

# SOCIETY matters



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From the sharp end

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Hello and welcome to the Spring edition of **Society Matters**



We hear from a lot of different voices in this edition – enjoy!

**T**he imperative of having strong and empathetic leaders in all businesses is talked and written about a lot. It is far from a new requirement, but seems especially important right now given the sheer number of external challenges and changing expectations everyone is facing. Ambiguity is part of our everyday, making breadth, depth and confidence in our leaders a massive advantage.

There are many ways in which leaders are grown: A very few people are born with it; for others it is gained through years of experience. You can import leaders and or ‘grow your own’.

The benefit of growing internal talent was behind the BSA/Loughborough University Business School MSc programme – which started way back in 2015. Even though I have been involved in the programme from the start, I am astounded that this year we are about to recruit our eighth group of students onto this three year, part time MSc programme. It may be a well-kept secret but the programme can be at least 95% funded by government for the first two-years, which can be taken as an apprenticeship; with a modest investment for the third year which delivers the ‘Masters Degree’.

Over the following pages (page 10 to page 14) hear from graduates, a student and a building society CEO about the impact of the programme and what it has delivered – plus a reality check on how the hard work it entails is dovetailed with work and family life. So far we have had 123 students on the programme, 83 of whom have graduated.

On top of these real life portraits about the MSc I am delighted that we are featuring two BSA members in this edition, with double page spreads on very different, but equally fascinating strategic topics.



On pages 6 and 7 we hear from Newcastle Building Society on the pilot it is running at two of its community branches with shared bank branch innovator, OneBanx. Could this offer a fresh approach to tackling the challenge of maintaining and restoring access to cash, preventing more of our high streets from being cut-adrift?

Then on pages 8 and 9 something different from The Cumberland, which shares details of its new brand purpose, Kinder Banking, and how that translated into hundreds of local people donating 2,000 hours of their time to volunteer with more than 25 local charities and good causes.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at the BSA Conference in Liverpool, running from lunch time on 3 May to the conference dinner in the stupendous Liverpool Cathedral on 4 May – who knows how many Eurovision song contest entrants you may bump into while you are there! If you haven’t booked-up yet, take a look at the conference website [bsaconference.org](http://bsaconference.org).

In the meantime read-on...

**HILARY MCVITTY**  
 Guest Editor

**The future of talent management – it’s all AI now!**



By **ROBIN FIETH**,  
 BSA Chief Executive

The flurry of recent stories about ChatGPT have been fascinating. A long anticipated breakthrough in artificial intelligence that threatens or promises (depending on your perspective) to turn our ways of learning, working and much more on its head.

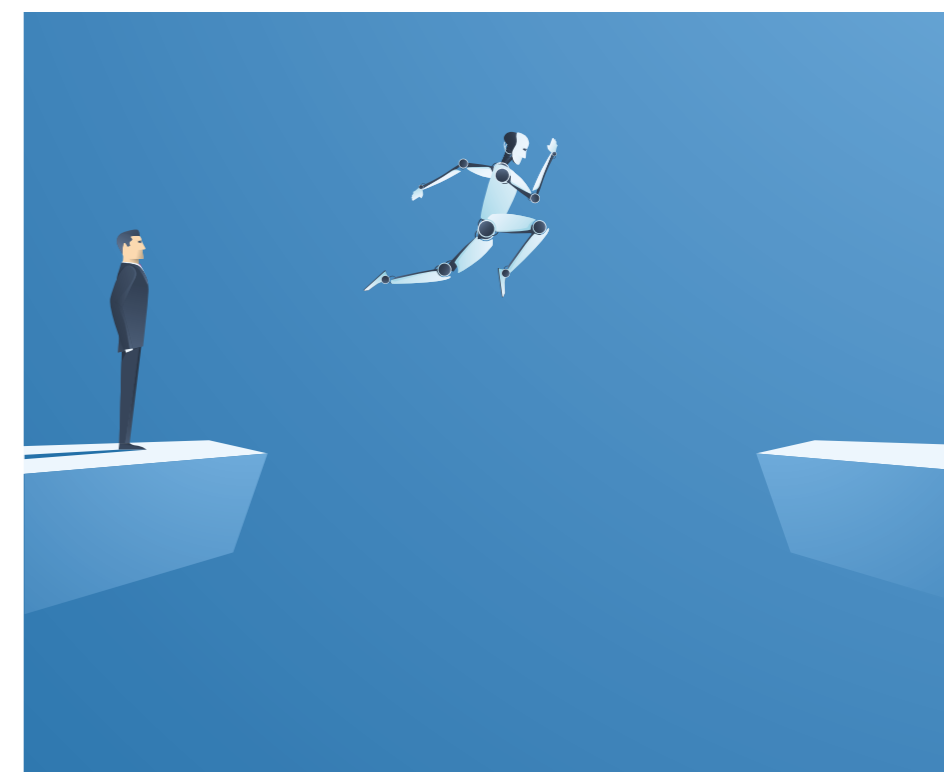
**F**rom doing your homework for you to, apparently, successfully passing a Wharton MBA paper, the capabilities of this latest innovation and others like it could very well change our world forever.

The stories caused me to return to Richard and Daniel Susskind’s 2015 book, *The Future of the Professions*, on how technology will transform the work of human experts, and in which they argue that as machines become increasingly capable, it is not at all clear why professionals in sectors as diverse as health, education, divinity, law, architecture and accountancy (and let’s include banking for good measure) will be able to secure their place indefinitely in joint ventures with artificial intelligence.

