Fuel consumption and CO2** figures for the Volvo XC60 T5 R-Design FWD Automatic, in MPG (l/100km): WLTP Combined 30.1 (9.4) – 34.0 (8.3). NEDC CO2 emissions 165g/km.

Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption and CO2 figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. **There is a new test used for fuel consumption and CO2 figures. The CO2 figures shown, however, are based on the outgoing test cycle and will be used to calculate vehicle tax on first registration. Preliminary data. Please contact your retailer for latest information.

*Finance subject to status. Subject to availability at participating retailers only on vehicles ordered between 01/04/2019 and 30/06/2019. At the end of the agreement there are 3 options: (i) Renew: Part exchange the vehicle, (ii) Retain: Pay the Optional Final Payment to own the vehicle or (iii) Return the vehicle. Further charges may be made subject to the condition or mileage of the vehicle. Terms and conditions apply. Applicants must be 18 or over. Guarantee/Indemnity may be required. Santander Consumer (UK) PLC trading as Volvo Car Financial Services, RH1 1SR. Retail offer only. Excludes fleet operators and business users.
HELLO AND WELCOME to our Summer 2019 and ninth issue of Abacus. The theme for this issue and, as set out by Clive in his President’s welcome, this year’s theme for the ICAEW in Birmingham and West Midlands is technology and innovation.

As you will see from our news section, the committee has been very busy over the last six months and has hosted some great events, including a business breakfast briefing with Phil Smith, Chairman of Innovate UK, and a Business skills event in Worcester. We also sponsored the Silicon Canal tech awards in Birmingham, which you can read about on page 15.

Following ICAEW Council elections in February, we now have two new Council members representing our region and you can read more about this on page 17.

We also have features focussing on technology advancements being made in the West Midlands region, specifically some innovative apps, an article breaking down agile project delivery and an update on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) one year after introduction.

As always, we would like to thank the local ICAEW committee for their support, especially Sophie Dale-Black who has been integral in providing many of the feature articles. Since joining ICAEW last summer, she has spent much of her time getting to know the ICAEW community in the Midlands, including many of the businesses featured in the magazine. We are also very grateful for all of those who contribute articles to the magazine – both new contributors (good to have you on board Richard Cartwright) and those that have been with us since the start (thank you CABA and Adlestrop).

Thank you as always for taking the time to read Abacus and please do get in touch if you have any feedback or suggestions for future content.

Gemma Jones
Gemma.Jones@frpadvisory.com

Amy Burton
Amy.burton@rsmuk.com

Steph Mersh
Smersh@orbiscf.com
President’s letter

In my presidential year, I wanted the district society to adopt a theme common to all Chartered Accountants, whether in business, practice, academic work or the third sector, and one that is definitely here to stay. The impact of technology and its power to shape our profession, whether for good or for bad.

At the start of the year, I helped judge the ICAEW-sponsored annual Finance Awards. Virtually all submissions included the adoption of advanced robotic technologies and AI within the finance functions to save time and money, as well as - crucially - free up intellectual capacity.

Since then, whether visiting technology-led practices, working alongside Council in the deployment of the new ICAEW Finance in a Digital World e-learning programme (if you haven’t seen this on the website please do – it is great), or running events such as our recent ‘meet the tech community’ event at Barclays Eagle Labs in Birmingham, the impact of technology through all service lines and all professions continues to strike home.

We are, bit by bit, becoming a veritable technation. And one where chartered accountancy needs to take a central position. Our opportunity is there.

“We are becoming a veritable technation, one where chartered accountancy needs to be central”

YEAR IN REVIEW

It has been my privilege and pleasure to have been your district society president. I have loved the sheer variety of the role – meeting members, collaborating with organisations in other sectors (focused on the burgeoning tech sector) to drive new partnerships and sales opportunities for chartered accountants and most of all working with the team at ICAEW.

Our ever cheerful regional executive Linda Conway and our new regional director Sophie Dale-Black, along with the volunteer team that powers the local committees are the reason for standing for this role. Great fun to work with, keen to work on behalf of the profession and dedicate their time to its development, who could ask for more?

Year-end also sees the retirement of several long-standing representatives of the profession here in the West Midlands. I know they are not keen to be singled out, but I must thank both Sheilagh Moffat and Barry Matthews in particular for their many years of service and attention and wish them well for the future.

All in all, as a district society we end the year in good shape. And with an award-winning BCASS student society team and the Young Chartered Accountants group in the capable hands of Louise, Katie and others. If you like what you see, have some time to volunteer developing the next generation, representing your profession in the region or simply helping us engage and run interesting events, make yourself known. We would be more than happy to welcome you.

To date, 2019 has certainly had its business challenges, and I am sure more are ahead. Thank you for your support in my year as president. I hope I have represented you and the Society following the best traditions of the past, but also with one eye to the future.

Good luck in the year ahead.

Clive Bawden
President, 2018-19
ICAEW Birmingham and West Midlands
### What’s on

To book online or see further updates go to [icaew.com/events](http://icaew.com/events) and search West Midlands

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Please email linda.conway@icaew.com for more details on any of our events.
Birmingham students make their mark

Birmingham Chartered Accountants’ Student Society has been busy with hospital visits, football tournaments, organising parties and dressing to impress.

BDO WIN THE CUP
Our football tournament, sponsored by Hays, saw 19 teams fight to be crowned winners. The tournament was tense with firm rivalry adding to the atmosphere. BDO took the cup as the overall winners, and Deloitte won the plate for runners-up.

CHILDREN CHEERED BY HOSPITAL VISIT
Last month, the BCASS committee swapped their laptops and spreadsheets for crayons and glitter glue for a visit to raise spirits at Birmingham Children’s Hospital.

The team helped bring some light relief to the families at the Birmingham Children’s Hospital by helping to make masks and other fun crafts using the materials donated by the committee; we hope the children had as much fun as we did!

The committee is also planning to run the Birmingham 10k this year to raise money for charity so watch this space for more information.

COMMITTEE STRIKES A POSE
In November, the BCASS committee tried their hand at modelling at the T.M Lewin fashion show event. The evening was held at their Grand Central store and was a great opportunity for students to check out the latest in professional fashion and refresh their workwear wardrobe.

Thank you to T.M Lewin for hosting the event, and to everyone who came along.

FUTURE EVENTS

ACA SIMPLIFIED CASE STUDY
If you are getting ready to sit your Case Study exam in July 2019 then this revision session is for you. Run by ACA Simplified founder and tutor, Martin Johnson, you’ll hear detailed tips on exactly what the examiners are looking for. Look out for more details on BCASS Facebook and Instagram.

SUMMER PARTY
BCASS will be hosting the second BCASS Summer Party in June. The event was a huge success last year and the team is hoping to make this year’s event even better. It is open to all students across Birmingham and the West Midlands and will be a great opportunity to expand networks.

We will be finalising details in the next few months and information about tickets will be released by your firm’s BCASS representative.

TREASURE HUNT
Plans are under way for the much-anticipated BCASS Treasure Hunt, which will see students all racing between Birmingham bars for clues in the hope of being crowned winners. Keep an eye on BCASS social media for more information.
Nominations open for the West Midlands Finance Awards

Businesses from across the region can now submit entries for the prestigious competition

Returning for the fourth year, the West Midlands Finance Awards recognises the work and achievements of the region’s top finance professionals and businesses. Bigger than ever, the awards will feature a new category - Excellence in Diversity.

Applicants will be judged by a panel of industry leaders in the region – last year this included Aston Martin, West Midlands Railway, Severn Trent, Britvic and Ericis. Deadline for entries is Friday 5 July.

Habiba Khatoon, Director of Robert Walters, said: “The number of entries increases each year and is testament to the region’s burgeoning finance sector. To be able to highlight the best diversity initiatives, innovation, or just an individual’s or team’s hard work is important in what has been a tough and uncertain year for the UK. I look forward to seeing the impressive entries and it never fails to amaze me the passion, hard work and dedication that is taking place within the finance industry locally.”

