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**Employee
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Learning Event**

Find out how our
recent event went on
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7N Architects Celebrates 15 Years of Success by Launching Employee Ownership Trust

Pioneering Scotland-based Practice Sets Up Employee-Owned Structure to Secure Long-Term Future

The long-term future of one of Scotland's most pioneering and innovative independent architectural practices has been secured following a successful transition to employee ownership.

Edinburgh-based **7N Architects**, which came to prominence by masterminding the 'placemaking-led' transformation of many of Scotland's most significant civic and urban areas, has set up an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT) with owner and founding director Ewan Anderson transferring 100% of his total shareholding to a trust acting on behalf of all the company's 24 employees. The EOT structure allows every member of the 7N team to share in the future success of the company.

The company's leadership will now be spearheaded by a Board of Directors composed of Anderson together with co-directors Ben Watson and Craig Tait. They will

work in collaboration with a Board of Trustees bringing together Ewan with independent Chair of Trustees John Hume, and 7N team members Lisa Blyth and Laura Adamson who were both elected by fellow employees.

The company now employs 24 staff, and, according to Anderson, with a formidable track record combined with a burgeoning project pipeline, now is the right time to secure the company's long-term future.

"7N Architects has come a long way since the practice was formed during the financial crisis of 2009," he explains. "Despite many challenges along the way, we have grown steadily and incrementally, and through a defined focus and commitment to putting placemaking at the heart of everything we do,

(Continued)

we have had the privilege of being involved on some of the most transformative and recognised development projects in Scotland and the UK.

“It’s an exciting time for the practice, with projects from London to Lerwick. We’ve created the City Centre Strategy for Glasgow, masterplans for University of Glasgow and Inverness Campus, a new station concept for Network Rail, built hundreds of new homes in some of the most deprived and affluent parts of Scotland and have developed transformational proposals for new workspaces which put people’s wellbeing at the heart of the design.

“I look forward to being an integral part of a new era for 7N Architects - and seeing the company, our employees and our clients continue over the longer-term to reap the benefits of our enlightened and progressive approach to making better places.”

Co-director Ben Watson adds: *“The successful completion our Employee Ownership Trust marks the next significant step of 7N’s journey. All team members have been involved in this process from the start, and the new leadership structure creates both a strong management framework whilst empowering every member of staff to play a significant role in the future of the company.”*

Architect Lisa Blyth, who was one of the original founder members of the practice, was voted in by fellow staff members to become a member of the new Board of Trustees. *“The whole employee ownership process was a hugely insightful experience showing how all our employees could play a significant role in the future of the company,”* she says.

“All team members took part in a variety of workshops ranging from defining our purpose statement to exploring what kind of work we wanted to focus on in the future. We now have a flexible and democratic management structure which reflects the representative and collegiate working environment that 7N has worked so hard to create over the years.”

7N Architects has been involved in many of Scotland’s most transformative development projects during the past 15 years. Originally a masterplanning specialist, the company has latterly diversified to include the end delivery



Ben Watson, Ewan Anderson, Craig Tait

of a range of high-profile residential, civic and commercial developments.

Current projects include a ‘Re-Imagining Railways’ project for Network Rail having been selected from 200 international entries to design the railway station of the future, with design guidance being published in 2022 for more than 2000 stations across the UK. 7N is also leading West Town in Edinburgh, helping to deliver a brand new ‘twenty-minute neighbourhood’ featuring 7,000 homes to the west of the city.

Employees were involved in the process from the very early stages. An initial presentation at the annual away day in East Lothian sounded out thoughts on the proposed move to employee ownership. Once the transition project launched, there were a series of workshops held with all staff to explore what their aspirations would be for the studio under employee ownership, and incorporating these into the companies legal documents. At the same time, a rigorous selection process was running to appoint the new directors to the company board. A session on the role of the Trust and Trustee was followed by a well contested election to appoint the employee trustees.

The company celebrated their move to employee ownership, and their 15th anniversary with a reception in their Edinburgh offices, attended by employees, friends and clients.

