our county."

Scholarship honours a F1 legend

A new motorsport scholarship is set to continue the global legacy of Tyler James Alexander, one of the founding fathers of the McLaren Formula 1 team. The Tyler James Alexander Scholarship will offer a student access to the Advanced Motorsport Engineering MSc at Cranfield University. The successful applicant will also receive internships at UK and US motorsport racing teams and mentoring from leading professionals in the industry. The first Tyler James Alexander scholarship will be available for the 2024/25 academic year. Mr Alexander, who died in 2016, helped to establish the McLaren F1 team and was

highly influential in building the success of McLaren across many decades. His partner Jane Nottage has established the scholarship as a legacy to the impact he had on the motorsport industry. She said: "When I discovered the 50 years of Formula One engineering history that Tyler left when he died, I knew his legacy should live on in helping others to embrace their hopes and dreams, to be the changemakers of future generations." To mark the introduction of the scholarship, the Tyler James Alexander Annual Lecture took place for the first time at Cranfield University in December, delivered by Tim Mayer, son of McLaren's former team principal Teddy Mayer.

YMCA

Here for young people
Here for communities
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No one would choose to spend their winter here.

"We are concerned by recent comments that have been made suggesting that homelessness is a lifestyle choice. Such comments fail to recognise the severity of the crisis and, as the largest voluntary sector provider of supported housing in the country, we can say that, whilst there are many complex circumstances that can lead to a person becoming homeless, lifestyle choice does not feature highly among them.

"The current crisis is the result of a series of public policy failures in recent decades that has greatly exacerbated the issue of homelessness. The lack of affordable housing options, insufficient mental health resources, and a limited safety net for those facing financial hardship have all played a significant role in the alarming rise in homelessness and the risk of homelessness. Reducing it to a matter of restricting the use of tents is irrelevant and does nothing to address these wider complex causes.

"As we continue to provide shelter and support in times of crisis, we implore the government to reconsider its stance and work alongside organisations like ours to address the root causes of homelessness. By addressing the systemic issues and not placing blame on the marginalised, we can build a more equitable and empathetic society for all."

DENISE HATTON

Chief Executive, YMCA England & Wales
November 6, 2023

165 young people are at risk of homelessness every day across England and Wales. They could be experiencing abuse, family breakdown or loved ones may not be able to afford to accommodate them any more. They become homeless, not through choice or any fault of their own.

With the donations of generous RoomSponsors at YMCA, we're able to give over 10,600 young people a safe place to stay. With your help, they can access mental health support, careers advice and many other vital opportunities to build bright futures.

For as little as £12 a month you could support one of these young people staying at your local YMCA. Please be as generous as you can, it could make such a huge difference to someone's life, not just throughout the winter months but all year round.

And help us spread the word. For the thousands of young people at risk of homelessness every week, this is not a lifestyle choice.

Become a RoomSponsor. Visit ymca.org.uk/ymca-roomsponsor

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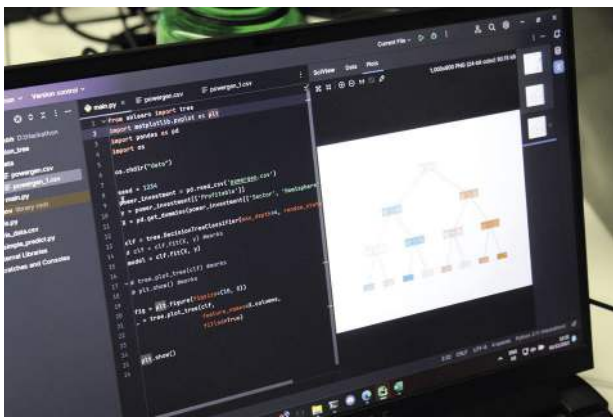
Business MK | January 2024

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AI and business ideas for the common good

Teams of people aged 18-35 battled it out at the South Central Institute of Technology in Bletchley to come up with the best business ideas, using AI to create practical, sustainable solutions to real world problems.

The AI Hackathon for the Common Good initiative was part of the British Council's Stronger Together youth leadership programme. Participants were treated to an intense bootcamp looking at the fundamentals of AI and how it could help combat climate change and support sustainability across the world. The teams then had to come up with their ideas and pitch them to an expert panel. The winners included SCIoT software development apprentice Sam Bailey, who works at waste management company Encore Environment in Northamptonshire. The team came up with an idea looking at how to use two different types of AI to read and digitise paper documents and transfer the relevant information into the right places on his employer's computer system.



"It was an entertaining and interactive presentation which contained a lot of interesting information about both AI and sustainability," said Mr Bailey. Mr Bailey's team's prize is a study trip to Bristol where they will meet other winners from similar events from across Europe. James Nowell, head of school at the SCIoT, was one of the judges. "The event provided an outstanding opportunity for our students to delve into the positive applications of AI and its pivotal role in advancing sustainability. "The Hackathon united students from diverse educational paths - apprenticeships, higher

education, and our Access to Higher Education courses - all to address real-world issues through AI solutions." Tim Moore, cultural engagement business director at the British Council, added: "The Artificial Intelligence strand of our Stronger Together programme aims to develop specialised skills that will enable young leaders to design AI-based solutions to address social and climate challenges. "The excellent facilities made the hackathon an enjoyable experience for participants. Students were very committed to the tasks throughout the whole training and their responses were incredibly impressive."