*“Manual ledgers gave way to mainframe computers, which in turn gave way to servers and PCs, and now many societies are embracing robotics and machine learning.”*

So, are we nearing the point where we no longer need to invest in human talent management to achieve growth and advancement in our businesses? Can we secure the future for our organisations by investing in technology rather than talent? Is the generational technology promise of an easier life and more leisure time actually upon us? Or is this the latest innovation in the cycle of an ever accelerating pace of work – a world in which we humans increasingly become the slaves of technology, rather than the other way round?

Going further back, Jim Collins’s *Good to Great*, now published well over twenty years ago, relates his team’s debate on technology and the fear of being left behind. Collins reminds us that technology induced change is nothing new, as we know when we look



back through the amazing histories of so many building societies. Manual ledgers gave way to mainframe computers, which in turn gave way to servers and PCs, and now many societies are embracing robotics and machine learning. Passbooks are no longer written up by hand, and are supplemented or succeeded by websites and apps.

The real question that Jim Collins poses is how great organisations think differently about technology; and how, when used well, technology becomes an accelerator of momentum, not a creator of it. He argued that “good-to-great companies never begin their transitions with pioneering technology, for the simple reason that you cannot make good use of technology until you know which technologies are relevant”.

Today’s tech industry may well dismiss that argument, but in the current AI debate, it feels like one we should revisit in terms of how we invest in the future of our businesses and our mutual sector. Surely, I would suggest, we need to double down on investment in talent management. If we are to harness these great leaps in technology for the benefit of our society and our world, we will need our future leaders to have the skills and experience to do so. And I would argue, with a particular focus on a deep understanding of the proper role and purpose of business in society, and all the ethical considerations that underpin that wonderful definition of integrity – doing the right thing even when no one is watching.

No AI Chatbots were involved in the writing of this article. Whether that is a good thing, I will leave you to decide!

# Reflections



By **MARK BOGARD**,  
Chair of the BSA

I am nearing the end of my time as BSA Chair and wanted to reflect on a couple of regulatory related issues.



## Conduct – caveat emptor?

I am a lawyer by training. It happened by accident. I wanted to change my course at university. The choice I was presented with was either The History of Art or Law? You learn that English common law evolves over the centuries by precedent. Politicians also come up with new laws via statutes on an ad hoc basis; judges then have to interpret these. Judges sometimes get a bad rap but, mostly what you uncover as you read their judgments, in the important historical precedents, is utterly brilliant. The most careful balancing of many competing interests gradually defined and evolved over time by people with vast experience, deep intellects and a profound sense of what is just. The eloquence and tightness of some of the judgments is extraordinary. Regulation should evolve in the same way.

Judges wrestle with the great concepts that found our society – duty, breach, negligence, reasonableness, causation, loss. The relationship between the parties; their conduct; the relationship between behaviour and damage; the duty to take care – sometimes it is a duty to avoid careless action, sometimes a duty to take proper precaution, sometimes a duty to guard others from harm, sometimes physical, sometimes economic. Indeed what is the proper function of the law itself?

The purchase of a home is probably the largest financial transaction that most people

will make. The principle of caveat emptor or “let the buyer beware” places the buyer under an obligation to discover any physical defects in the property they are buying. That principle is a foundation of English common law and is broadly based. It has been developed over the years. There have

*“firms effectively have no balanced way to appeal against an Ombudsman’s decisions. We can seek Judicial Review, we are told. Well judges do not want their courts clogged up reviewing the countless decisions of bureaucrats. So they make it nearly impossible to win.”*

been discussions since 1988 about reversing the principle in relation to property purchase but, after the most careful consideration by the Law Commission and successive Governments, it remains.

## So what’s my point?

At an interaction that the BSA had with the FOS, I asked what the customer is now responsible for in their world? Apparently, this was not a question that could be answered. Judges would not end up here and it is breath-taking.

This is compounded by the fact that firms effectively have no balanced way to appeal against an Ombudsman’s decisions. We can seek Judicial Review, we are told. Well judges do not want their courts clogged up reviewing the countless decisions of bureaucrats. So they make it nearly impossible to win. At my previous firm, we had one of the lead cases on this. The judge said that he would certainly have found in favour of the firm had the case come before him but the test in a judicial review was “is this a decision that no reasonable Ombudsman could have come to?”, which is a rather different test. We lost. The FOS told the BSA that they win 98% of these cases. Exactly. Firms need an alternative appeal mechanism for reviewing significant FOS decisions, perhaps drawing on the experience of judges.

## Prudential – it’s good to talk

As regards prudential regulation, I believe that the BSA has strengthened its relationship with the PRA over the last few years. Sam Woods asked that we meet for longer at our last meeting. It has been a long journey, given the historic views of some there about Building Societies, but a really important and valuable one. I believe that the sector has earned it.

## Next steps:

Follow Mark Bogard on LinkedIn. Mark is also the Chief Executive of Family Building Society, he will be Chair of the BSA until early May 2023.

# Green Mortgages, the path ahead



By **RACHAEL HUNNISSETT**,  
Green Mortgage Campaign Lead,  
Green Finance Institute

You will likely be no stranger to the term ‘green mortgage’, with the number of green mortgage products increasing from 3 in 2017 to 51 in 2022. But what is a green mortgage?

In my work leading the Green Mortgage Campaign at the GFI, I have asked this question across the mortgage industry. It may not be a surprise to learn that I received more answers on what a green mortgage isn’t, rather than what it actually is. Through campaigning it is our mission at the Green Finance Institute (GFI) to enable a scalable green mortgage market, which plays a significant role in improving the energy efficiency of UK homes – which will be vital given almost 20% of carbon emissions come from our homes.<sup>1</sup> We are in the design and scoping phase of the campaign, so I thought I’d share my early thinking on the direction of travel:

important first step on the road to net zero, with more innovation to follow...