OAUK News

Good to see the number of companies moving to employee ownership continue to increase. We are now just a few short of the magic 200 which we should hit this month. Still a way to go to achieve the Scottish Government's ambition of 500 by 2030. It was good to hear from Malcolm Dick at GS Brown that Claire Baker MSP was genuinely interested in how employee ownership worked when she visited recently. Claire is a Co-op Party MSP and has raised questions in the past as to how the Scottish Government should be better supporting a business model that is proven to be good for the economy.

It is so encouraging to read about the first EOT in Ireland – and what an interesting company. Wolfgang's CEO Alan Coleman's words particularly resonated with me "Many of the young people who work in Wolfgang fear they'll never own where they live. They now own where they work." What a powerful statement! I feel we sometimes lose sight of how transformative employee ownership can be; when a business is owned by its employees there is quite a seismic shift in power. It doesn't mean that employees run the business; it's more that the business is run for the employees. And the primary concern is the company continues to be successful and the meaning of that success is often articulated in the company's constitutional documents. The company's leadership must understand that and do all they can to enhance and protect the employees' value in their company.

And of course, this ownership has to be real. Feedback from the recent Learning Event suggests that many companies aren't taking full advantage of the benefits that the EOT brings. The Trust exists to ensure the company is run for the benefit of its employees. Not external shareholders, not for a remote body, but for the current and future employees. The individuals appointed to the Trust, whether as Trustees or Trustee Directors, have a pivotal role in making sure employee interests are front and centre in every decision and action taken by the company's Board. It's a weighty responsibility and having the



right people in the right places goes a long way to a healthy employee-owned company.

The EOT was designed to be a long term model of ownership. However, there may be good reasons why the Trustees decide it's in the best interests of the employees to agree to a sale. So what happens in that case? Tax Barrister, David Pett, produced [a comprehensive explanation](#) of what happens when an EOT controlled company is sold. In most cases, as controllers of the majority shareholding, the decision to sell will sit with the Trustees, not the Company's board. Some company articles differ from this and insist on an employee vote. As David Pett points out, it's a complicated matter and there's much more to it than just getting a high price.

Thankfully, most employee owned companies are here for the long term. Will we break the 200 barrier in time for the next issue of Ownership Matters?

Yours in partnership

- Carole
01786 611066

Smith Design Associates employee ownership move

Having completed 30 successful years in business, **Smith Design Associates** are delighted to announce their transition to Employee Ownership. The change to an Employee Ownership Trust completed on Thursday 15th of February, making 2024 an extremely exciting and significant year for the Practice.

Employee Ownership will allow the dedicated members of staff to continue providing a high quality service for clients into the future, whilst creating an enhanced collaborative working approach across the company.

The team have worked together for a very long time, many for 20-25 years or more, and are a close-knit and happy group. Over the years colleagues have become friends and collectively are all excited about the future of the Practice under Employee Ownership.

A number of new appointments have been made as part of this transition, which the practice announced as part of the news:

Brian Smith has stepped back from his role as Managing Director and is now Chair, reducing his working week to three days. Brian will continue to support his existing clients and contribute to their development programme for the next five years.

Norrie Ross is the new Managing Director with responsibility for the strategic approach and performance of the Practice. Norrie joined the company in 2000 and has been a Director since 2007.

Andrew Goody has been appointed as a Director and has been with the company since 2011. Andrew is the first board appointment since 2019 and brings youth and enthusiasm to his new role as the Practice evolves for the future.

Douglas Allan has been appointed as a Technical Director and has been with the company since



1998. Douglas has unrivalled expertise in drawing and specification management, in addition to his proven track record in project delivery.

Helen Cassidy has been appointed as an Associate as part of the new management team. Helen has been a key contributor since 1999 and brings attention to detail and scrutiny of all possible design solutions to her work. Our younger members of staff benefit from her experience.

Stewart McKenna Maxwell has also been appointed as an Associate having joined the Practice in 2006. Stewart is a very experienced Architect in food retail development and highly valued by his clients.

Scott Jordan joined the Practice in 2014 and has been appointed as an Associate. A qualified Architect, Scott has taken a key role with a national food retailer contributing to all aspects of their development programme in recent years.

Smith Design Associates have embraced the potential of Employee Ownership and look forward to providing continued service to existing clients and welcoming new clients in the years to come.



Shetland construction firm now employee-owned

Shetland based construction company, **DITT Construction Ltd** has transferred its entire shareholding to an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT).