2018 winner Karen Owen from McDonalds said: “We won two awards, Rising Star Non-Qualified and Finance Team of the Year - Over 20 People. “We’ve had a busy 2018 and made significant improvements over the past year through a big continuous improvement drive, process and automation. We have plenty lined up for 2019 and so we will definitely be putting ourselves up for an award next year!”

Dr Sophie Dale-Black, ICAEW’s Regional Director in the Midlands, said: “We are delighted to be associated with the West Midlands Finance Awards for the fourth year. The Awards are a chance for us to celebrate the outstanding work done by finance professionals in the region and to promote the contribution they make. I look forward to being part of the judging group, and thank our many member judges in advance for giving their time.”

The ceremony – hosted in partnership with ICAEW, Lockton and RSM – will take place on Thursday 5 December in Birmingham and will see over 500 professionals gather to celebrate the outstanding achievements of the regions business and finance community.

For further information, please visit the website or contact Rum Gill on rumandeep.gill@robertwalters.com or 020 7509 8178.

WEST MIDLANDS FINANCE AWARDS 2019 CATEGORIES

• Finance Director of the Year (Up to £100m turnover)
• Finance Director of the Year (Over £100m turnover)
• Rising Star of the Year (Non/Part Qualified)
• Rising Star of the Year (Qualified)
• Finance Team of the Year (Over 20 people)
• Finance Team of the Year (20 people or less)
• Finance Team of the Year (Not-for-profit)
• Shared Service Centre of the Year
• Business of the Year
• Excellence in Diversity
• Business Innovation
ICAЕW members meet the region’s tech community

30 local members had the chance to network with some of the region’s brightest tech entrepreneurs.

Members and students from the region got to hear from some of the leading players in the development of the technology sector at the Barclay’s Eagle Lab in Birmingham on 18 March. Barclay’s Eagle Labs is one of the UK’s leading accelerators offering workspaces, membership and product innovation support as well as networking and events to start-up businesses across a range of industries.

The national network of Eagle Labs supports individuals, businesses and corporates to innovate and grow through collaborations with industry leading corporates, universities and start-ups.

The local team from Eagle Labs talked about their work and the need for Chartered Accountants to engage, mentor and work with Eagle Lab tenants to secure the future success of their fledgling businesses.

The introduction was followed by two short pitches from current Lab tenants, Snoozle and WalkRunCycle, who presented on their start-up app ideas and spoke about how they have been helped by Eagle Labs.

**Eagle Labs talked of how Chartered Accountants need to mentor and work with entrepreneurs**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**
Eagle Labs: labs.uk.barclays
Tech Nation: technation.io
Silicon Canal: siliconcanal.co.uk
Snoozle: snoozleapp.com
WalkRunCycle: walkruncycle.com

**SNOOZLE**
Snoozle is a connected clock radio for social and on-demand content which rewards users for staying off their phones overnight with Snoozle Points which can be exchanged for rewards and content from partners.

Creator Phil Neale talked about his journey with Eagle Labs and more recently his relationship with Gym Shark.

**WALKRUNCYCLE**
WalkRunCycle is an activity based app that provides users with suggestions of the best routes to walk, run and cycle in London and Birmingham based on distance and location. In 2019 the business plans to expand to cover Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Liverpool and Oxford.

Founder Ian Bush is a qualified Chartered Accountant having previously worked at KPMG in Birmingham.
Competition hots up as BASE marks 10 years

Over a decade, ICAEW’s engaging business gameplay competition has helped more than 25,000 students understand more about the profession.

Biddulph High School; Birmingham Metropolitan College – LTSB; Denstone College; Fairfax; and King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls will be representing Birmingham and the West Midlands in the National Final of this year’s BASE competition.

Now in its 10th year, BASE has helped more than 25,000 students understand more about careers in chartered accountancy. It provides an engaging way for students to develop the key employability skills that employers look for.

This year’s competition opened to students on 14 January and since then, nearly 5,000 students across the UK have registered to take part, aiming for a place at the National Final.

Teams of students took part in an interactive game. The game followed the lives of four Chartered Accountants working in a variety of sectors, from retail to technology.

Students watched short animated videos which presented them with a scenario one of the characters was facing, or some information they needed to analyse. The students had to conduct this analysis or decide what they would do in that situation.

Following the interactive game, students had to prepare and deliver a five-minute presentation, online. One of the Chartered Accountants they met in the game worked for a charity. The presentation covered their recommendation on which of three business proposals they believed his charity should invest in.

To keep up to date with this year’s competition, please visit icaew.com/base.
We have a number of local opportunities available for volunteers every year, and we’d love to have you involved.
To find out more, please contact base@icaew.com.

Teams of students took part in an interactive game. The game followed the lives of four Chartered Accountants working in a variety of sectors.
Finance Awards dinner celebrates business success

The ICAEW East Midlands Finance Awards dinner, sponsored by Michael Page Finance, Bailey Construction (Derby) Ltd and Norton Motorcycles, was held at Eastwood Hall in Nottingham on Friday 15 March. The dinner was attended by over 200 members of the local business and finance community, and celebrated the work of accountants and the positive impact they have on people and business. Prizes were awarded during the evening to:

- **Best Small Practice (0–10 Partners)** – Page Kirk LLP, Nottingham.
- **Best Medium Practice (11–30 Partners)** – Smith Cooper, Derby/Nottingham.
- **Best Large Practice (30+ Partners)** – Duncan & Toplis, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.
- **Best Finance Team (Industry and Commerce)** – Cullum Detuners Limited, Derbyshire.
- **Best Finance Director/CFO** – Bruce Condon, Weetabix Ltd, Kettering.
- **Best Start-Up Business (Under 36 months trading)** – AddQual, Derby.

During the evening a collection was made in aid of the charity MIND, totalling over £1,300. Dr. Sophie Dale-Black, ICAEW Regional Director – Midlands, said: “We are delighted to be associated with the East Midlands Finance Awards. The awards dinner is an opportunity for us to celebrate the outstanding work of finance professionals across the region and to promote their contribution to the local economic and business landscape.”

Anshu Mehan, President, ICAEW Nottingham, Derby and Lincoln, added: “The dinner has always been an important..."
Earlier this year Solihull Business Discussion Group welcomed Geoff Holiday to talk to us on the History of the Topless Bus.

Roger Thompson started open top bus tours in Stratford-upon-Avon in the 1970s. Roger had originally been running private car guided tours around London, when he developed the concept of the open top bus tour, for the simple reason a double decker could carry more passengers and the roof had to come off to pass under the low bridges. So he thought he would try the idea out in Stratford-upon-Avon where there were plenty of tourists.

He was able to spread to other tourist areas and the company was eventually sold to become a worldwide, often franchised, service we all know today, but now with a Big Red Bus.

Geoff, an experienced Stratford Tour Guide and Bus Driver, then took us on an imaginary tour of Stratford starting at the Pen & Parchment Hostelry; was this the centre of unsavoury activities of their time such as cock fighting and bear baiting? Past Shakespeare’s Birthplace for which in 1892 P.T Barham offered £2,500, so he could ship it to the States. Fortunately he was outbid by a local who paid £3,000. He was able to spread to other tourist areas and the company was eventually sold to become a worldwide, often franchised, service we all know today, but now with a Big Red Bus.

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Our programme for 2019/20 includes speakers on subjects as diverse as, Norton Motorcycles CEO Stuart Garner and local entrepreneur and author Mark Esho fascinated attendees with hints and tips developed through their own experiences of business.

Our roundup of events that have been going on around the region since we last published

Nottingham, Derby and Lincoln for the local business community and it was pleasing to see so many local businesses and members from the financial community involved this year; their ongoing contribution and commitment helped to make this event a huge success.”

James Bagley, Managing Partner at Smith Cooper, said: “We’re delighted to have been awarded the Medium Practice of the Year award at the ICAEW East Midlands awards. We are exceptionally proud of our team, all of whom work hard to ensure we continue to exceed clients’ expectations.”