Foundation's donation boosts vision for high-quality engineering hub

Plans to develop the engineering hub vision for Central Bedfordshire College's campus in Leighton Buzzard have moved a step closer to reality with a £90,000 funding boost from Bedfordshire grant-making charity The Connolly Foundation. The college merged with The Bedford College Group last year but plans to become an engineering hub delivering a variety of qualifications within the engineering sector. Now the group and the Connolly Foundation are progressing the plan. The Leighton Buzzard campus sits close to a number of businesses within the engineering and logistics sectors, said David Oldham, chief operating officer of The Connolly Foundation. The charity is a major charity

in Bedfordshire created to meet the changing needs of young and older people. It has awarded more than £12 million in grants since it launched in 2007. "The Leighton Buzzard campus meets the Foundation's objective of giving young people the opportunity to build careers," Mr Oldham added. "The equipment we are funding will provide skills that are needed in the county." The campus has been supported by South West Bedfordshire MP Andrew Selous who also recognised the need to develop a high-class provision. "Many employers are offering well-paid jobs to people with the qualifications which are being provided here and I am very pleased that we now have a high-quality offer in the town so people do not need to travel elsewhere."

The Bedford College Group's new chief executive Yiannis Koursis, who replaced outgoing chief executive and principal Ian Pryce this month, was at the event. "This is a fast-growing area and we look forward to forging more partnerships with employers and other organisations." The campus has begun to deliver engineering Apprenticeship Standards. Additional investment has equipped the workshop to teach apprenticeships and T Levels. The new equipment is required to meet Apprenticeship Standards and awarding body requirements. Employers are being invited to contribute to the curriculum to ensure qualifications will be fit for purpose and in line with employer needs.

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Business networking events this month across Milton Keynes, North Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire.



Josie Groves receives her cheque from Sarah Powderham of Milton Keynes Sporting Lunch sponsor Oakwood resources and Mark Ormerod, chair of SportsAid East

Funding boost for rising sports star

Rising netball and cricket player Josie Groves is the latest young sports star to benefit from fundraising by the regional sports charity SportsAid. She is pictured receiving a cheque from Sarah Powderham, of lunch sponsor Oakwood resources, at last month's Milton Keynes Sporting Lunch at which more than 200 guests heard from guest speaker the former England, West Ham and Everton striker Tony Cottee.

Speaking to SportsAid's Eastern region chair Mark Ormerod, who is stepping down at the end of his term in office, Ms Groves said the cheque would be a valuable contribution to her training and transport expenses.

"I have always wanted to get as high as I can in both sports, whatever that might be, and see where it takes me," she said.

Mr Ormerod welcomed two new Sporting Lunch sponsors - accountancy practice TC Group and Barclays - and thanked existing sponsors for their support in 2023.



Former West Ham, Everton and England striker Tony Cottee entertains guests at the Milton Keynes Sporting Lunch. Below: Josie Groves in conversation with Mark Ormerod



Business networking and development meetings.

AYLESBURY

2nd Tuesday 12 noon-2pm: Online.

MILTON KEYNES

2nd Thursday 12 noon-2pm: Online.

BUCKINGHAM

3rd Tuesday 12 noon-2pm: Online.

CAPPUCCINO CONNECTIONS

4th Thursday 10am-11.30am: Online.

Contact: Anna Atkins-Carter, regional director North Bucks / West Chilterns. 07540 097776, email anna.atkinscarter@theathenanetwork.com or visit www.theathenanetwork.com.

BEDFORD

2nd Wednesday 12 noon-2pm: Online.

SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE

4th Tuesday 12 noon-2pm: Online.

WOBURN

3rd Thursday 12 noon-2pm: Online.

Contact: Kate Cherry, regional director Bedfordshire & St Albans. 07909 675333 email kate.cherry@theathenanetwork.com or visit www.theathenanetwork.com



CONNECT OVER COFFEE

plus the launch of the

SME BEDFORDSHIRE BUSINESS AWARDS 2024

January 17 9.30am-11.15am:

The Pavilion, Bowling Green Lane, Luton

Informal networking. Free event.

NATIONAL NETWORKING ONLINE

January 31 8.45am-10am

Sponsored by Essential Workwear.

Hosted by Bedfordshire Chamber in partnership with Dorset and Greater Manchester Chambers of Commerce.

Chamber members only. Free event.

Book at events.chamber-business.com.

Book on to Chamber of Commerce events via events.chamber-business.com.



If you are serious about growing your business, BNI works. Last year BNI members in the UK generated more than £482 million worth of business for each other. To find out how, visit a local chapter meeting. Each chapter has a personality of its own and finding where you fit best helps you get connected.

ACHIEVERS

Wednesday 9.30am:

Brewpoint, Cut Throat Lane, Bedford.

APOLLO

Wednesday 10am:

Abbey Hill Golf Centre, Two Mile Ash, Milton Keynes.

FUSION

Thursday 6.45am:

Abbey Hill Golf Centre, Two Mile Ash, Milton Keynes.

ENCORE

Friday 6.45am: Holiday Inn London Luton

BLAZE

Thursday 6.45am:

Mount Pleasant Golf Club, Lower Stondon nr Henlow.

More information: www.bni.co.uk



January 9, 23 7am-8.30am:

Villiers Hotel, Buckingham

Breakfast meeting + speaker. Visitors: £10.

More details: www.bucks-fizz.biz.



STONEBRIDGE NETWORKING

January 31 6pm

Brewery Tap House, Bucks Star Brewery, Stonebridge

Networking event. Speaker: John Pryor, an expert on intellectual property.

Price: £5.

Contact: www.bucksstar.beer/events.



Regional sponsor:

Business MK and Business2Business

No fuss, no membership, pay as you go...

The Business Buzz format is relaxed, informal, conversational B2B networking.

Town focused events meet face-to-face, allowing visitors to build better, more robust relationships. These are complemented by regional virtual events.

All Business Buzz events run 10am-noon.

BEDFORD

1st Wednesday: George & Dragon, Mill Street.

Price : £10 + VAT.

BIGGLESWADE

4th Tuesday: Miss Vietnam, Market Square.

Price : £10 + VAT.

BRACKLEY

Sponsor: Pulse Group Media.

1st Thursday: Paisley Pear, Northampton Road.

Price: £8 + VAT.

DUNSTABLE

4th Friday: Sugar Lounge at The Old Sugar Loaf, High Street North.

Price : £10 + VAT.