The business originally started in 1974 and currently employs some 95 people. It has completed many of Shetland's best-known buildings including Clickimin Swimming Pool, Shetland Museum and Mareel. DITT has a long-standing contract at Sullom Voe Terminal and operates a busy Builders Merchants shop.

The decision for this transformative shift came from the current shareholders, Gibbie Irvine, Roy Leask, George Smith and Peter Tait, who took over the business in a management buyout in 2000.

This is seen as an ideal opportunity for the nextgenerational change in the business ownership and management. When considering succession options, central to the director's thoughts was to keep the workforce secure and ensure that the Company remains a vibrant and significant part of the Shetland economy.

Peter Tait: *"Our success is due to the loyal team we have at DITT. We are committed to an annual intake of new apprentices to refresh the workforce and ensure that there are opportunities for all for training and development."*

"A sale to a third party would potentially have disrupted that philosophy. This move to employee

ownership allows the company to continue to offer an excellent service to our clients, and secure long term employment opportunities."

He added: *"A sale to an employee ownership trust lets us leave the company in safe hands. We have a very talented and experienced leadership team stepping up to take over greater responsibilities"*

The move facilitates a smooth exit for Gibbie, Roy and George who are stepping down as directors. Peter Tait is remaining as Managing Director in the meantime to ensure that the transition continues in a smooth manner.

Additionally, in the interim, the company has made three new board appointments in

Lewie Tulloch, Steven Farquhar and Liam Spence, who will join long standing director John Tait.





MSP Visit to GS Brown Precision Engineering

Claire Baker MSP, of the Scottish Labour and Scottish Co-operative Party and Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Economy and Fair Work Committee, Claire Baker, paid a visit to **GS Brown Precision Engineers** in Ladybank recently. Claire is an enthusiastic supporter of employee ownership and was keen to find out the benefits directly from the company.

Claire met with Malcolm Dick, Director of GS Brown and heard how moving to an employee ownership model has encouraged staff retention, improved productivity, and been very positive for the business.

Claire is interested in encouraging employee ownership, identifying any barriers, and understanding how to support more businesses to adopt co-op models in the region of Mid Scotland and Fife and across Scotland.

She says, *"If Scotland is to grow the number of employee-owned business and reach the target*

of 500, and meet Scotland's wellbeing economy ambitions, further action is needed from the Scottish Government now to achieve this."

"I have written to the Scottish Government to ask if they are considering introducing incentives, such as funding to help with the initial costs, to encourage more businesses to take up the positive opportunities that employee ownership offers."

GS Brown is recognised as a progressive manufacturing facility providing high precision engineering components and assemblies, in medium to high volume, for the hydraulics, robotics, telecommunications and instrumentation sectors. GS Brown became employee-owned in 2019.

The move was part of the succession plans for the family owners, who wanted the company to remain local. One of the conditions of the deal is that any future sale of the company requires the agreement of 80% of the workforce.





First EOT in Ireland!

Pictured - Wolfgang Digital's newly elected employee reps with CEO Alan Coleman. Left to right - Chris Bury, Rob Beirne, Shreya Barua, Stephen Murphy, Niamh O'Doherty, Ian Booth, and Alan Coleman.

Wolfgang Digital has become the first Irish-owned company to transition to employee ownership through an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT).

The “Wolfgang Talent Trust” established on May 3rd, 2024, marks a significant shift, with employees of over 12 months becoming partners in the Trust. This move empowers employees, granting them a voice in decision-making processes and fostering a sense of ownership.

Founder and CEO Alan Coleman highlighted the transformative impact of this shift, emphasising the shift from renter to owner mentality among employees. Adopting an employee ownership model introduces a democratic framework within **Wolfgang Digital**, with elected representatives playing a key role in decision-making. He had this to say: *“Many of the young people who work in Wolfgang fear they’ll never own where they live. They now own where they work. Because the gang now has skin in the game, their relationship with their workplace has changed from renter to owner.*

I believe this will improve performance at work and the business will grow in strength.”

Under the Wolfgang Partners initiative, employees will receive regular profit shares every three months, further aligning their interests with the company’s success. Additionally, a portion of the company’s profits will be reinvested annually to facilitate the Trust’s gradual acquisition of majority ownership within a decade.