In addition, on Friday 10 May 2019, ICAEW Leicestershire and Northamptonshire brought ‘Making it in Business’ to Leicester, in partnership with the Institute of Directors, Morningside Arena, Leicester Riders and the Leicester and Leicestershire Economic Partnership.

The event focused on a networking exhibition of local businesses and organisations. Norton Motorcycles CEO Stuart Garner and local entrepreneur and author Mark Esho fascinated attendees with hints and tips developed through their own experiences of business.

Strangely, SBDG was also formed in the mid 1970s when the Institute set up local discussion groups. The majority of those in the West Midlands had only short lives, but Stourbridge and Solihull kept going, now sadly only Solihull remains.

SBDG, like the open top bus, has changed, and the membership is now mainly semi-retired and retired Chartered Accountants from the Solihull/Birmingham area. They come together at the Old Silhillians Club House, Junction 4 M42, on the second Thursday of the month October to April.


We talk about Anything but Accountancy! For further Information or to be put on our mailing list, please contact Meeting Secretary Chris Jacob at sbdg@chadwick.demon.co.uk or icaew.com/groups-and-networks/local-groups-and-societies/birmingham-and-west-midlands-ds
Local Focus

WORCESTERSHIRE ANNUAL DINNER A ROARING SUCCESS!
The Worcestershire Group of Chartered Accountants (WGCA) 2019 Annual Dinner was held at Worcester Cricket Club on Friday 5 April. The event was a great success, attended by over 150 local accountants and sponsors. Attendees were treated to a hilarious comedy set from Mock the Week and Live at the Apollo star Gary Delaney, followed by a night of music from the excellent soul and funk band Urban Intro.

Part of the success of the dinner was down to the sponsors - EBC Group, CY Resourcing, Alliance Commercial Finance, MB Insolvency, BCRS Business Loans and MFG Solicitors. Their support allowed the committee to attract top quality entertainment and it is hoped this will continue in the future.

The night also raised a massive £1,300 for Nerve Tumours UK, a small charity looking after people affected with the rare genetic conditions NF1 and NF2 in the UK. The charity is close to the heart of Chair Ben Powell, whose good friend Scott Leach has a son with NF1. Scott gave an emotional speech at the event about the condition.

Ben Powell, Chair of WGCA and Director at Ballards LLP, said “it was great to organise a fantastic event and follow in a long line of successful dinners organised by the WGCA committee. I thoroughly enjoyed my time as Chair and encourage other ICAEW members to engage with the committee as much as possible”.

OUR CORE CPD PROGRAMME

Essentials CPD 2019 is our cutting-edge core CPD programme, designed by ICAEW and subject matter experts to keep you up-to-date and ahead of the competition. Delivered in Birmingham and Solihull, Essentials CPD combines industry-leading speakers with highly engaging content to bring you the latest practical guidance on the topical issues that matter most to you and your clients or stakeholders. Save by taking full advantage of our multi-booking options.

AUDIT AND ASSURANCE UPDATE (SPRING)
13 Jun 2019, 09:30 - 12:30
Birmingham

A fresh look at scepticism, independence and audit evidence using ICAEW’s new film, Without Question.

THE PRACTICE OF TODAY
26 Jun 2019, 09:30 - 12:30
Birmingham

An overview of market drivers shaping the practices of today. The session will explore the impact technological trends are having on practices.

AUDIT AND ASSURANCE UPDATE (AUTUMN)
23 Sept 2019, 09:30 - 12:30
Birmingham

A roundup of all the latest news in auditing for the busy audit practitioner using practical examples and case studies.

FINANCIAL REPORTING UPDATE (AUTUMN)
23 Sept 2019, 13:30 - 16:30
Birmingham

Identifies areas where accountants need to improve the quality of financial statements using feedback from QAD and ICAEW Technical Enquiry Service.

MOTIVATING AND ENERGISING TEAMS
16 Oct 2019, 09:30 - 12:30
Solihull

Designed to enable you to facilitate team meetings, energise team behaviours and create synergies to achieve team goals.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT FOR FINANCE
16 Oct 2019, 13:30 - 16:30
Solihull

Provides a structured series of techniques to ensure key stakeholders understand why the change is happening, accept the new reality and commit to the ‘call for action’.

MULTI-BOOKING OPTIONS DISCOUNTS

1 seminar £100 + VAT
2-5 seminars £75 + VAT
6-9 seminars £65 + VAT
10-19 seminars £60 + VAT
20+ seminars Please contact the Events Information Team on the number below for the best price.

MULTI-BOOKING OPTIONS USAGE

Multi-booking options can be combined across the Essentials CPD programme and can be divided amongst multiple topics or people within an organisation or for an individual, making it an excellent way to fulfil individual and team core CPD requirements.

TO BOOK OR FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
icaew.com/bircpd
events@icaew.com
+44 (0)1908 248 159
Production lines
Driving productivity in the UK requires businesses of all sizes to engage with improvements, says Dr Sophie Dale-Black, Regional Director – Midlands, ICAEW.

Productivity in the UK, and how businesses - especially small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) - can work to improve in this area, have been key themes at two recent breakfast events in the West Midlands.

ICAEW West Midlands invited business leader Phil Smith to speak in Birmingham in December, and at an April event where ICAEW Staffordshire, Salop and Wolverhampton partnered with Dains Accountants on their popular Financial Directors’ Forum programme in Stoke-on-Trent.

Phil brought real life examples to the complex discussion of productivity, from his own experience through roles with organisations such as Cisco, Innovate UK and IQE, and particularly the Be The Business initiative.

Phil opened his comments with two quotes from Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman, from his book The Age of Diminishing Expectations:

“Productivity isn’t everything, but in the long run it is almost everything,” and “A country’s ability to improve its standard of living over time depends almost entirely on its ability to raise its output per worker.”

The issue of productivity may not be hot on the lips of every member of the public, but it forms an increasingly common vocabulary within government policy and business support circles. I've found the work of Professor Richard Jones of the University of Sheffield very useful in developing my own understanding in this area.

Discussion at the two recent events focused on how SMEs in particular can make a difference to their own productivity, when time availability and cost implications can be real barriers to their engagement with improvement programmes.

As Phil described, successful identification and adoption of productivity improvements within an SME will often be strongly influenced by the leadership skills available, adding further weight to the debate on skills that our ICAEW Midlands team has facilitated in recent months at both West Midlands and the East Midlands ‘The Business of Skills’ events.

Financial directors raised a particular concern over the focus of performance indicators within many publicly-funded business growth and R&D programmes being related to creating jobs locally, when the balance between productivity and employment is such a fine one.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the idea of a more productive, four-day week without reduction in salary was a popular one when raised with the audiences, but there is regional concern over ongoing below-inflation rises in staff development budgets.

According to ICAEW’s Business Confidence Monitor data for the West Midlands, staff development budgets will see 1.7% growth for the next year, compared to 2.6% in the past year (Q1 2019 data).

Phil noted that many businesses that don't train their staff cite financial reasons for this choice but also the relative importance of training against ‘business as usual’. With two-thirds of the 2030 workforce already in work today in 2019, the importance of skills development is ever-increasing.

Digital skills development is a particular issue for many businesses, and organisations - from finance to manufacturing to healthcare and beyond - with predictions that within 20 years, more than 90% of jobs will require digital skills.

ICAEW's Finance in a Digital World e-learning programme targets the development of digital awareness across our membership, and is seeing an excellent take-up.

There is much more to do in helping businesses to secure productivity gains, and the conversation around how this is done through various levels of government, local agency and private sector support is an important one.

The role of ICAEW Chartered Accountants is two-fold, with both having considerable impact on the regional economy - as practice-based advisers to local businesses, and as innovative financial professionals helping to drive those businesses from within.
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Plain sailing on Silicon Canal

ICAEW Birmingham & West Midlands sponsors ‘Best Angel or Seed Investor of the Year’ award at the Silicon Canal Tech Awards

Established and rising stars in the digital and technology community in the West Midlands gathered at the Custard Factory in Digbeth to celebrate the 2018 Silicon Canal Tech Awards earlier this year.