LUTON

2nd Tuesday: The Garden Cafe, Stockwood Discovery Centre, London Road.

Price : £10 + VAT.

MILTON KEYNES

Sponsor: Pulse Group Media.

3rd Friday: Pop World MK, Lower 12th Street, Central Milton Keynes.

Price : £10 + VAT.

TOWCESTER

Sponsor: Pulse Group Media

4th Thursday: The Saracen's Head, Watling Street.

Price: £8 + VAT.

BEDFORDSHIRE BIG BUZZ NETWORKING

January 30 8am-noon

The Bedford Swan Hotel, The Embankment

VIP BIG BUZZ BREAKFAST NETWORKING

8am-9.45am

Breakfast networking with speakers. Banner included + entry to the Big Buzz Main Event (10am-noon). Price: £65 + VAT.

BIG BUZZ MAIN EVENT

10am-noon.

Networking event. Price: £17 + VAT. Pop-up banner: £30 + VAT.

All meetings payable in advance on the Business Buzz Booking App <https://app.business-buzz.org/app> or at the event.



Business networking and referral group.

Price: £6.

MILTON KEYNES

2nd Thursday, 7.30am-9.30am:

Abbey Hill Golf Centre, Two Mile Ash.

VIRTUAL NETWORKING

Tuesday Brunch

2nd Tuesday, 9.30am-11am.

Wednesday Breakfast

4th Wednesday, 7.30am.

Thursday Breakfast

3rd Thursday, 7.30am.

Friday Breakfast

2nd Friday, 7.30am.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCLE

Monday 10am-11am: Online

Helping small businesses get tasks from 'to do' to 'done'. Advice and tips on time management and productivity.

Price: £6 per session or £12 per month.

More information: www.buscomm.co.uk.



January 12, 26 7am:

Windmill Hill Golf Centre, Bletchley

Networking breakfast with speaker. Price: £15.

Contact: www.businessgrowthclub.co.uk or Mark Orr 07903 655169.



BEDFORD

January 11 9.30am-11.30am

Brewpoint, Cut Throat Lane, Bedford

Host: Aruno Rao.

Brunchtime networking. Price: £26.

MILTON KEYNES

January 3 9.30am-11.30am

The Anchor, The Square, Aspley Guise

Host: Heide Swift.

Brunchtime networking. Price: £26.

Contact: www.busynetworking.net/meetings.



Networking for businesswomen aiming to grow their business in a professional manner while getting to know each other better and having some fun along the way.

All events are a networking lunch. price: £28.

AMPTHILL

January 11 11.45am-2pm

The Knife & Cleaver, Houghton Conquest

Host: Natalie Murray.

BEDFORD

January 25 11.45am-2pm

The Woodland Manor Hotel, Clapham

Host: Aruno Rao.

BUCKINGHAM

January 15 11.45am-2pm

The Grand Junction, High Street, Buckingham

Host: Heide Swift.

CHICHELEY

January 8 11.45am-2pm

Chicheley Hall

Host: Aruno Rao.

MILTON KEYNES

January 4 11.45am-2pm

The George Inn, Watling Street, Little Brickhill

Host: Aruno Rao.

To feature your networking group's events in Business MK, email details to news@businessmk.co.uk or scan the QR code >>

Business networking events this month across Milton Keynes, North Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire.

TOWCESTER
January 31 11.45am-2pm
The Navigation Inn, Thrupp Wharf Marina, Cosgrove
Host: Aruno Rao.
Contact: www.buzzywomen.net or call 07957 284851.



NETWORKING BREAKFAST
3rd Friday, 7am-9am
Astral Park, Leighton Buzzard
Breakfast networking with speaker. Price: £13.
Contact: info@buzzyardnetworking.co.uk or visit www.buzzyardnetworking.co.uk



January 18 12.30pm-2.30pm
Maaya Restaurant, The Hub, Central Milton Keynes
Sponsors: Freeths; Pinders.
Networking lunch. Price: £33.
Book at thecurryclubs.co.uk/event/milton-keynes-curry-club-24/.



MILTON KEYNES VIRTUAL NETWORKING
January 12 10am-11am: Online.
Networking + an update on the benefits of FSB membership. Hosted by James Anderson, FSB development manager for the Thames Valley.
Free event for FSB members and non-members.
To book on to FSB events, visit www.fsb.org.uk



SPEED NETWORKING + LUNCH
January 24 11.30am-1.30pm
Horwood House Hotel, Mursley Road, Little Horwood
Chamber members only. Price: £20 + VAT.
To book on to Chamber events, visit www.chambermk.co.uk/events.



Networking events provide a platform to meet and build relationships with peers and fellow members.
The group also hosts personal development sessions, with talks from business leaders.
THE IMPORTANCE OF GOAL SETTING
January 16 5.30pm-7pm:
Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, Waterside Way, Northampton
Free event. To book, email info@nextgenerationchamber.co.uk.



MK-Act's chief executive Sue Burke (second from left) with MHA partners Liz Newell (left) and Steve Freeman and Andrea Smith, partner at Franklins Solicitors. at the final City Breakfast Club meeting of 2023

Breakfast club backs domestic abuse charity

Plans to build a new refuge for victims of domestic abuse in Milton Keynes have been unveiled to the city's business community.
Speaking at the December meeting of the City Breakfast Club networking group, the charity MK-Act - which has been supporting domestic abuse victims in the city for more than 45 years - presented its plans

to build 28 new flats across the city by 2050 to keep pace with increased demand for its services.
Chief executive Sue Burke said MK-Act has seen a 30 per cent increase in cases of domestic abuse and currently works with more than 2,000 clients a year.
The 50-plus businesspeople at the event also brought Christmas gifts, which the

charity distributed among its clients for the festive season. The charity is currently working with more than 100 families across Milton Keynes.
City Breakfast Club chairman Steve Freeman, a partner at event organiser MHA, said: "MK City Breakfast Club is more than just a networking event; it is a platform for positive change and community support.