**Customer choice.** There are lots of ways to provide financial solutions which unlock the retrofit market. For example, unsecured loans and property-linked finance are examples of scalable mechanisms which can deliver results in this space. Green mortgages provide a key opportunity to support and encourage retrofitting at scale, while continuing to do what Building Societies do particularly well, keeping their members heart of everything they do.

At the Green Finance Institute, through our connections with industry, finance and government, we continue to work with the market to ensure longevity and scalability, focusing on a solutions based approach to provide tools and insight which support market growth. Green mortgages provide an exciting path forward for our industry on the road to secure a net-zero future.

## Next steps:

GFI Website: [Green Finance Institute](https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk)  
Rachael Hunnisett LinkedIn  
[greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk](https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk)

**Collaboration is key when it comes to green mortgages**, unlike many instances in product design. We could liken it to putting the cart before the horse as usually in product design you start with consumer demand and build out from there. We are in a unique environment where we have a brief window of time before consumer demand gains pace. This differs from the usual product design process. It is a unique mind who can think of a solution to a problem their customer doesn’t realise they have yet. Thankfully, there are plenty of unique and wonderful minds creating solutions. Our Broker’s Handbook – produced in collaboration with leading industry experts, including the BSA – proves that working in partnership often drives better results.

**Continuous evolution** is needed. I’m often asked about the effectiveness of cashback or discounted products – this can be quite a polarising question. My view is that in the current market, we are stood with lots of options when it comes to the next iteration of green products, from retrofit solutions to usage linked innovation – there are plenty of ideas. It’s important that we use this opportunity to put consumer choice at the heart of product design. While the exact needs of the consumer are being established, product design should continue to evolve with these potentially changing needs. Cashback and discounted rate products are an



<sup>1</sup> 2021 UK greenhouse gas emissions, provisional figures ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))



By **MICHAEL CONVILLE**, Acting Chief Customer Officer at Newcastle Building Society

# A blueprint for restoring access to cash and financial services on our high streets

Unsurprisingly, the subject of bank branch closures is one that often engenders an emotional response from the communities they impact the most. Since 2015, more than 5,000 banking branches have closed across the UK, with a raft of further closures in UK towns announced on what feels like a daily basis. In the wake of this abandonment of local communities, could the financial services sector take a fresh approach to tackling the challenge of maintaining and restoring access to cash, preventing more of our high streets from being cut-adrift?

The beginning of 2023 saw the latest step in Newcastle Building Society's commitment to growing its high street presence and making people think differently about branches. As a UK-first, the mutual is piloting a project to restore access to cash on high streets and town centres. Collaborating with shared bank branch innovator OneBanx, it is providing access to a multi-bank kiosk in its Gosforth (Newcastle) and Knaresborough (North Yorkshire) branches.

The kiosks allow small businesses and personal customers of any bank in the Open Banking network to withdraw and deposit cash and coins from their accounts by use of a mobile app. In their first month

of operation, the kiosks have experienced growing interest amongst customers, with feedback from local businesses positive, embracing the service after bank closures as an alternative to travelling some distance to the next nearest bank or undertaking basic banking tasks via the Post Office. As with the adoption of any new amenity, there is a transition period, which the Society's branch colleagues are supporting customers and service users through.

It's hoped the pilot will help keep cash alive and high streets vibrant in local communities, while addressing customers' dissatisfaction with the growing absence of available cash, inhibiting their ability to transact locally. No less so than in Gosforth, Newcastle, which

has seen several major bank branches close over recent years, with more closures planned for 2023, despite concerns voiced by local businesses and residents.

According to a 2022 Which? survey, more people are turning to cash to help them budget in the face of a cost of living crisis. Of 4,000 people surveyed, more than half (54%) said they regularly use cash alongside other payment methods such as debit and credit cards. Of those, half

(52%) said that cash helps them keep track of their spending - equivalent to 15 million people. Meanwhile 20% of people who don't regularly use cash said they would start using it if the cost of living crisis gets worse.<sup>1</sup>

For Newcastle Building Society, restoring access to cash is just one strand of its blueprint for a future branch model, which combines communities, technology and partnerships to deliver essential, face-to-face, and local financial services cost effectively. Alongside convenient access to cash, the inability to transact locally has been highlighted as another concern for people. Newcastle Building Society's UK consumer branch survey 2023, suggests that 1.4million people in the UK now have to travel more than an hour to reach their closest branch. With the average round trip costing £9.00, in-person banking is no longer possible for more than a quarter of those surveyed.

The steady attrition of physical branches is an ongoing cause for concern UK-wide. The average UK adult still visits their branch in-person twice a month, but 38% worry their local bank or building society will close this year, presenting more customers with longer journey times and increased costs to undertake the financial transactions they wish, or need to conduct face-to-face.

## A blueprint to maintain access to financial services

In 2016, in the Teesside town of Yarm, a joint scheme between Stockton Borough Council and Newcastle Building Society saw the UK's first library-based building society branch open its doors.



Branch Manager, Heather Pearman in Knaresborough Branch

This joint vision to share a resource to mutual advantage in order to support local people's saving and borrowing needs and offer local face-to-face financial advice services has seen the branch achieve significant success, far exceeding early expectations.