The awards were a chance to highlight and promote the amazing talent that the West Midlands’ tech community has, celebrating individuals and start-ups along with larger more established companies.

ICAEW Birmingham & West Midlands president Clive Bawden said: “As part of the District Society’s focus on technology and its impact on the profession, we partnered with Silicon Canal as a category sponsor for their 2018 Awards.

“Attracting over 200 guests on the evening, featuring a number of the region’s fastest-growing technology ventures, ICAEW was able to deepen its connections with the sector through this partnership, helping create future jobs, clients and partnerships.

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THE AWARDS PRESENTED ON THE NIGHT WERE:

- Small Company of The Year: GuyKat
- Large Company of The Year: PM Connect
- Outstanding Technology Individual of The Year: Chris Meah
- Best Angel or Seed Investor: Mark O’Sullivan
- Most Influential Male in Technology: Alan Wilson
- Most Influential Female in Technology: Suzanne Edwards
- Developer of the Year: Golnaz Sepehrband
- Graduate Developer of The Year: Leigh White

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Andrew Coulson of Dolfinblue Accounting Ltd and Gemma Jones of FRP Advisory LLP are new Council members for West Midlands and Birmingham, joining Clive Bawden, who was elected to Council in 2017. Andrew said: “I am delighted to have been elected to Council from June 2019, to work in the best interests of our members in the West Midlands and globally as ICAEW supports the profession with a continually changing global environment.”

Gemma said: “Having worked with ICAEW locally for a number of years I am excited to take on this new challenge and look forward to working with the other members of the Council to understand and develop ICAEW, both for its members and the wider business community.” We asked them to introduce themselves.

ANDREW COULSON

“I’m an MBA educated, internationally experienced, Chartered Accountant. I help business owners create great enterprises so that they can achieve their business, financial and personal goals. “Throughout my career, since qualifying, I have operated as a financial controller, finance director and CFO, working in a variety of sectors and countries including the EU and South East Asia.

“In my current business I provide CFO advisory services to the SME sector, to businesses with a growth plan, leveraging technology to achieve success. “My business is 100% digital and I’m always willing to share knowledge on how others can do the same. “I’m passionate about education and helping others attain their education goals.”

GEMMA JONES

“My current role is as a Director in FRP Advisory’s Birmingham team advising businesses in periods of stress and distress focusing on stakeholder management and transactions such as business sales and refinances. “I have worked in Birmingham through my career having qualified in 2009 at Grant Thornton and moved to FRP Advisory four years ago during a period of significant growth for the firm. “I work with clients across multiple sectors and industries including manufacturing, construction and education. I particularly assist management teams in their relationships with lenders, shareholders and pension scheme trustees.”

“I am excited to take on this new challenge and look forward to working with other members of the Council”
A head for business

Ian Bush has successfully launched three businesses. We asked him to tell us how he did it.

Ian Bush is a Chartered Accountant with a strong entrepreneurial drive and an engineering background. After gaining a First Class BSc Hons degree in Building Services Engineering at the University of Bath in 1993, he qualified as a chartered accountant at KPMG in Birmingham, coming first in the UK in the overall final level exams as well as first in the individual exam on Business Planning & Evaluation in 1997.

This led to a role as financial analyst & fund manager at Singer & Friedlander Investment Management. Ian then left to pursue an opportunity to launch his own businesses, resulting in an award-winning landscape gardening business (Great Spaces), a specialist travel agency and an online wedding gift list business (The Bottom Drawer) that was sold to Park Group Plc in 2015.

This combination of a top financial brain able to see the clearest path through the numbers; an engineer’s heart to take a problem-solving, jargon-free approach; and actual hands-on experience of starting several very different businesses (not just hiding behind the finance desk!) makes for an unbeatable combination of skills.

Ian says: “At school I always said the career I absolutely would never do is accountancy! However, there is no doubt getting the accountant qualification was the best business grounding I could ask for, not just the training knowledge but going into different businesses as a trainee auditor and seeing how they operate.”

Ian, a keen runner, wanted to add more to his Birmingham tourism app

Great Spaces: Ian set up, grew and managed this award-winning garden design and installation business. At the start, you could find Ian wheelbarrowing gravel to help with the garden installations – he is very hands on! The business went on to win some prestigious awards and work with major household names to offer garden design and installation services.

The innovative concept behind Great Spaces was to be able to buy a designer garden for your newly built home, through the housebuilder, in a way that was as easy as choosing a new carpet. Different garden style templates were created – such as a wildlife or entertaining-style garden – and these could be adapted for any specific plot that came with your new home. Prices, like carpet, were done by the square metre to make it really simple. The brand and name were also licensed onto other products, with a Great Spaces energy efficient electric patio heater for sale through major DIY superstores at one point.

In just the second year of operations Great Spaces was awarded a Silver medal for Garden Design Company of the Year at the Daily Express/National House Building Council annual awards ceremony. The company also won a Silver medal for a show garden at RHS Royal Hampton Court Palace Flower Show and worked with leading companies including Mastercard, Argos Additions Catalogue and Heinz Soups providing garden makeovers as prizes in national competitions, as well as several major UK house builders to offer garden packages, priced by the square metre, to new house purchasers.

The Bottom Drawer: The Bottom Drawer was an online wedding gift list service. Ian acquired it in 2006 when total turnover to date was just under £30,000. Ian grew The Bottom Drawer into a business that had generated over £5m of wedding list transactions at the time of sale to Park Group Plc, a company with over £375m of annual billings.

Park Group has since relaunched The Bottom Drawer as Gift2Us, with Ian consulting to help with the handover and launch of the new business. Customer service was paramount during Ian’s time...
at The Bottom Drawer, with the company ranked on independent review sites as the best gift list service in the UK and consistently achieving over 95% positive customer satisfaction ratings. The Bottom Drawer had tens of thousands of wedding guests and hundreds of couples use the service each year.

Walk Run Cycle: Ian launched this free-to-download city based tourism & visitor app in 2018. It started as a tourism app for Birmingham, a city that gets over 40 million visitors a year but had no tourism app! But as he loves sports, especially running and cycling, Ian wanted to add something more than just walking routes. So WalkRunCycle.com was born to offer highly curated, self-guided walking, running and cycling routes to show tourists and business visitors the best of a city.

Birmingham and London are now live on iTunes and Googleplay, with more UK cities to be added this year, and global cities to follow. The plan is that Walk Run Cycle becomes the go-to resource for routes to see the hidden gems for visitors to any city. Ian is currently considering taking on investment to make this happen.

Walk Run Cycle Birmingham is already getting over 200,000 views a year and has been listed by Birmingham Mail as one of the “must have” apps of 2019, and the Digbeth Graffiti Art tour has been featured in The Guardian as one of the best art tours in the UK.

Local ICAEW member Will Buggey has combined his passion for technology with his professional qualification to develop a tool that enables employers to assess the practical accountancy skills of candidates during the recruitment process.

Sutton Coldfield-based Buggey led finance department restructuring initiatives at Severn Trent and Genting Casinos before launching his recruitment test under the brand name Orecor. He cites his personal experiences in recruiting accountancy and finance personnel as the drivers behind the project:

“As a hiring manager, I simply wanted a greater level of confidence as to candidates’ hands-on accountancy capability in the here and now. I sensed increasing variability in people’s understanding of the core underlying fundamentals of the profession, and I knew that technology and data should be playing a more prominent role in the accountancy and finance recruitment process in 2019.”

The Orecor test he developed simulates the real-world workplace scenarios accountants face day-to-day, requiring candidates to complete interactive tasks such as bank reconciliations, forecast updates and the preparation of financial statements. Employers receive detailed feedback as to how a candidate has fared, and even suggestions for follow-up interview questions (dynamically selected according to the level of understanding shown in each area).