The overwhelming support for MK-Act at our latest event truly exemplifies the power of coming together to make a difference."
The club meets ten times a year, with its first meeting of 2024 scheduled for February 7 at the YMCA campus in Central Milton Keynes.
■ Find out more and book your place at www.citybreakfastclub.co.uk.

Read the latest business news at www.businessmk.co.uk

Find out more about NextGen Chamber at www.nextgenerationchamber.co.uk.



12 noon-2pm, networking lunch.
Bedford & Ampthill
1st Tuesday: The Swan Hotel, The Embankment, Bedford / Online.
Leighton Buzzard
3rd Wednesday: The Dukes, Heath & Reach / Online.
Luton
2nd Monday: South Beds Golf Club/ Online.
Sandy & Biggleswade
1st Wednesday: Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade.
Contact: Louise Yexley on 07989 020647, email louise.yexley@wibn.co.uk or visit www.wibn.co.uk.
Milton Keynes
1st Tuesday: The Brasserie at Milton Keynes College, Sherwood Drive, Bletchley.
Contact: Edith Samambwa on 07802 581838, email edith.samambwa@wibn.co.uk or visit www.wibn.co.uk.



NETWORKING LUNCH
January 31 12 noon-2pm
The Warbler on the Wharf, Campbell Park Marina, Milton Keynes
Prices tbc.
Book at www.womeninenterprise.co.uk

CITY BREAKFAST CLUB, MILTON KEYNES, BRINGS NETWORKING BACK

City Breakfast Club, Milton Keynes is the longest running, premier networking event giving you opportunity to meet with the city's top business leaders. The event takes place on the first Wednesday of each month*.

To book your place, visit citybreakfastclub.co.uk

"I am looking forward to ensuring we continue to deliver an informal, informative and interactive networking experience for our guests"

Steve Freeman
Chairman

YMCA, 1 North Sixth Street, Milton Keynes MK9 2NR
7:30 - 9:00

*No events in January and August



House builder backs ‘vital work’ for young people

Staff at construction and property development firm Taylor Wimpey have raised £8,000 for youth charity Action4Youth from its annual charity triathlon event.

The donation will help to support the 25,000 young people each year that Action4Youth supports at its centre at Caldecotte Lake in Milton Keynes.

“With the donation, we will be able to increase our mentoring work across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes,” said Action4Youth chief executive Jenifer



Jenifer Cameron (right) with Taylor Wimpey's regional managing director Hayden Dolby (left)

Cameron. “Our team supports individual young people experiencing difficulties in their school or home lives, working with them over a period of time to find solutions and positive direction in their lives.”

Adds Hayden Dolby, managing director for Taylor Wimpey South Midlands: “The charity does vital

work in transforming the lives of young people in Buckinghamshire and we hope the £8,000 raised makes a difference to the services they provide.”

The money will boost Action4Youth’s Capital Campaign supporting the redevelopment of the main building and infrastructure at The Caldecotte Xperience.



■ Pictured: The Lords Taverners Bedfordshire & Buckinghamshire regional committee at Woburn Golf Club ahead of the charity’s annual Christmas lunch. More than 150 guests dug deep to raise almost £20,000 for the charity, which works to positively impact the lives of young people facing the challenges of inequality. It runs cricket programmes across the UK, aiming to help young people with disabilities and from disadvantaged communities to develop the knowledge, skills, capabilities and confidence required to overcome the challenges of inequality, raise their aspirations and reach their potential.

Boat crews prepare to make a charity splash

Entries open for Milton Keynes Dragon Boat Festival 2024

Paddles up... The Milton Keynes Dragon Boat Festival is back and we are inviting teams to join us at Willen Lake on Saturday, July 6.

Festival organisers NewWave Events are expecting up to 48 teams to join in the fun and surpass the remarkable £16,850 fundraising achievement of 2023.

Sponsors Business MK, Pulse Magazine and MKFM are once again backing the 2024 festival and there is a new charity partner: Brain Tumour Research, a medical research charity dedicated to funding research and raising awareness of brain tumours.

2024 is the Year of the Dragon in the Chinese zodiac, adding an extra layer of excitement to this already vibrant dragon boat festival. NewWave Events executive director Alicja Mierzejewska said: “We are delighted to announce the return of this event in 2024. We cannot wait to welcome back the fantastic companies that join us year after year and eagerly anticipate new additions. Our dragons are primed and

ready so we will see you all in 2024 for an exhilarating day of fundraising and team building.”

Just like in 2023, the festival will feature 30ft dragon boats, accommodating teams of up to 11 crew members. This ensures that companies and organisations of all sizes can easily form teams.

With entries now open, companies, clubs and organisations from across the region are assembling their teams to take part. The teams will represent a diverse mix of newcomers and returning crews, all sharing the common goal of enjoying a fantastic day with colleagues and friends while making a meaningful impact in their community.

Each team will participate in a minimum of three races and all equipment is provided, with no prior experience required. A range of bankside activities will keep teams and spectators entertained. The top fundraisers will earn a charity trophy and team prize, providing an extra incentive to gather sponsorship.



Winning crew members celebrate with Mayor Cllr Mick Legg and Mayoress Mandy Legg at the 2023 Milton Keynes Dragon Boat Festival

“The Milton Keynes Dragon Boat Festival embodies an incredible sense of community each year and it is wonderful to bring people together in this way for the benefit of numerous outstanding local charities,” said NewWave Events executive director Lucy Morton.

“We are thrilled to partner with a new charity this year, Brain Tumour Research

THE OFFICIAL

2024

MILTON KEYNES

DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

IN AID OF BRAIN TUMOUR RESEARCH

SATURDAY 6TH JULY

WILLEN LAKE, MILTON KEYNES

INTERESTED IN ENTERING A TEAM?

DRAGONBOATEVENTS.CO.UK

01536 674 748



Festival embodies an incredible sense of community each year

and see the good that this relationship will bring to the event with the aim of raising as many funds for a very important cause.”