## Sharing resource to deliver multiple services under one roof

In Hawes, a small market town in the Yorkshire Dales, the community suffered the plight of seeing its last bank branch close at a time when the economy of the town relied on having access to financial services.

Working collaboratively with the Upper Dales Community Partnership, Newcastle Building Society set out to restore the vital services that were being lost. In 2019, a community branch was established inside the Hawes Community Office, which also runs the local post office, a well-used volunteer bus service and the town's library. By sharing space at the heart of the community the mutual is able to support Hawes maintain several vital services that run from the premises, while keeping its own operating costs comparatively low. A similar story in Wooler in Northumberland saw Newcastle Building Society's community branch open in the Cheviot Centre in 2020, the successful product of a collaboration with the Glendale Gateway Trust. Its branch counter sits alongside the Tourist Information service, a gift shop and a library.

## Providing a lifeline to communities

In 2021, in the thriving market town of Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, Harrogate Borough Council needed a solution after it received notice that the town's last bank was to be closed.

After reaching out to Newcastle Building Society to discuss options for establishing a branch presence to maintain local access to financial services a further community branch was launched, this time inside Knaresborough's popular library building. It offers the Society's full range of services and has created four new jobs for the town, while becoming a pilot branch for the OneBanx kiosk to serve the bustling local economy, restoring access to cash for both personal and business users.

The months ahead will see Newcastle Building Society continue to listen to customers, monitor usage of the kiosks and improve where necessary. The Society is keen to point out that, if successful, the model is potentially applicable to every high street.

As the Society continues to look for opportunities where it can bridge the gap in communities left abandoned by financial services providers, it aims to take a tailored approach to meeting the needs of customers in its heartland. Its Community

branch model works in partnership with local people and organisations, leveraging technology, enabling it to fulfil its commitment to delivering face-to-face financial services.

## Customer Testimonial

Situated in the heart of Knaresborough, the Music Bank opened in 2020 as an independent retailer selling a wide range of instruments and offering musical tuition.

Nathan Francey, The Music Bank's Store Manager, was one of the first to try out the OneBanx terminal in the Library branch, and said: "It's fantastic to have the Newcastle Building Society branch in the library, it's really convenient and the staff are so friendly. Hearing that customers and businesses will have access to cash withdrawal and deposit is such a great boost for the town. The kiosk was straightforward to use and access, it will save us so much time and effort travelling to Harrogate to our nearest bank branch, so as a business we will definitely be using the machine going forward."

## Next steps:

Read more about Newcastle's Community Branches at [www.newcastle.co.uk/powering-communities/community-branches](http://www.newcastle.co.uk/powering-communities/community-branches)



Nathan Francey, Store Manager at the Music Bank and OneBanx Kiosk user

<sup>1</sup> [www.which.co.uk/news/article/more-people-could-turn-to-cash-to-help-budget-as-cost-of-living-rises-aada54Q9HEAk](http://www.which.co.uk/news/article/more-people-could-turn-to-cash-to-help-budget-as-cost-of-living-rises-aada54Q9HEAk)

# Kinder Banking: How a building society made the world a kinder place

A wave of kindness swept across Cumbria and south-west Scotland last year.

The Cumberland



By **NIGEL TAYLOR**,  
Head of Marketing,  
The Cumberland

**N**ot just a social media surge. But a real life, practical, roll up your sleeves, go to those in need and put in some effort to help, sort of wave. Hundreds of local people pitched in, donating an amazing 2,000 hours of their time to volunteer with more than 25 local charities and good causes.

The volunteers ranged from school children to grannies, local business leaders, a college principal and numerous ordinary shoppers who made a pledge to help their community often on the spur of the moment.

But how did this tide of generosity come about? It was all thanks to Kinder Shops, a pioneering idea launched by Carlisle based The Cumberland as part of the launch of its new brand purpose - Kinder Banking.

The Kinder Shops were the world's first shops where customers could pay with 'kindness' – by volunteering to work for a local charity.

Eager shoppers snapped up gifts, hampers, homeware, garden furniture, toys and barbeques without a penny changing hands. Instead of a price tag each item at a Kinder

Shop bears a label stating how many hours volunteering is needed to 'pay' for it.

The Cumberland ran five of the one-day pop-up shops across its region last year and they were a runaway success.

An initial ambitious target to generate 1,000 volunteer hours for charity was smashed, with the Kinder Shops generating a total of 2,000 hours.

Many of those who volunteered had never done so before and some enjoyed it so much they carried on volunteering after 'paying' for their Kinder Shop goods.

The feedback was enthusiastic with many expressing their delight.

Twelve-year-old Kian Johnston who dropped in to the Christmas Kinder Shop in Dumfries with his school friends, found the perfect Christmas present for his mum.

"I got her this giant cushion because her recliner is broken and my dad always gets the corner of the sofa so this will give her something to support her," he said.

Matthew Carroll, 12, and Aaron Kirk, 11, also found gifts for their mums.

"I got my mum a pair of fluffy slippers. I think it's great to come to a shop like this and get your presents for free by helping others," said Aaron.

The boys paid for their gifts by volunteering at the food bank run by the Queen of the South Community Trust. Dan Armstrong, Queen of the South's community and development manager, said: "The boys have been brilliant. They came down to help us get all the shelves stocked up with donations. The Kinder Shop has been a nice way to show them that looking out for others is valued."

These unique shops were just one part of The Cumberland's new brand strategy.

The aim was to focus attention on the building society's new brand positioning of Kinder Banking and its redefined purpose of 'creating banking experiences that are kinder to people and planet.'