Having moved into industry almost immediately after qualifying with a regional practice in Oxfordshire in the late 2000s, Buggey has seen first-hand the explosive impact technology has already had on the way finance departments operate:

“In a world where we’re now starting to look seriously at things like artificial intelligence and blockchain, it’s easy to overlook the giant strides we’ve already taken. Whether on the transaction processing side through things like Optical Character Recognition, on the reporting side with statutory accounts production software or even just in easily analysing volumes of data we wouldn’t have dreamt of tackling only a few years ago, the efficiency and effectiveness of finance departments are at an all-time high.”

With the ICAEW and other accountancy bodies engaging members to address ‘big picture’ questions around the role of the profession in a more automated future, Buggey welcomes the positioning of technology-related skills at the forefront of the debate. He sees opportunities for forward-thinking accountants to lead wider change initiatives in business:

“I actually think that, as a profession, we should be more ambitious in the way we adapt our qualifications to ensure the professionals we develop are uniquely equipped to drive business forward over the next 10-20 years. The ACA qualification remains for me unparalleled in terms of robustness, and if we’re savvy in the way we introduce more advanced technology skills into the mix, there’s great potential for the future.”

“I knew technology and data should be playing a more prominent role in recruitment”
We British proudly lay claim to the birth of the first industrial revolution and boldly trumpet its benefits and advantages. For example, we benefitted from increased production, reduced prices, a wealth of technological innovations and improved living standards. By contrast, we tend to be less vocal about the challenges and problems it created, such as industrial-scale pollution, the decline of farming, overcrowding in cities and dangerous and inhumane working conditions.

As we now sit on the cusp of the fourth industrial revolution we have the opportunity, and indeed the responsibility, to consider not only the benefits but just as importantly, the consequences. We have to find a way to have an open and honest dialogue about what this means to the woman and man on the street, as well as to the tech industry, entrepreneurs, policymakers and financiers. In short, we have the chance to embark on a Thoughtful Revolution.

This revolution has the potential to be much more impactful than anything we have seen so far in its ability to improve our productivity and enhance our human capacity. McKinsey estimate a boost of $11 trn is available, if all emerging economies can match the productivity of the out-performers. This gain will not be exclusively attributed to digital technology, but clearly in today’s economy it has a significant effect. The advent of widespread artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, robotics and automation as well as genetic engineering and biotechnology could help us to work smarter, remove drudgery, extend our lives and improve our health - but correspondingly it could have a much more fundamental and catastrophic downside for jobs, society, personal fulfilment and our current political and international systems.

The more pessimistic forecasters, such as Frey and Osbourne, estimated that almost unsurprisingly half of US workers were at risk of having their jobs automated by 2030, while others see a much more modest 9%.

Some see an opportunity, if we prepare effectively, to create a net increase in employment based on completely new job types and massively boosted economic growth. This revolution will also affect parts of the economy that have previously been undisturbed by technology. Historically, technical advances have focused on automating manual or repetitive tasks. Through artificial...
“The economies that manage the re-allocation of labour the best will be the ones that prosper”

intelligence and machine learning there are no jobs that remain unaffected. It is clear however that the extent of this effect in any economy will be determined by the skill base and adaptability of the workforce and it is this complex and well-trodden area that needs a complete re-boot.

We need to have a dialogue that gives the shopworker in Leamington Spa as much confidence as the solicitor in Solihull that their future in an automated, AI-driven world is being considered and that we as a society are trying to prepare ourselves for the next century. It may not be obvious, but they are both open to the same level of technology driven disruption. I can’t predict the future any better that the next person, but I do think that we need to openly discuss what we need to be doing to prepare ourselves, our families, our friends, colleagues and fellow citizens for a very different world.

It’s sometimes easy for a business leader or politician to trot out the positive or negative predictions about the numbers of new jobs that will be created or the dystopian view that we will have a massive, incapable and irrelevant population in the future. I think the choice is in our hands and requires us to start now by having the right conversations.

How will we deal with the job enhancement and displacement caused by robotics and automation? What are the ethics of a world driven by algorithms and fuelled by data? How do we provide access to the bio-technologies that could improve or extend our lives to everyone and not just to a privileged elite?

It may not be possible to stop this happening but if we want to lead on the benefits and not disenfranchise or ostracise large groups of the population we need to prepare ourselves in a much more radical and co-ordinated way than we are doing today. There are levers we can pull that can make this transition more or less successful.

There is no more visible lever than in the opportunity and necessity for us to provide a nation which is appropriately skilled for the radical changes we are about to see. Unsurprisingly, other nations are not waiting around for us to get our act together as the battle for a talented and skilled workforce is at the top of many of their agendas. On a recent trip to speak at a conference in Singapore, I followed a government minister who clearly laid out, albeit in a much less complex environment, a comprehensive programme of policies, collaborations and initiatives to provide a world-leading skilled society regardless of background through the government’s SkillsFuture programme.

In historical transitions where productivity has improved through new technology, such as in the first Industrial Revolution, we have seen short term declines in employment followed by new job creation and strong employment growth. That could well be the situation in this revolution, but it is going to require that we are much more thoughtful about the way that we ensure that is the case, by creating the most digitally and technologically skilled workforce in the world.

A job eliminated through automation in the North East of England or in the central belt of Scotland no longer simply becomes a new job in Durham or Dunfermline – as a digital job it is just as likely to appear in Singapore or Shanghai.

Don’t get me wrong, I am not suggesting that every job will disappear or even that every existing job will be affected negatively. I believe that if we get the adoption and use of technology right, we can radically improve our ability to put more nurses on the ward, removing their need to spend excessive amounts of time on administration and bureaucracy; we can put more teachers in front of our children by giving them the backup and expertise through technology and are relieving them of the non-pupil facing work. We can focus on the relevance, fulfilling and human nature of work in all jobs over the next century.

We need to embark on a visible, co-ordinated, funded and consistent programme to improve our understanding of next generation skills at a level that has never before been attempted. I think one thing we can be sure of is that the economies that manage the re-allocation of labour the best will be the ones that prosper most over the next 100 years. That effort should be:

Co-ordinated and simple There is a huge body of online, offline, written and video and audio-based material available nationally and internationally that could be mapped, made easily accessible to anyone at any stage of their learning path which can start to demystify the new world and allow anyone to begin to investigate and learn new and relevant skills.

I recognise this will require cultural change and significant investment from industry and government. Hence it needs to be:

Relevant and demand-driven Jobs and technology are moving at a frightening pace and it is easy to become overwhelmed no matter where you are on the scale of relevant skills for the next generation. We need to be creating a feedback-based mechanism from business which helps schools, colleges and universities as well as companies themselves understand the relevant skills that are emerging. Companies then need to find, potentially with government incentives at least initially, the time and mechanisms to skill and re-skill their workforces on an ongoing basis as well as evaluate, resource and reward them effectively and for individuals to embrace that need for continuous re-learning and re-invention.

Long-term and dynamic To be successful with this we need it to be long term, consistent and well-funded. The battle for the successful economies of the future will be won by those who have the skills, expertise and environment not only to create new companies and technical innovation but to have their populations fully capable, dynamic and flexible in its use and exploitation.

Vocal and relevant I don’t have all the answers to all of the above but I am convinced of the urgency, necessity and criticality of having this dialogue in a way that removes the uncertainty from every citizen or individual about the question “are robots going to take my jobs?” or “is AI going to leave me irrelevant?”.

If we don’t, we may well struggle to gain the benefits we believe are possible from an exciting set of new and powerful technologies.

I believe we need business to lead and be open in this conversation and everyone to feel secure in the thought that in an uncertain and frequently challenging world, the opportunities are being thought through in a human-centric and considered way. If we get it right this could well be a much more Thoughtful Revolution.
Digitalisation of Tax 2019 edition

As the UK implementation of Making Tax Digital comes closer, David Lyford-Smith reports on how other countries are handling digitalisation of the tax system.
findings of that research at the House of Lords Finance Bill subcommittee, and it helped inform ICAEW’s response to the MTD consultations; as a result of those consultations, MTD has been reorganised.