Enhanced Gold and Silver entry packages are available, offering marketing benefits such as the company's logo

■ For more details and the entry form, visit dragonboatevents.co.uk/milton-keynes-dragon-boat-festival/ or contact dragonboatevents@newwave-events.co.uk. Find out more about Brain Tumour Research at <https://braintumourresearch.org/>.

displayed prominently on each side of a dragon boat, as well as a substantial donation to Brain Tumour Research.

Matt Howarth, corporate development manager at Brain Tumour Research said: “We are delighted to be the charity partner for the 2024 Milton Keynes Dragon Boat Festival. One in three people knows someone affected by a brain tumour, and the disease kills more children and adults under the age of 40 than any other cancer yet just one per cent of the national spend on cancer research has been

allocated to this devastating disease since records began in 2002.

“With so many people affected, it is vital we continue our work to raise awareness, to fund research at our Centres of Excellence and to lobby the government and the larger charities to invest more.

“As a Milton Keynes-based charity, we hope lots of teams will get behind our cause and help raise vital funds so that we can improve treatment options for patients and, ultimately, find a cure.”

In the first of a regular column in Business MK, Milton Keynes Community Foundation is seeking the support of businesses across the city for its Cost of Living Winter Appeal.

Join hands in our campaign to support those most in need

Established over 36 years ago, Milton Keynes Community Foundation is a grant-making charity sending funding where it is needed most in Milton Keynes. Over those years we have awarded more than £18 million in rent subsidies and £15 million in grant programmes.

In response to the growing challenges faced by local

Fund will assist local charities and community groups

charities and community groups, MK Community Foundation has launched its Cost of Living Winter

Appeal. The appeal aims to address the rising costs faced by charities and community organisations, as they navigate a post-pandemic and now cost of living world in delivering vital services to vulnerable residents in Milton Keynes.

As the cost of living rises, so do the running costs of charities working to support those hit hardest in our community.

As temperatures plummet, the Foundation invites individuals, businesses and philanthropists to join hands in supporting the Cost of Living Fund.

This fund will directly assist local charities and community groups by alleviating some of the financial strain brought about by rising operational costs.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

There are many ways you can make a difference in Milton Keynes, by donating through Milton Keynes Community Foundation.

- Make a one-off donation.
- Organise a fundraising event.
- Become a Friend.
- Donate your winter fuel payment.

CASE STUDY: CARERSMK

The generosity shown by the community last year meant that MK Community Foundation was able to support organisations with targeted financial support.

Many of CarersMK's service users confided in the charity and stressed just how much they were struggling to heat their homes and provide food for their families due to the increased costs.

CarersMK received a crucial £10,000 Cost of Living grant from MK Community Foundation so that it could offer financial support to unpaid carers through the challenging winter months.

The grant meant that CarersMK could provide a £200 one-off payment to 50 families, providing a lifeline amid the cost of living crisis. The grant significantly enhanced mental well-being, addressing urgent needs such as utility bills and food.

One carer who provides full-time care to a partner with memory impairment faced significant financial strain. Unable to work, they struggled with household bills and transportation costs, forcing them to walk, worsening their back problem. The cost of living payment played a crucial role in managing their expenses and alleviating stress.

■ Support the appeal at <https://mkcommunityfoundation.enthuse.com/cf/350b/costoflivingcrisis#!/>. For more information, contact the philanthropy team at Milton Keynes Community Foundation on 01908 690276 or email info@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk

7,267 households in Milton Keynes won't be turning on their heating this winter*

Your Support Can Brighten a Life.





BeCentral Bedfordshire

www.becentralbedfordshire.co.uk

@BeCentralBeds

Be Central Bedfordshire - Economic Growth Partnership

Central Bedfordshire Council, through its Be Central Bedfordshire website and services, provides a wealth of support and information to help all businesses, either established or new to the area, to thrive and grow.

Local economy to receive a £2m boost from business support

Hundreds of Central Bedfordshire businesses are set to benefit from £2 million worth of free, specialist advice on start-up and growth, innovation, developing trade and export, and decarbonisation.

Central Bedfordshire Council has secured funding from the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund to deliver business support across the area. Other UKSPF and REPF funding is

being allocated by the council to support local community projects, invest in town centres, and develop skills.

Businesses throughout Central Bedfordshire, including both urban and rural areas, are eligible to apply for the support.

Part of the package will see businesses receive innovation and technological support to improve productivity and help in adopting new or improved products or services. This will be delivered by the University

of Bedfordshire.

Independent, not-for-profit organisation WENTA is offering support to help those in the process of setting up a new business, and for start-up businesses including social enterprises. Delivery will help potential entrepreneurs to be business ready and to understand what they need to know about self-employment.

Also on offer is help and guidance from Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce to get businesses export-ready

and engaged in new markets. Export grants will support businesses to expand their overseas trading, boosting local employment and helping businesses to develop their export strategy.

Established businesses with growth potential can access specialist training and support programmes through Cranfield University, to develop plans for business growth, decarbonisation or development of new products and services.

Cllr Mary Walsh, Executive Member for Planning and Development, said: "Businesses in Central Bedfordshire, including those in rural areas, have tremendous potential for growth. We are in a key location nationally and are

already an attractive area for start-ups, growing businesses, and established industry. This new support, worth £2 million, will give a further boost to the local economy, attracting inward investment and creating jobs for local people."