So, rather than selling mortgages, savings and banking products, the idea was to get people talking and thinking about kindness.

The shops were specifically designed – including through the goods on offer and the styling - to reach out to the building society's target audiences and connect those people with their local communities.

The Kinder Shops received coverage from local and national media including print, online, TV and radio. One TikTok post was viewed 154,000 times and Kinder Shop customers became advocates, sharing news of their purchases and volunteering experiences across social media.

The Kinder Banking strategy began in 2021 with extensive research across colleagues, customers, non-customers and including people outside The Cumberland's branch footprint.

The aim was to understand people's opinions and habits as well as their honest views of The Cumberland. It showed that there was a clear preference for its audiences to want to do business with firms that have a social purpose, and a perception that The Cumberland is a kind and people-focused business. This helped it become much clearer about its purpose – summed up in the new brand positioning.

A key aim of the process was to strengthen the culture within the business as it prepares for a period of investment and change to meet customers changing requirements. The rebrand makes it crystal clear what The Cumberland is here to do.

Before any customer-facing messaging began, there was a colleague engagement programme with roadshow events, and a new internal magazine, Our Kind of People, was launched. Staff were invited to attend the Kinder Shops and get involved with the idea of Kinder Banking.

A key message shown by independent research to resonate with The Cumberland audience, contrasted the building society with the sometimes uncaring image associated with Corporate high street banks.

So, the new campaign threw a spotlight on real Cumberland colleagues and customers and their own stories of kindness. The campaign has featured their work on a range of issues from mental health to caring for ancient woodland to running a dog rescue charity.

One way chosen to reinforce the commitment to being 'kinder to the planet' was a partnership with Cumbria Wildlife Trust which will see around £25,000 donated to help red squirrel conservation activities around the region. The campaign used the 'Mortgages for Squirrels' messaging across all media, marking a return to TV advertising with a humorous ad following a red squirrel on moving day. I described the Kinder Banking project as one of the most effective activations of a purpose that I have been involved in.

It has been inspiring to work in a business that really does what it says it's going to do. We genuinely have something unique at The Cumberland, and this project has been an innovative and meaningful way of communicating our purpose.

## Next steps:

Follow Nigel Taylor on LinkedIn  
And The Cumberland on  
[www.cumberland.co.uk](http://www.cumberland.co.uk)



Kinder Shop at Christmas



The Kinder Shop Carlisle



The Kinder Shop Dumfries



The Kinder Shop Kendal

## BSA and Loughborough University Business School MSc

The application window opens on 24 March and closes on 31 July

There will be two Open Days on the University Campus both commencing at 11:00

- 28 March Virtual Open Day (starts at 13:00)
- 29 March (Potential BSA students and employers only)
- 16 May (Potential Open Programme and BSA students and employers)

The full programme brochure will be published by 24 March and will be available on the BSA website. Apprenticeship levy-payers pay £0 for the first two years of the programme with an apprentice. Non levy-payers with an apprentice pay 5% of the programme costs for the first two years and the Government pays the remaining 95%.

Programme information and access to Open Days from Vicki Unwin at the Loughborough University Business School: [V.E.Unwin@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:V.E.Unwin@lboro.ac.uk)



# Unlocking Potential

You've built up the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to excel in your field and made a name for yourself, but how do you make the transition from "potential" to credible leader worthy of people's confidence in your ability to take that next step?



By **DARREN DITCHBURN**, Deputy Chief Executive, Leek Building Society



## Education for senior executives is critical

By **CAROLINE DOMANSKI** MBE, Chief Executive, No1 CopperPot Credit Union

The importance of education for senior executives cannot be overstated.



Through the Loughborough University Masters Programme, senior executives or those looking to progress their careers are able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the sector and its complexities.

I found the Loughborough University Masters Programme invaluable to my development as a credit union professional. It enabled me to gain a greater understanding of the mutual sector and through this, I have been able to assess distinct challenges and develop strategies to overcome these.

The course enables participants to develop the necessary skills to become more successful in their career and to apply academic theory

to real business challenges. It allows students the opportunity to contribute effectively to discussions and debates within the sector, as well as to make more informed decisions. The benefits also include providing students with the opportunity to network with other professionals in the field and acquire valuable insights from across the industry.

Personally, the Loughborough programme allowed me to become more connected with the mutual sector, through the opportunities to network and share experiences. I was able to develop beneficial relationships that enhanced my own knowledge and development and provided a platform to contribute to the sector as a whole. The course enabled me to stay up-to-date with the latest trends and developments and

acquire additional expertise to take No1 CopperPot forward.

The Masters programme supplied the necessary skills for me to become more successful in my career. From financial analysis and value-based decision making, to strategy and marketing, this programme enabled me to develop the business overview that is required for success as a senior executive.

All in all, the Loughborough University Masters Programme is a must for anyone who is serious about progressing their knowledge of the sector and wants to gain an understanding of how different business areas link together, beyond their personal specialism. It provides the relevant and important tools to broaden horizons and progress a successful career.

Finding the right opportunity at the right time can be a challenge, but as I was seeking a way to further my professional career, I was delighted to discover the Leadership and Management master's degree (MSc) through Loughborough University in partnership with the Building Societies Association, which provided the perfect fit.

I wanted to develop more strategically, with a broader knowledge base and the ability to impact more widely across the business. This programme provided me with the opportunity to gain exposure to wider business areas in a structured and purposeful way. It allowed me to gain an understanding of the different areas of the organisation, including a more detailed insight into how different business functions operate and interact.