However, the wider story of digitalisation is still very much being told. The UK and many other territories are expanding the role of digital automation within their tax compliance systems, and are looking to both realise cost savings and increase the quality of the customer service they provide. Therefore, we are now launching Digitalisation of Tax 2019 edition, an update and expansion to the original paper. You can read the full paper at icaew.com/digitaltax

The new paper synthesises a holistic review of the processes of digitalisation: the needs of the different stakeholders, the tools and options available for making digital administration a reality, and the thorny issues that countries need to consider when making their plans. It builds on the 12 case studies (see boxout) to build an understanding of what makes a good digitalisation project tick.

For example, while the 12 case study countries differ substantially, there are many common threads in the challenges they face. The most consistent was that of digital exclusion – how to fairly treat those taxpayers who were unable or unwilling to move to online or automated filing. Some took the path of full mandation, expecting taxpayers to buy software or hire agents if they couldn’t comply themselves. Others allowed taxpayers to stay on paper-based or in-person systems, but suffered increased costs as a result. Still others attempted to provide community filing support or free digital skills training to help taxpayers learn how to file for themselves – all these approaches and more, but the core issue remained the same, even for the most digital-native of countries.

A second key trend was pre-population of tax returns. With ever more information reported to tax authorities digitally and often in real time, many countries are taking advantage of this to start pre-filling taxpayers’ returns with relevant third-party information. As well as making filing quicker and easier – averaging under five minutes in Estonia, for example – this shift also reduces the chances of omissions and errors. But pre-population isn’t just a convenience – it also spells major change for the tripartite relationship between the tax authority, the taxpayer, and their tax advisers. With the taxman preparing the return and the taxpayer auditing it, the flow of information is reversed.

If defaults are chosen on things like elections, compliant taxpayers may end up overpaying. Less technically aware taxpayers may feel uninformed or unable to challenge the tax authority’s figures, and tax agents should be prepared to increase their work checking automated returns as well as in advisory.

Big data analytics is already big business in many fields, but tax authorities can legislate to ensure that they get exactly the data they want, in the format that they want it. With this high quality data input and a broad set of entities reporting, it’s only natural that countries like Brazil and China are not only making tax compliance more automated, they’re also working to build analytics tools for catching tax evaders and even to analyse and plan their national economies.

The arrow of technology is clearly pointing one way. Increasing digitalisation is inevitable. But there are lessons to be learned about how to plan digitalisation projects, how they will affect the tax landscape, and how stakeholders can respond in this new world. Our review has introduced us to some interesting approaches and alerted us to some potential pitfalls – and we’re working on how best to deal with MTD. But I wouldn’t be surprised to see a further revisit to this research again in the future – as we continue to have more to learn.

David Lyford-Smith, technical manager, IT and the profession, IT Faculty

It spells major change. With the taxman preparing the return and the taxpayer auditing it, the flow of information is reversed
Making IT work for you

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Sticking with the programme

Birmingham-based corporate finance advisers Orbis Partners take a look at UK software trends and M&A activity for Q1-2019

In 2019 we are expecting a number of blockchain projects to transition from test stage to end-user accessibility. While the development of blockchain within financial services is now seemingly dependent on regulatory change, there have been a number of major blockchain projects released in other industries including cybersecurity, healthcare and agriculture.

Towards the end of 2018, IBM launched its food-tracking blockchain project, having signed up European supermarket Carrefour as its first user. The IBM Food Trust commercial offering allows users to trace items through the supply chain and pinpoint ingredients back to a specific field or factory. In the event of a contamination incident, the trace can be brought forward to recall the specific range of products that may have been affected.

Elsewhere, financial institutions are looking for ways to incorporate AI and machine learning into the fraud monitoring sector. The ability of AI to analyse large data sets while simultaneously reducing the manual aspect of monitoring transactions is expected to reduce the cost of anti-fraud practices. In 2019 we are also expecting to see a transition from DevOps to DevSecOps. Security software companies are expected to develop their software using DevOps in order to reduce time-to-market and develop new features quickly and easily.

Despite uncertainties caused by leaving the EU, the UK Software M&A environment remains healthy with 76 trade deals completed in Q4-2018 and Q1-2019. Leading technology company Roper Technologies Inc. has announced the acquisition of Foundry, an established developer of CG industry tools such as Modo, Nuke, Katana and Marl, for £410m subject to regulatory approval. Identity Data Intelligence specialist GBG has announced the acquisition of IDology, a US-based provider of identity verification and fraud prevention services, for £233m. The deal is expected to provide GBG with a strong foothold in North America while strengthening its product portfolio.

Taptica has announced the acquisition of RhythmOne, a multiscreen digital advertising solutions provider, in a deal worth £121m. The deal, which sees Taptica hold 50.1% of the enlarged group, was agreed in February. RhythmOne is expected to enhance Taptica’s media exchange capability through its private marketplace. The new company will be called Tremor International Ltd.

Managed services and business-critical software application provider, Civica Group, acquired ERS Group, a specialist election and civic engagement services provider. The acquisition is expected to enhance Civica’s overall cloud software strategy through ERS’s broad software portfolio which includes cloud applications from paperless meetings to mobile canvassing.

Elsewhere, Upland Software acquired a leading provider of cloud-based customer engagement solutions, Rant & Rave, and email technology developer, Adestra, for £44.4m and £44.6m respectively. EMIS Group acquired the remaining 21.1% of outstanding shares in pharmacy and software services company Rx Systems for £8m.

Orbis expects software M&A activity to remain high despite the uncertain political environment surrounding the UK leaving the EU. Private equity interest in the software sector is at an all-time high while large software companies are continuing to grow their offerings through the acquisition of specialist software houses.●
Windows of opportunity

The Social Mobility Foundation helps young people from low-income backgrounds into professions

The Social Mobility Foundation (SMF) is a charity that supports high-achieving young people from low-income backgrounds into the top universities and professions. With the help of employers, we support thousands of young people every year, people who have the ability to flourish in the top universities and professions but who lack the encouragement and networks to help them get there.

SMF SUPPORT
It is widely reported that the most competitive professions are dominated by those from wealthier backgrounds, with only 6% of doctors, 12% of chief executives and 12% of journalists today coming from working-class backgrounds. Working to tackle this, the SMF supports students across the UK. This support includes e-mentoring by a professional working within a career sector they are interested in; tailored skills sessions and career workshops; university application support; and internships with employers. They also work directly with employers to help them reflect on their ability to foster upwards social mobility through the Social Mobility Employer Index.

SMF support for students begins in Year 12 and continues throughout university until they find employment. This year the SMF has offered 1,842 students across the UK a place on their programme. Their West Midlands cohort has 162 students, many of whom are keen to pursue a career in accountancy.

“I hadn’t considered accountancy as a career until I was offered a placement”

Jasvir, who is based in Birmingham, was offered a place on SMF’s programme in 2016. She attended an SMF internship last summer with KPMG. “With the SMF, I’ve had the opportunity to speak to professionals I would not otherwise have had access to, which has been vital in building both my network and my confidence,” she says. “I hadn’t considered accountancy as a career until I was offered the placement with KPMG. It gave me a real insight into accountancy and the different pathways to becoming an accountant. I attended a Grant Thornton insight day through the SMF; I hadn’t heard of the firm before. It gave me the opportunity to speak to professionals on their graduate scheme and this sparked a real interest in the firm. As a result, I decided to apply to Grant Thornton. My SMF mentor really helped, particularly with perfecting my CV,” says Jasvir.

Jasvir is studying Mathematics at Aston University. She has been offered a placement year at Grant Thornton starting in September and will graduate in July 2021.

GET INVOLVED
There are numerous ways individuals or organisations can get involved:

• Sign up to become an SMF mentor. It’s a great way to see our students develop and help them fulfil their potential. Our mentoring cycle starts in April and lasts from nine to 12 months.
• Host an SMF student on work experience. This gives students invaluable first-hand experience of their chosen career and the chance to build their network.
• Support or host an SMF skills session. If you cannot commit to becoming a mentor, volunteering at a skills session is a great alternative.
• Sign-up to the Social Mobility Employer Index. Find out if your organisation is taking social mobility seriously.