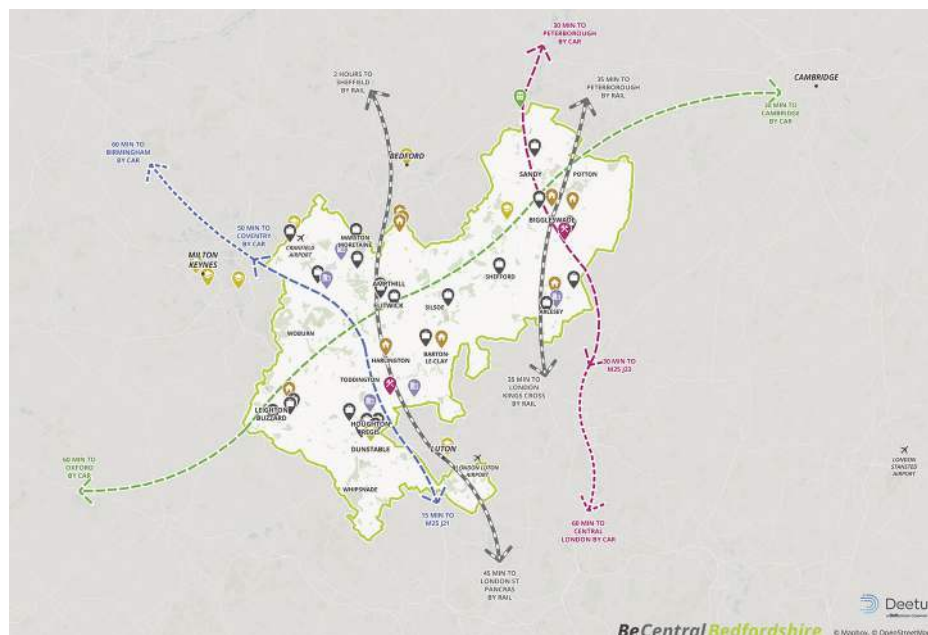
■ The council's business website www.becentralbedfordshire.co.uk provides full information and updates about what the council is doing to support local businesses with UKSPF/REPF money. If you would like further information about business support available through UKSPF and REPF, email: ukspfbusinesssupport@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Interactive map highlights area's investor appeal

The Business & Investment team at Central Bedfordshire launched a new interactive map on their inward investment website www.becentralbedfordshire.co.uk.

The map is a key tool in marketing Central Bedfordshire to potential investors, showcasing our strengths and our central location in the Oxford-Cambridge Corridor.

The online map includes greater detail of the region and showcases commercial, housing and transport schemes, world-class higher



education and excellent road and rail connections.

Coming soon to the map will be new video content,

economic data on major towns and links to our commercial property search portal.

■ See the map for yourself at map.becentralbedfordshire.co.uk.

EV infrastructure grants for staff and fleets

The grant provides small and medium-sized businesses money off the cost of installing electric vehicle charge points and supporting infrastructure for their staff and fleet vehicles.

An EV infrastructure grant gives money off the cost of wider building and installation work needed to install multiple charge point sockets.

The work can be for sockets you want to install now and in the future. For example, an EV infrastructure grant can cover things like wiring and posts.

The grant covers 75 per cent of the cost of the work up to a maximum of £15,000. You can get up to £350 per charge point socket installed and up

to £500 per parking space enabled with supporting infrastructure

Funding is confirmed until March 31 2025.

Before you apply for a grant you must:

- Complete any necessary upgrades to the building's electrical supply;
- Arrange regular maintenance checks of the charge points;
- Decide how the electricity and running costs will be paid;
- Make sure the charge points are accessible;
- Update your property's risk assessment to include the charge points.

The government reserves the right to end or change this grant scheme.

■ Find out more on the application process at www.find-government-grants.service.gov.uk/grants

Success inspired by a taste of the exotic Far East

We visit Unisnacks, importer and distributor of snacks, confectionery and beverages from Asia.

Unisnacks is trailblazing its sustainable and ethical practices in Central Bedfordshire.

The company employs 65 people at its head office site in Biggleswade, which includes around 40,000 sq ft of state-of-the-art highbay warehousing space.

Head of marketing Dr Sharaaz Jaffar said: "With the help and support of Central Bedfordshire Council, we made the move to Biggleswade from Hertfordshire in 2021. We are now based in 'the Golden Triangle' and logistically it is very well located."

For a business maintaining its website in 16 languages, Unisnacks likes to get close to its suppliers.

"We currently work with 35 different suppliers and we like to take a proactive partnership approach to help break down any barriers to market entry," said marketing communications manager Rebecca Paulose. "It is all about effective

localisation and, importantly, it might also help with reducing packaging waste or moving to sustainable materials."

The company has invested in waste water recycling and renewable energy generation. Around half of Unisnacks' energy is supplied through roof top solar panels. Central Bedfordshire Council helped to secure a £15,000 grant from the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership to fund environmentally friendly repackaging capabilities.

In the warehouse, Artificial Intelligence-driven systems help staff to take care of the handling of 14,000 pallets and 800 products.

"Yes, investment in the latest technology is about helping us to become more productive, to save energy, to augment our service etc.," said Rebecca. "But it is also about helping our people to do an even better job, using people in a more considered way."



■ Read the full story of Unisnacks inspirational approach to an ethical and sustainable business at: www.becentralbedfordshire.co.uk/media-events/case-studies/

Looking for your new business admin apprentice

Bedfordshire Employment and Skills Academy is offering employers the Level 3 Business Administration apprenticeship.

BESA helps to find your new apprentice. They will promote your vacancy, help to shortlist candidates and support you and your apprentice through the 18-month programme.

The apprentice will be employed for a minimum 30 hours per week for at least the 18 months of the programme. This must include at least six paid hours weekly for learning and

development detailed in their training plan. Once a month, they join BESA's face-to-face training session in Flitwick. For the rest of their time they learn 'on the job' at work.

Employers paying the Apprenticeship Levy can use funds in their apprenticeship account to cover the £5,000 training cost. If not, they pay just five per cent (£250). The employer pays the apprentice's salary, which must be at least the national apprenticeship minimum wage (£5.28 per hour, rising to £6.40 in April).

■ Find out more at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/besa or email academy@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

£2m programme aims to boost export drive



Tilia House

Exporters in Bedfordshire are set to benefit from a targeted support programme aimed at assisting businesses already engaged in or looking to develop international trade.