Adopting an employee ownership model also introduces a democratic framework within Wolfgang Digital. Each team has elected a representative who can bring their insights and suggestions to decision-makers. Moreover, employee representatives will play a pivotal role in electing trust board members, ensuring that employee interests remain at the forefront of strategic decisions.

Incorporating employee ownership activities such as the “Wolves Den,” where employees contribute ideas for innovation budget allocation, underscores Wolfgang Digital’s commitment

(Continued)

to fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. Importantly, the company's constitution now mandates that operations prioritise long-term employee benefits, a stark departure from the traditional focus on maximising shareholder wealth.

Contrary to conventional notions of success being tied to selling out to larger entities, Wolfgang's journey toward employee ownership represents a redefinition of success according to CEO Alan Coleman:

"We've had many opportunities to sell out to international acquirers. I've learned from these conversations that the sell-out is designed to extract value from the company. Selling out doesn't feel like success to me, it feels like death, the death of the dream.

On the other hand, the sell-in to employees creates value for all stakeholders in the business. There is a win-win-win for people, customers, and society. Personally, I love the legacy aspect of employee ownership. Our precious

vision and values are now legally enshrined in our constitution forever more."

The appointment of Graeme Nuttall OBE, a well-known advocate of employee ownership, as the independent Chairperson of the Wolfgang Talent Trust underscores the significance of this transition. Nuttall's expertise and advocacy will encourage a broader acceptance and adoption of employee ownership models in Ireland, potentially establishing a thriving ecosystem of employee-owned enterprises.

Wolfgang Digital's ground-breaking shift to employee ownership marks a significant milestone in Ireland's business environment. By adopting a model focused on empowering employees and ensuring long-term sustainability, Wolfgang Digital not only cements its legacy but also establishes a blueprint for other companies to replicate. As the idea of employee ownership gains momentum globally, Wolfgang Digital stands out as a leader in innovation and inclusivity, redefining the future of work.

Fellowship for Helen Erwood

Helen Erwood, founder and Director of Shetland based regulatory affairs firm ESPL, has been honoured with the appointment of Fellow to TOPRA; The Organisation for Professionals in Regulatory Affairs. The team were delighted at the recognition.

*"All of us at ESPL would like to congratulate **Helen Erwood** for being awarded a TOPRA Fellowship. Having worked in Regulatory Affairs for over 35 years, supported many clients during the 24 years of developing **ESPL Regulatory Consulting**, teaching Regulatory Affairs around the world, and striving to stay at the forefront of the ever-changing field of RA, this is a well-deserved achievement of which we are all very proud."*

ESPL is one of the UK's most experienced regulatory consultancies. The company has been providing clients across the Pharmaceutical, Medical Device, Cosmetic, and Veterinary Drug sectors worldwide with industry leading consultancy services for the past two decades. ESPL became employee-owned in 2019.

"I'm delighted and humbled to be welcomed to TOPRA Fellowship. After 40 years in regulatory affairs, it remains a wonderful profession that continues to fascinate and challenge. Achieving Fellow Status has made me more determined to continue my journey supporting TOPRA and the profession with teaching, mentoring and strategy."

Helen Erwood FTOPRA

Director Global
Regulatory Affairs
ESPL Regulatory
Consulting





Fred Bowden

Aquascot welcomes Fred Bowden Snr as Chair of Board

Aquascot is an award-winning seafood supplier based in Alness, in the Highlands. The company achieved 100 per cent employee-ownership in 2016 and has been processing salmon and trout for more than 30 years, partnering with UK top-end retailer Waitrose as their dedicated supplier. In 2021 they won the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) trophy for excellence in people development at the SCDI Highlands and Islands Business Excellence Awards. In 2022 they won employer of the year at the Scotland Food and Drink Excellence Awards.

Following 3 years on the Aquascot Board as Chair, Simon Fowler will be succeeded in April by Fred Bowden. His appointment has been overseen by the Trust Board Nominations Committee, the Aquascot Board and the Chair of Partnership Council.