If you are interested in supporting the SMF and want to find out more, please contact Hannah Baron on 0121 573 0044 or hannah.baron@socialmobility.org.uk
Shape up for Agile

We’re hearing a lot about Agile working, but what is it and where does it come from? Richard Cartwright is here to help.

If you’ve done any IT Project work over the past few years you’re bound to have heard about Agile project delivery. But what is Agile, and why does everyone from CEO to web engineer feel the need to talk about it?

At the turn of this century a global group of experienced software developers got together to talk about how they were all tired of leviathan technology projects costing too much and delivering poor quality software later than planned. They liked the idea of making sure their customers saw value from their software early, and favoured an approach of frequent and iterative delivery of project solutions. To that end they wrote down their Agile Manifesto which sets out the values they believe are the most important when building project solutions.

Cynics may think the Agile values and principles describe some kind of organisational nirvana. In small software companies, creating a purist Agile environment where the team is a master of its own destiny can be achieved relatively easily. In an enterprise environment where production of software is not an end-goal but instead an enabler of the business, and where any cross-team implementation requires negotiation and careful planning, the Agile approach must be implemented with a level of pragmatism to realise its benefits.

While there is no de facto Agile methodology there are several that now encapsulate its spirit including Scrum, SAFe (Scaled Agile Framework), Kanban, and XP. The technical language of Agile can be off-putting to those new to it, but I would encourage any of you working with it to get involved so you are better able to work with the team to manage it. If you want to understand and have a level of control over your Agile project then you need to know your sprints from your story points!

Day-to-day involvement in the project of the owning business-as-usual managers and team is important; they are, after all, the ones who will go on to live the changes. That means you shouldn’t just set up Agile projects and let “the techies” get on with it. It might have worked for building small applications, but it is more difficult in larger projects that require considerable investment and enterprise co-ordination. For those types of projects, a project management framework can be wrapped around the Agile delivery, such as PRINCE2 Agile® which has updated the well-known PRINCE2 methodology to consider the very different nature of Agile delivery.

Traditional project management focus has been on delivering a specific scope by flexing time, cost and quality boundaries. In Agile projects it is scope that is the most moveable boundary. That is, time, cost and quality are maintained by time-boxing the iterative build stage and, fairly simply, not building those scope items at the bottom of a prioritised scope list. This is a shift in thinking – that the scope and benefits are less fixed than in more traditional projects, and that this can be difficult to commercially manage.

I’ve seen Agile work brilliantly for the delivery of small projects of a few hundred days, to projects with thousands of days of effort. The common aspect of the successful projects has been that all their participants were on board with the approach, and worked out how they would implement Agile before they commenced.

I’d definitely recommend you consider trialling agile in your IT projects, and advise you to listen neither to the Agile naysayers, nor the Agile zealots – it’s not a silver bullet, but it could help you deliver customer value more quickly than traditional delivery approaches.

Richard Cartwright is a Senior Manager in the PwC Technology Risk team, Birmingham.

THE AGILE MANIFESTO

“We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:

• Individuals and interactions over processes and tools;
• Working software over comprehensive documentation;
• Customer collaboration over contract negotiation,
• Responding to change over following a plan.”

See more detail including supporting principles at agilemanifesto.org/
Mind your personal data
The risk of penalties under GDPR is very real if your organisation has not considered how it handles data, say Sheila Pancholi and Sarah Reynolds of RSM UK

The sceptics among you may question the enforcement powers of the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and its sibling data protection authorities with regards to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). You may think your organisation is unlikely to suffer a breach.

Whether or not your organisation has or will have an establishment in the EU, recent case law has shown that if you fail to demonstrate adequate safeguarding of personal data of individuals you are targeting there, the ICO is not the only regulatory body that can and will enforce financial penalties. There’s also the very real possibility of individuals bringing class actions outside any penalties enforced by regulatory bodies.

Enforcement began on 25 May 2018, when the first complaints were filed under the new law. The recent €50m penalty imposed by the French data protection authority (CNIL) against Google is the most significant sanction to date, clearly signalling that regulators are taking GDPR enforcement seriously. It is notable that the fine was imposed without a data breach. The CNIL fined Google for a purported lack of transparency in data collection and processing, and for invalid consent processes for ad personalisation.

While supervisory authorities are clearly prepared to levy heavy fines for non-compliance with the GDPR, smaller fines have also illustrated the breadth of application of the law. For example:
• Austria’s data protection authority fined a retail establishment €4,800 because its surveillance camera captured too much of a sidewalk;
• a hospital in Portugal was fined €400,000 for handling patient information inappropriately; and
• a German chat platform was fined €20,000 for a breach of user passwords.

Each of these fines was for different violations, and levels vary dramatically. Taken together, however, they provide insight into how enforcement actions might look. Each country’s supervisory
authority has significant latitude with how strictly the law is interpreted and what non-compliance penalties should be. Importantly these fines demonstrated that while full compliance is optimal, the GDPR is an expansive law, and companies that co-operated with regulators and showed progress towards compliance were shown leniency by regulators.

Albert Einstein apparently said that if he only had one hour to solve a problem he would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and the remaining five solving it. The answer to “what does good data privacy look like?” is therefore, “it depends”. It depends on the problem. It depends on the risk profile of the processing operation and on the “likelihood and severity” of a negative impact on the data subject’s rights.

Good data governance requires effective alignment between people, process and technology. Under the GDPR this includes:
- policies and procedures for managing data handling, security, protection and retention;
- regular user education and awareness including induction and refresher training for staff at all levels throughout the organisation; and
- systems that will support data security, segregation of duties, protective marking and data storage and retention processes.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to GDPR compliance, and risk-based analysis concepts underlie many aspects of the GDPR. Risk-based analysis underlies thresholds for breach notification under Article 31, security requirements under Article 32, and the criteria for authorities determining the level of penalties for violations.

According to Article 83, remedies should have regard to the technical and organisational measures implemented pursuant to Articles 25 and 32, which deal with data protection by design and data security requirements. These require controllers to tailor protective measures to the risk of a processing activity.

Risk analysis under the GDPR is therefore contextual. You cannot assess risk in a vacuum and privacy risk assessments should be part of business as usual. The next logical question then is how should risk assessments be conducted? CNIL advises controllers to first identify the potential harm associated with a processing activity; then evaluate the severity of harm that could result; and finally assess the likelihood of the event by analysing vulnerabilities of systems and operations and the nature of the threats.

This analysis needs to be conducted with reference to the nature, scope, context and purposes of the processing.

Once you’ve assessed the problem, how then do you limit your exposure? Remember that a breach in itself will not automatically make you liable for a fine when those systems and controls are evaded. If you can demonstrate that you have robust systems in place you may reduce or eliminate your liability for a fine, although not your liability to individuals.

That’s because effective compensation for individuals is a cornerstone of the GDPR. Article 82 sets out the concept of joint and several liability for breaches, while sections 168 and 169 of the DPA 2018 introduce the possibility of multi-party compensation claims for non-material damage (e.g. distress). This means that by aggregating what may individually be quite small sums, you could build a large case against a company if there was an infringement affecting large numbers of people.

Unfortunately, data privacy isn’t a one-time activity. It requires regular maintenance, ongoing oversight, executive buy-in, cultural change and investment. Article 30 of the GDPR requires that all organisations know what personal data they hold, for what purpose, for how long and with whom the data is shared. The data discovery exercise required to gather this information can be long and complex but is the foundation for your supporting processes and controls. Good data governance needs to be embedded into the DNA of the organisation.

Cybercrime is difficult to anticipate and plan for. But all organisations need to give cyber breaches proper consideration and develop and test appropriate protections and contingency plans. These should be tailored to different parts of the business where they present different risks.

Organisations need to be able to demonstrate compliance at any point in time, not only in the event of a data breach. The sooner you address emerging data privacy laws and regulations, the better the case your organisation can make that it’s taking data privacy seriously. Like it or not, the GDPR is here to stay and has initiated a global trend in data privacy compliance.

Sheila Pancholi is the Head of Technology Risk at RSM. She has substantial technology advisory and assurance experience with clients across a variety of industry sectors.