The initiative, led by Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce and Central Bedfordshire Council, is part of the government's national UK Shared Prosperity Fund support project.

The £2 million package is tailored to help businesses based in the Central Bedfordshire area through the complexities of international trade. It includes:

- **Exploring New Markets:** Companies looking to expand their reach and explore new international markets will benefit from strategic insights and resources to identify and capitalise on emerging opportunities.



Justin Richardson

Commerce chief executive Justin Richardson said: "Exporting presents a wealth of opportunities for our local businesses and through this support programme, we aim to equip them with the knowledge and tools needed to thrive in the global marketplace."

Cllr Mary Walsh, Central Bedfordshire Council's executive member for planning and development, added: "Businesses in Central Bedfordshire, including those in rural areas, have tremendous potential for growth. We are in a key location nationally and are already an attractive area for start-ups, growing businesses, and established industry. This new support will give a further boost to the local economy, attracting inward investment and creating jobs."

- **New to Export:** Tailored guidance and resources will be offered to businesses venturing into international trade for the first time, ensuring a smooth and informed entry into global markets.

- **Increasing your Export Capability:** Get your team export-ready with a wide range of training courses and practical assistance to address the challenges that businesses may encounter in the course of international trade.

Bedfordshire Chamber of

Find out more at <https://www.chamber-business.com/goglobalukspf>. Contact the Chamber's Global Trade Service team on 01582 522448 or email export@chamber-business.com.

Property investor buys builder's HQ

Investors have completed the acquisition of a headquarters-style office building in Bedford.

A local family-run property investment company is the new owner of Tilia House - home of housebuilder Tilia Homes - on the town's Priory Business Park. The previous owner, who held the two-storey building in a pension scheme, had been seeking offers in the region of £1.8 million for the 13,767 sq ft property.

Commercial property

consultancy Kirkby Diamond's Bedford office acted for the vendor. "Our client decided it was time to retire and as part of that chose to sell the investment which was held as part of his pension scheme," said Andrew Clarke, agency associate at Kirkby Diamond's Bedford office. "My involvement with this high-quality building dates back many years, all the way to before it was constructed when the land was sold to the original owner occupier.

"The subsequent owner has had it as an investment and we have let it on his behalf on a couple of occasions, including to the latest tenant Tilia Homes."

Tilia House has been sold by way of a long leasehold interest for a term of 125 years from April 30, 2001. It is an individually designed and built detached office/hi-tech premises that has been subject to extensive internal alterations and upgrades by successive owners and tenants.

Moves signal 'buoyant' unit sector

A food bank, a powder coating company and a firm providing airport support services have each agreed a deal on industrial units in Bedford.

The deals demonstrate the continuing strong demand for industrial and warehouse accommodation - particularly those units that have been refurbished - throughout the town and the surrounding area, said senior surveyor Diccon Brearley of property consultancy Kirkby Diamond which handled the deals.

Expansion plans have led Spectrum Enamellers to take a 15-year lease on a 4,276 sq ft detached unit in Murdock Road, on the Manton Lane industrial estate. Bedford



Food Bank has agreed a ten-year lease on a fully refurbished 13,931 sq ft unit on the same estate to meet increased demand for the food bank's services. On the Woburn Road industrial estate in Kempston, airport support services provider Alvest Equipment Services has agreed a ten-year lease on an 11,439 sq ft unit at Lyon Close.

Kirkby Diamond acted for three private owners in the

negotiations. "The industrial and logistics sector remains buoyant across Bedfordshire and further afield, which is really encouraging for landlords," said Mr Brearley.

"Of particular note is how attractive recently refurbished premises are to potential occupiers when searching for their ideal business accommodation, especially when aiming for the future and the upcoming alterations to EPC legislation."

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Plumbing firm turns on jobs tap

New jobs and a £250,000 investment in its vehicle fleet are on the way at a Bedfordshire plumbing and heating business to keep pace with an expanding number of contracts.

Burton Smith Plumbing & Heating, based at Silsoe, is growing its team of engineers working on contracts with home insurance providers and a expanding residential client base

for its 24-hour emergency call-out and planned maintenance service. The company employs 50 staff and is looking to recruit another seven plumbing and heating engineers.

The company has also invested in seven new Ford Transit vans, which have been fully fitted with racking and specialist equipment.

Founder and managing director Toby Burton (pictured above) said:

“The addition of the new vehicles and recruiting more experienced engineers reflects the rapid scale-up trajectory the business is experiencing. We have seen growth of around 400 per cent in the past three years, which is enabling us to invest in our capabilities, skills and responsiveness. We have built a talented workforce of both engineers and support staff and we are keen to add to those numbers.”

Manager hails radio station opening as ‘major milestone’

Mayor of Bedford Tom Wootton and the town’s MP Mohammad Yasin join station manager Martin Steers at the microphone for the official opening of Bedford Radio, the town’s new local radio station.

They are pictured in the Community Media Hub, which houses the station’s new studio in partnership with Wellbeing Media.

Bedford Radio has been on air since 2020, with presenters broadcasting remotely but they now have access to a live broadcasting facility, a pre-recording studio and collaborative workspace.

“We look forward to welcoming



Station manager Martin Steers welcomes Bedford MP Mohammad Yasin and Mayor Tom Wootton

the local community and our listeners into the station to appear on air, as well as welcoming new volunteers onto the team, both as presenters and behind the scenes,”

said Mr Steers. “Getting our studios up and running is a major milestone for the station and we are ready and waiting to launch on DAB soon.”



Bedford Blues director of rugby Mike Rayer (right) with Dr Martyn Morris, head of the University of Bedfordshire’s School of Sport Science and Physical Activity.

Blues sign up to education partnership with university

Career development and educational opportunities are on offer for students at the University of Bedfordshire after it expanded its partnership with Bedford Blues Rugby Club to become its official higher education partner.

The new arrangement means work experience for students at the club’s Goldington Road ground and an annual student prize for those particularly excelling in their studies.