Simon Fowler, Chair of Aquascot Trust: *“I am delighted Fred has been appointed to the role following a detailed process involving a broad range of partners from around the Aquascot business. Fred brings a wealth of valuable experience from the world of manufacturing and employee ownership.”*

Fred worked at employee-owned business, The Tullis Russell Group for just under 30 years in the roles of General Manager, Group CEO and most latterly as Chairman. Prior to this Fred was at

the paper company Arjo Wiggins Appleton where he rose to the position of divisional director of distribution in the Fine Papers division.

For 10 years Fred was also Chairman of the employee owned Childbase Partnership Board, responsible for the monitoring of the management board in relation to the agreed strategies and business plans and the development of both the elected employee directors and the three non-executive directors. He was also Non-Executive Board member of trust-based Aberdeen Harbour board where he was a member of the remuneration committee, chair of the audit committee and a pension trustee.

Fred Bowden, Chairman: *“I’m looking forward to taking on this exciting role. I am fully committed to the ideals of employee ownership and believe it is part of my DNA. My first introduction to employee ownership was with The Tullis Russell Group when we embarked on an employee buyout from the Russell family, convincing me that this was a better way to do business from both the company and employee’s perspective. I look forward to supporting Aquascot on both its commercial and employee ownership journey.”*

Simon will continue to hold strong links with Aquascot as Chair of the Aquascot Trust, a role he took up in 2023 following the retirement of co-founder, Dennis Overton.

Employee Ownership Learning Event

April 2024

The recent learning event, taking place in Glasgow last month, was judged a great success with several requests for a repeat event. Indeed, attendees expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to network and learn from each other.

The session was fully subscribed with a wide range of companies attending; some were new into employee ownership and others with longer employee ownership histories such as Clansman Dynamics (2009), Stewartry Care (2004) and Collective Architecture (2007).

The focus was very much on the role of the Trust in the company, and that of the Trustees or Trustee Directors. There were some interesting discussions regarding the relationship between the Trust and the company Board, and the Trust and the employees. Many found that the nuts and bolts on running the Trust to be useful; this is an element that is often forgotten about once the initial transaction is complete.

Delegates found the case studies a valuable exercise. Attendees broke into groups to examine some examples of where the Trustees might have to intervene in how the company is running.

Undoubtedly, the best outcome from the day was the opportunity to talk and share experiences with other employee owners.

It is planned to hold another session in September.



“The event surpassed my expectations! I feel like I’ve gained a ton of valuable knowledge and it’s really boosted my confidence as a trustee director.”

- Vilma, Edinburgh Design

“Great learning event and very eye opening into what is expected as trustee.”

- Matthew, EDC

“Informative, concise and great for sharing experiences with others.”

- John, Clansman Dynamics

“The event exceeded my expectations. The information was presented into segments with delegate interaction that I found very useful.”

- Tracey, Mediascape

“The whole day was very well structured. Carole’s facilitation skills were highly professional not to mention her overall knowledge of the EO industry.”

- Andy, Esteem Training



PROMOTION

Allstaff

Allstaff are delighted to announce the promotion of Jennifer Pagliocca to the position of Managing Consultant. Jennifer has been with the company for 5 years. She says *“It’s been a great journey so far and I’m looking forward to my next chapter at Allstaff. We have the best team!”*



Jennifer Paliocca

PROMOTION

Martin Precision

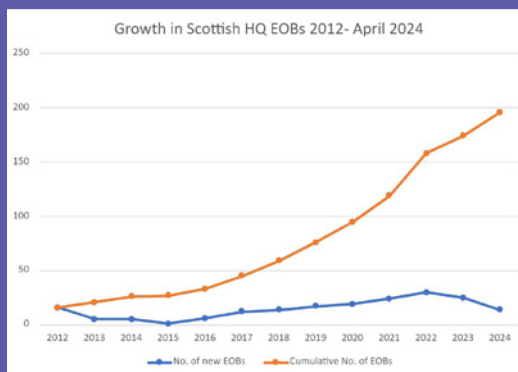
Martin Precision has announced the promotion of Alan Muir to the role of Quality Manager. Alan has been with the business since 2001 and has progressed through the CNC apprenticeship, Non-Destructive testing, Health & Safety, Facilities, Quality and Production departments.



Alan Muir

Alan is also a Trustee of the EOT.

Employee Ownership in Scotland



OA Ownership Associates uk
let's make it happen