Each module strikes the right balance between academic research and practical application, by applying skills and knowledge gained to problem solve and develop strategies within the workplace. This meant I was able to build and demonstrate knowledge and skills beyond my own area of expertise to improve my overall performance.

Having made the decision to bypass going to university and head straight into the world of work, I was worried about being able to complete the MSc programme, especially with two young children and a full-time job at the same time. However, I was able to complete a foundation degree through Teesside University before taking on the MSc. This was a really important step for me personally, as it gave me confidence and a good understanding of academic writing and research, all of which are essential for completing the MSc.

One of the biggest, unexpected benefits of the programme is that it provides you with the opportunity to network with peers and build strong relationships. The programme encourages students to share their knowledge and experiences, enabling them to learn from each other and build a supportive network of

professionals. This is beneficial for both the individual and the business, and it certainly allowed me to gain a better understanding with a broader range of views from people with different backgrounds and experiences. The network was also beneficial in terms of supporting each other to navigate both study and day to day work challenges. I know this extends beyond the programme and is one of the qualities which makes working in the building society sector so special.

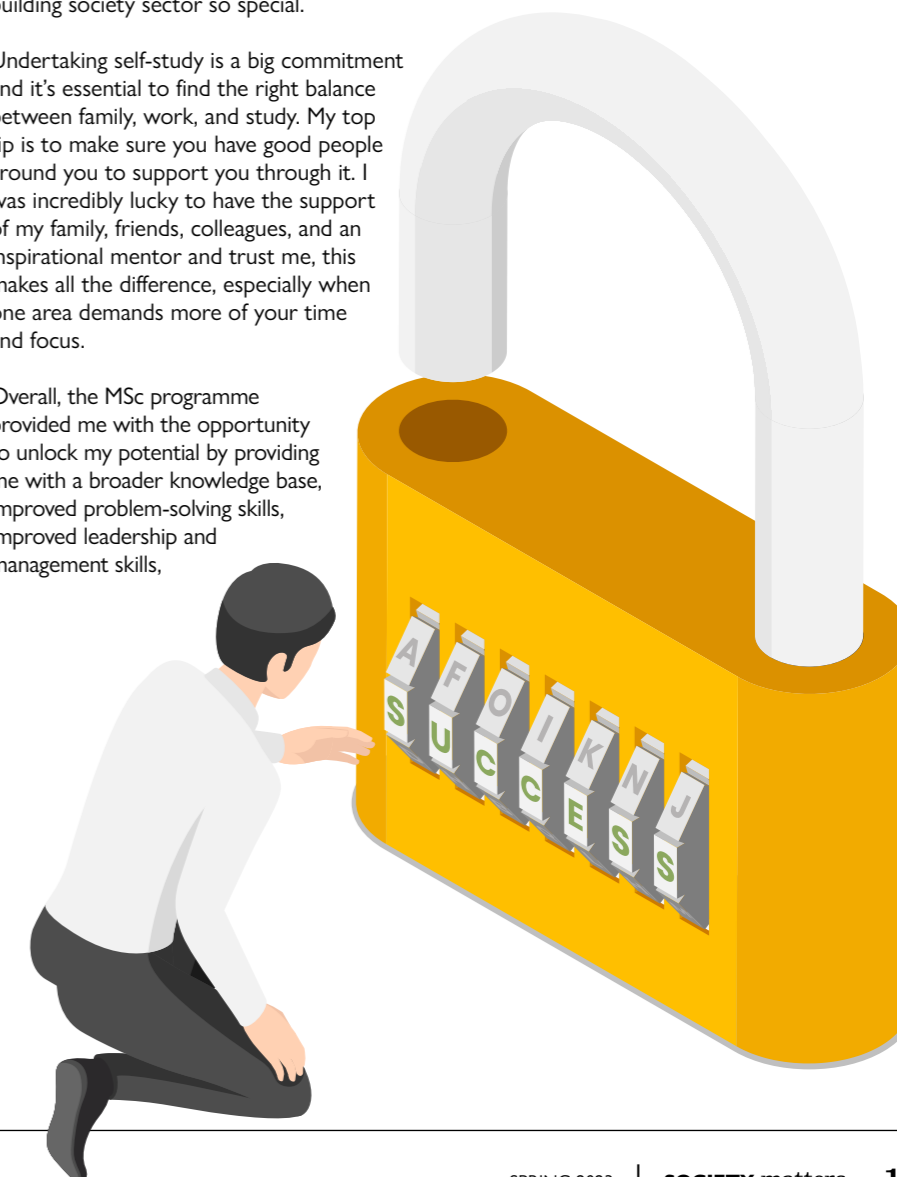
Undertaking self-study is a big commitment and it's essential to find the right balance between family, work, and study. My top tip is to make sure you have good people around you to support you through it. I was incredibly lucky to have the support of my family, friends, colleagues, and an inspirational mentor and trust me, this makes all the difference, especially when one area demands more of your time and focus.

Overall, the MSc programme provided me with the opportunity to unlock my potential by providing me with a broader knowledge base, improved problem-solving skills, improved leadership and management skills,

networking opportunities, and increased personal resilience from working and studying at the same time. All of which has ultimately helped me to progress my career into more senior roles.

### Next steps:

Follow Darren on LinkedIn and the Leek Building Society at [leekbs.co.uk](http://leekbs.co.uk)





By **COLIN FYFE**,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Hinckley & Rugby  
Building Society

# Adding value to our business by investing in our people



Colin Fyfe, Chief Executive Officer at Hinckley and Rugby Building Society, discusses the benefits of a 'grow your own' approach to employee development and the wider benefits of adopting a learning strategy that includes the BSA Masters programme within the workplace.