Students studying relevant courses, including at the university’s School of Sport Science and Physical Activity, will be able to attend Bedford Blues training sessions and matches for observation and content production opportunities.

The Blues will deliver guest lectures on the latest sporting industry trends and development and University of Bedfordshire students will have the chance to see life behind the scenes for Blues players and commercial staff.

There will also be a £500 student prize awarded annually in collaboration between the university and the club.

Bedford Blues chief operating officer Gareth Alred said: “We are extremely excited to extend our long-term partnership with the University of Bedfordshire. Their commitment to enhancing student experience and taking a student-centric approach to their partnerships makes them a fantastic university to work with.”

The university’s pro vice chancellor Adrian Dutch said: “Preparing our students for their post-study career is at the very heart of what we do, from the design of our curriculum to our world-class facilities and the opportunities we provide for real-world experience.

“We have enjoyed a great relationship with the club for many years and look forward to strengthening our shared goals through a range of new and exciting opportunities for our students.”



Manufacturer wins export award

Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce chief executive Justin Richardson is pictured on a visit to specialist temperature-controlled packaging manufacturer Peli BioThermal to present two awards to the Leighton Buzzard-based company in the British Chamber of Commerce Global Player category.

High overseas sales earned Peli BioThermal a win at the Bedfordshire awards and the company has also brought home gold in the East England regional awards.

The company’s director of operations EMEA Nicki Harris, pictured with Mr Richardson and sales manager EMEA Ben Singleton

(right), said: “We are proud our industry-leading products and services are receiving recognition as the company continues its significant growth on a national and global scale.”

Mr Richardson said: “Businesses that embrace international trade not only strengthen their own business success but also boost the local economy. The award recognises outstanding exporters across the UK and we are delighted that Peli BioThermal has been acknowledged as such. It is a truly great example of how innovative local companies with the right ideas and products can make their mark in a competitive global market.”

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Industry initiative tackles gender imbalance

A new returners programme is being launched in Luton to help improve gender imbalances across the construction industry.

The programme is a partnership between Wates and STEM Returners and will support people who have had a career break back into employment.

The programme at the Wates Luton site will include opportunities across Wates' construction business, including site manager, project manager and project engineer roles.

Return-to-work specialists STEM Returners will source the candidates and provide career coaching and mentoring.

The new programme follows the success of the first partnership between Wates and STEM Returners last year which helped six returners back to industry.

Anwesha Gupta secured a role as a bid manager at the end of a two-year career break to look after her young daughter after moving to the UK. Prior to finding the opportunity at Wates, she had had difficulty in securing an interview through standard recruitment channels, despite her 11 years' experience in the civil and structural industry.

"Most of the time I was told that they saved my resume for future reference. It was tricky to secure a further interview as I did not have prior UK experience."



Louisa Watson

Construction programme helps returners to work after career break

"There was a point when I started to feel that it was tough to get a suitable role after a career break. But, with the help and connection of STEM Returners, I am now able to move forward with my career."

Annual research compiled in The STEM Returners Index highlights the challenges people face when trying to return to work

following a career break, with recruitment bias shown to be the main barrier to entry. STEM Returners' programmes aim to eliminate barriers by giving candidates real work experience and mentoring during their placement, as well as helping them to adjust to life back in work.

STEM Returners director Natalie Desty said: "Stories like Anwesha's are very common. Despite excellent skills, knowledge and experience, a gap on a CV puts you at a disadvantage, which should not be the case."

Wates Group's inclusion and diversity director Nikunj Upadhyay said: "We are delighted to continue our partnership with STEM Returners

to ensure talented individuals are not held back from pursuing a meaningful career of choice. We look forward to welcoming them into our business. For us, this programme is a bridge where experience meets opportunity, paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive, and diverse tomorrow."

Since STEM Returners first launched in 2017, more than 450 STEM Returners candidates have joined programmes across the UK. Ms Gupta said: "There are certain circumstances in people's lives where they need to interrupt their professional journey in order to take care of other things such as family life and health. But that does not mean the end of their career."



Across the country, thousands of businesses are members of a Chamber of Commerce. Why? Because the Chamber is renowned the world over for helping foster connections and enabling local businesses to thrive and grow.



Venue signs net zero carbon pledge

Conference and training venue Wyboston Lakes Resort has joined more than 600 major meetings industry organisations in signing the Net Zero Carbon Events Pledge.

The resort near Bedford has committed to support and advocate the goal of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Wyboston Lakes (pictured below) published its four-year Green Energy Roadmap in 2022 and repeated its net zero vision in its ESG report last year. "More sustainable, no apology' is how we express our total commitment to sustainability and to driving down our carbon emissions," said its director of marketing Louise Watson.

"Signing this Pledge is clear indication of our determination to continue to move forward to these goals."



Here at the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, we are passionate about working at a local, national and international level to support businesses of all sizes and across all sectors.

Being a member of the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce:

- Connects you with a large network of businesses.
- Provides you with unrivalled access to help, support, and advice to grow your business.
- Opens new business opportunities for you in local, national and international markets.
- Ensures your views are heard within Government and other policy makers.

Our role is to ensure that, working together, we create connections within our ever-growing network and become an enabler for business growth – after all, business is done better together.



"The Chamber is not only there to give support of local connections and guidance on export and trade, but go above and beyond to help us nurture business collaborations that results in business growth."



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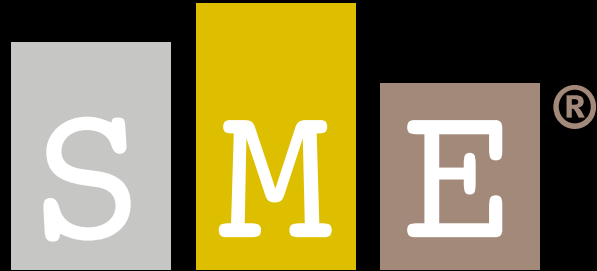
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