At Hinckley and Rugby Building Society, it's our biggest responsibility to develop our people and grow our own future leaders from within. Varied and diverse learning is a crucial part of our leadership investment and one which will strengthen our business. Organisations are filled with untapped potential and the BSA MSc provides an opportunity to give our employees structured learning in an environment that understands our sector. It allows them to learn and grow with their peers whilst working with academics to understand theory that can be applied in the business.

Since 2015 we are delighted that six employees have gained their qualifications through this programme and each person has grown in their role and more importantly, their learnings have enabled them to impact the business positively both strategically and operationally. We are ambitious and willing to put people on the course and support them because we understand the advantages it offers, not only for us a business, but also, as a springboard for their careers.

Niki Barker, Chief People Officer comments on the course as a key part of the Society's overall people strategy. "We are committed to investing in our future talent and the value we have seen following the programmes launch has been fantastic for not only individuals but the Society as a whole".

The programme isn't easy, three years is a challenging commitment, especially when maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Our goal is to support students and guide them when implementing their learnings and strategies within the workplace.

Kelly West, Senior People & Culture Manager for the Society as well as recent graduate from the course comments. "I'm

really enjoying seeing the work I put into my dissertation come to life within the organisation and I really look forward to enhancing our ED&I strategy, thanks to the research and findings from it".

Our first participant on the course, Rebecca Griffin started her Master's in 2015 and during her time at university, she received a promotion to Head of Risk and Compliance. Rebecca used the knowledge gained through the course to create various business solutions and has continued to develop and apply her skills which supported her in securing a role as the Society's Chief Risk Officer in 2020.

One of our great success stories, Evan Crosskey received a distinction for his hard work and dedication. Sadly, Evan tragically passed away a few weeks after his graduation. His dedication to the course and commitment to implement his learnings was a testament to his character. His legacy

within the course will remain with the introduction of The Evan Crosskey Award for Academic Achievement, which will be awarded each year to the graduate with the highest academic result.

Clare White, Operational Risk and Climate Manager, is our latest student on the master's programme. She is very excited to see what the next three years hold and during the last five months, since she commenced the programme, she has already started utilising the skills she is learning within the Society.

These examples reinforce the focus we put into our leadership development, where there are no barriers, if you have a willingness and desire to learn, we will continue to support you.

### Next steps:

Follow the Hinckley & Rugby Building Society on LinkedIn.



H&R Graduates: Kelly West, CEO Colin Fyfe, Sarah Johnson, Carolyn Thornley-Yates, Michael Sharp and Rebecca Griffin



By **MICHAEL SHAND**, Consumer Duty Programme Director, Nationwide Building Society

# Accepting the challenge



When the offer came to take on the challenge of the MSc programme back in 2017, I grabbed it because it was my moment to learn and develop my leadership in a context that was uniquely focused on the opportunities and challenges for the future of Building Societies.



Now three years post-graduation, I can reflect with confidence and say that the experience, learning and insights I gained have fundamentally supported both my contribution to Nationwide and my own career progression.

There are two significant parts to this: first of all, the knowledge and skills I gained from my time on the programme, and secondly the insights and networks that I have managed to forge with leaders from other Societies and across the BSA.

The learning experience at Loughborough was fantastic – the structure of the programme meant we were able to spend time covering a breadth of the most important leadership challenges – from strategy to finance to marketing, to people and culture. The 'USP' for this programme is that this learning is achieved in a way that is directly relevant to our sector.

Whilst I enjoyed the academic research and exploration of ideas, the real gems of knowledge and understating came from the conversations that we had in the room. Hearing the perspective from

leaders at other Societies, allowed me to get understanding and insights that would be almost impossible to get elsewhere. I took practical learnings and actions away from each of these sessions – real tips and hints for things that I could personally do differently or insights / fresh thinking that I could share with others.

To be clear, the work is tough – especially when trying to balance alongside busy careers. The assignments require space, time and effort to complete – and the final year research project was truly a mammoth amount of effort. For that, I chose to pursue the question "Is mutuality a marketable concept?" ... a vast and varied topic to explore, but I can confidently say that I learned a lot.

However, the real and enduring benefit that I have taken from the programme are the connections I have made. Being able to reach out to people across other Societies to ask questions, explore challenges and share ideas is where the real value lies for me. Since completing the programme, I have taken on several new leadership roles within my Society – from strategy, to innovation,

to new product launches and now as Programme Director for our response to the FCA's new Consumer Duty. Throughout, I have a ready-made set of contacts that I can reach out to ask for help and insights. In the context of my current role, I have benefitted from being able to participate in events such as the BSA annual conference - with direct access to leaders across Societies to understand how they are approaching the Duty as well as dialogue with key representatives at the FCA to help us on our journey. These are the sort of intangible benefits that I have come to value most since my time on the programme.

There is an enduring opportunity for our Building Societies – our mutual strength, our singular focus on helping our members achieve the most from their financial lives. But, we need leaders. The MSc programme is a uniquely brilliant way for you to be part of that future. So, to those interested, my advice is give it a shot!

### Next steps:

Feel free to reach out – you can get me on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/michaelshand](https://www.linkedin.com/in/michaelshand)



By **STEPHANIE HATTERSLEY**, Chief of Staff, Skipton Building Society

# Fulfilling my potential



I started at the Skipton when I was 19 - young, full of energy, and a little unruly if I'm truthful! I started as an administrator at the contact centre, and if you asked 19-year-old me what her chances of progression were she'd be pretty surprised now! I didn't think I had much potential, or so I'd been told at school.

In my time at Skipton I've learnt that I am intrinsically motivated – I love to learn new things and I've had five different careers so far! When it comes to formal qualifications however, I left school with minimal GCSEs and I have always put myself down, assuming others were more 'academic' than me. However, in 2020 I began to realise that this self-doubt was impacting my ability to progress.

I'd seen the MSc in Strategic Leadership and always wondered if I'd be brave enough to apply. Would I be good enough? I was 30-something with a husband, a son about to start school, and a fat Labrador, so applying for something so intensive was a big decision. Two years on, I know it was the right one.

When colleagues ask me for advice about applying for the Masters, I always ask them about their motivation. Is it for the CV, for self-confidence, or something else? Understanding your intent is important as it helps you assess the impact it may have on your life. For me it was about my self-confidence, so I needed to know I had sufficient time to plan, learn, read, and ask questions – I therefore planned to put time aside to make sure I wasn't overwhelmed (the University recommend 7-10 hours a week). I spoke with my husband; we created a schedule and I applied!

I'm in my final year now and about to submit my business project, and for those considering it I thought I'd share what I've learnt and offer some advice:

- Being at Uni is like starting a new project at work: you listen, learn, ask questions, explore, and make a recommendation.
- You don't need to be 'academic' to be successful - the programme has given me confidence to be my authentic self, to understand who I am and how I show up in different environments.
- Some of the most useful skills I learned that I use every day are: how to conduct research, to think critically, and to write a clear business report.
- Set boundaries with yourself on what you will and won't give up - I will never give up family time, which means I study in the evenings and get up at 6am on a Saturday to do a few hours before the fun starts!
- Build a network of support. I'm thankful for my cohort on the programme - I have made some true friends who are there to support, listen, moan, and laugh together!

While the Masters has given me the knowledge of how an organisation is most effectively run and the moving parts it needs to be successful, the most important things I've learned are about myself. I've grown as a person, gained the confidence to try new things, to push myself, and to challenge myself on what I can achieve. Most recently that has been accepting the position of Chief of Staff, a role that I wouldn't have thought possible two years ago.

So if you're considering taking the leap, what are you waiting for?

### Next steps

You can follow Stephanie on LinkedIn.



By **MATTHEW CLEWOW**, Client Director (Financial Services), CSI Ltd

# How cloud technologies redefined Darlington Building Society's competitive edge

Learn how a building society adopted the cloud to improve business-critical applications.



CSI understands that banks, building societies and investment management services face more challenges than many other markets – from changing business models, increased pressure to maintain compliance and a disruptive technology environment enabling new entrants. But IT can make you more compliant, efficient, and accessible to digitally savvy customers, who are increasingly relying on complex applications for their banking, to manage mortgages and loans, and other financial services.

### CSI Powers Regulated Organisations

Nowadays, success in the competitive UK market demands that a business remains resilient and flexible. Although it's a challenging case of navigating risk and reward, organisations that work meaningfully with the right technology and partner can discover a seamless journey to the cloud.

CSI's engagement with Darlington Building Society included a migration to Microsoft Azure and security capabilities, ensuring client protection with AI-powered cyber resilience and data protection. CSI's design used Azure Infrastructure-, Platform- and Software-as-a-Service (IaaS, PaaS and SaaS) to improve workload performance and reliability.

After successfully migrating to Azure, CSI continues to focus on delivering a portfolio of managed services, ensuring the smooth operation of the new environment, creating a foundation for the future.

### Azure Migration

Darlington's new cloud environment embraces a range of Azure services to increase application performance, cost-effectiveness, and reliability. Existing virtual machines were moved onto Azure with the IaaS solution split across two regions to provide disaster recovery. Replication between the two regions is provided by Azure Site Recovery and data protection is delivered via Azure Backup, with data stored across different data centres.

The migration also replaced the existing wide area network (WAN) with connectivity provided via Azure ExpressRoute which allows more reliability, faster speeds, consistent latencies, and higher security than typical connections over the internet.

Darlington's database servers were replaced with Azure SQL Database PaaS functionality running on the latest version with 99.99% availability. They also migrated the on-premises email system to a subscription-based SaaS environment with Microsoft 365. The existing

Mimecast system was retained for inbound and outbound mail filtering.

### Cyber Resilience by Default

Changes in working habits brought about by the pandemic resulted in employees using personal devices as well as corporate endpoints from a mix of office locations and remotely. Staff productivity and responsiveness is improved through access to the internet, but this convenience is also a security risk. In response to Darlington's specific requirements, CSI implemented two complementary managed security services, including Endpoint Protection and Web Filtering.

### IT Automation

CSI built Darlington's new servers using Infrastructure as Code (IaC) and IT automation. The estate is continually checked, so compliance audits become 'business as usual' rather than periodic business disruptions. By delivering cyber security services to protect endpoint devices together with managed backup and disaster recovery, CSI provides Darlington with the first line and the last line of defence against cyber threats.

Following the successful migration to Azure, Darlington received a positive independent assessment of its cloud strategy, highlighting the robust, well-considered approach taken by the IT Department around the wider data protection and information governance challenges.

For the chance to claim flexible consultancy days, get in touch with our dedicated financial service consultant, Matthew Clemow, available at [matthew.clemow@csilt.co.uk](mailto:matthew.clemow@csilt.co.uk). To find out more about compliant, secure technologies for building societies, visit our support for financial services.

### Next steps:

Matthew Clemow, Client Director (Financial Services), CSI Ltd.





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