Sarah Reynolds is Legal Services Director at RSM and a commercial lawyer. She provides pragmatic, solution-driven advice to mid-market leaders on complex business law issues and transactions, often with global reach.
Digital technology businesses in the West Midlands are turning over £7.7bn a year according to the latest Tech Nation report. The sector employs 117,000 people in 19,900 businesses.

All this means Birmingham is increasingly seen as one of the powerhouses of the UK’s booming tech industry, an industry that is leading Europe in scaleup investment. Between 2015 and 2018, £4.5bn in funding was generated for scaleup investment into fintech firms – making the UK the number one nation in the world for this. And the UK is fourth in the world for scaleup investment across the tech sector, behind the US, China and India. The UK is also a hotbed for tech talent, employing 5% of all high-growth tech workers globally – placing it ahead of Japan, France and Indonesia.

Yiannis Maos, co-founder of managed hosting provider Hyve, is one of the tech sector business people extolling the virtues of Birmingham. He said: “Birmingham is a fantastic and diverse City full of incredible talent, which made it the ideal location to start a business. Its burgeoning tech scene allows us to collaborate with like-minded businesses and people who share our vision. I believe that Birmingham will be seen as the Tech Capital of the UK and we want to be a big part of that when it happens.”

Tech Nation is a scaleup network for UK entrepreneurs and it produces its annual report in association with the World Economic Forum. The report aims to “provide a comprehensive look into the evolution of the UK’s tech ecosystem, exploring the drivers that underpin and power economic growth within the sector”.

This year’s report focused on the UK’s place within the international landscape. Eileen Burbidge, Partner, Passion Capital & Chair of Tech Nation, said: “The UK has an incredibly pivotal role in the global tech scene. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Fintech sector where the UK is ranked number one in the world; an enviable position that has been established with decades of hard work, entrepreneurial talent, innovation and supportive policymakers. I’m confident that we have all the ingredients needed for continued success and even greater acceleration of the tech sector in the UK.”

Gerard Grech, CEO, Tech Nation said: “The UK continues to exceed all predictions when it comes to tech growth. This report shows how the UK is a critical hub when it comes to global technology developments, with scaleup tech investment being the highest in Europe, and only surpassed by the US, China and India. This is a testament to the innovation, ambition and tenacity of tech entrepreneurs across the UK. These valuable findings will help inform how the UK as a nation can continue to foster competition and collaboration in an increasingly interconnected world.”

In 2018, the UK attracted 5% of global high-tech scaleup investment, with investment in high-growth digital tech firms up 61% between 2017 and 2018. And tech scaleups made up the majority of all tech investment in the UK in 2018, with £5bn of a total £6.3bn invested in scaleups. The strongest tech sub-sector is fintech.

Some 26 UK cities also form part of a series of global hubs with shared

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**Total deals (2015-2018) by country**

- **United States**: £5bn
- **China**: £4.5bn
- **India**: £3bn
- **United Kingdom**: £2.5bn
- **Sweden**: £2bn
- **Germany**: £1.5bn
- **South Korea**: £1bn
- **France**: £800m
- **Australia**: £800m
- **Brazil**: £600m

**Total deals (£000,000s)**

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**Proportion of high growth tech employment by country (2015-2018)**

- **United States**: 5%
- **China**: 5%
- **India**: 5%
- **South Korea**: 5%
- **United Kingdom**: 5%
- **Germany**: 5%
- **Japan**: 5%
- **France**: 5%
- **Indonesia**: 5%
- **Singapore**: 5%
- **Canada**: 5%
- **Australia**: 5%
- **Russia**: 5%
- **Sweden**: 5%
investigation patterns. Birmingham has tech scaleup investment twins in Atlanta and New Delhi.

Insurtech and fintech are the biggest employers among high-growth digital firms in 2018, with artificial intelligence, cyber and Big Data growing areas of importance on the scaleup scene.

The sector is underpinned by strong investment in research and development as the government prioritises the development of a knowledge-based economy. In the most recent year for which data is available, 2016, UK spending on R&D was up 4.3% to £33.1bn, putting the UK seventh globally for R&D spending.

Prime Minister Theresa May said: “The UK is a global tech powerhouse. I am immensely proud of our country’s ambitious tech scaleups. These companies are delivering significant economic value to the nation through the investment they raise, the jobs they create and the innovative products and services they deliver.”

“On 9 July Tech Nation will hold a Tech Nation Talks event in Birmingham where it will be sharing insights from the Tech Nation 2019 report and discussing the strengths and challenges of tech in the Midlands. More information can be found at technation.io”

**KEY STATISTICS**

- Investment for UK scaleup digital tech firms grew 61% between 2017 and 2018.
- 35% of Europe and Israel’s 169 unicorn tech companies have been created in the UK.
- Scaleup tech investment was 2.5x higher than expected based on the relative size of the UK economy.
- Investment in AI grew almost sixfold from 2014 to 2018.
- Total venture capital investment in UK tech in 2018 topped £6bn, more than any other European country.
- The recent growth rate for London tech scaleups at 56% makes the cluster first in the world for scaleup growth.
- With £5bn of scaleup investment, the UK ranks fourth in the world, after the US, China and India.
- Ambitious scaleups are driving UK tech advantage - tech scaleup deals delivered the most tech investments in the UK in 2018 (£5bn of over £6bn).
Licence to lose money

Know your software rights in an age of cloud computing, or you could pay the price, says Mark Neale, a partner at the law firm Freeths LLP

As more and more organisations begin the often long, complex process of moving their technical infrastructure into the cloud, almost inevitably there will come a time where transition teams realise that they will need to grapple with the (perhaps surprising) consequences of traditional software licensing. Maybe a critical software application is no longer in active development, or the organisation finds itself bound by a costly licence agreement that predates the widespread adoption of cloud computing, or fails to account for it. Whatever the circumstance, making sure that the organisation has all the rights it might need to install, host and back up the software it relies on when moving it into the cloud could avoid expensive and protracted legal battles later on.

Some of the most common licencing pitfalls to consider are:

1. ENTERPRISE LICENSING

Enterprise licences typically grant blanket use rights to all the members of a given group of companies, for however many employees that group may have from time to time. While going down this route may seem to be an easier way of avoiding many of the complications associated with software licensing, the terms on which an enterprise licence is granted may not be entirely straightforward. Most enterprise licences specifically restrict use of the licensed software in the event of a merger between the licensee and a third-party. As such, where a smaller group of companies is purchased by a much larger entity, the software it used may no longer be licensed for all the members of the buyer’s group. When selling or buying company assets, the terms of their software licenses should always be checked, and any change of control clauses noted.

2. THREADS, CORES AND PROCESSORS

Software developers charge for product licences in myriad different ways, depending on the company’s business model. While each licence should be read on its own terms, there are certain industry standards which have arisen over time. Firstly, it is important to check if a product is licensed per thread, core or processor. In brief, a thread is a series of programmatic instructions. A processor core can have several threads (typically 2 or 4) which are capable of running simultaneously. A processor can then have multiple cores, which can be dedicated to different independent tasks. Powerful servers may have 16-core processors, capable of running four threads per core, meaning 64 threads.

In the cloud context, threads or cores may not necessarily represent physical hardware - virtual machines can take advantage of several virtual cores (and therefore many threads) which are not necessarily on the same processor, or even part of the same physical server. Organisations need to check licences carefully to make sure that when the application is hosted in the cloud, it is only running on the number of cores covered by the licence.

3. PER USER

Another important aspect of licensing which should be carefully thought through when migrating applications to the cloud stems from the use rights granted in the licence documentation. Licences may limit software usage with reference to “named” or “concurrent” users. Limiting the use rights to named users will mean that only certain designated individuals have the legal right to use the software - if they leave the organisation, their rights may not be transferred to a new employee, or there may be costs associated or a minimum notice period before a transfer can occur.

Concurrent user rights are less common, but can be useful as they allow an unlimited number of user accounts to be created, provided that the total number of individuals who access the software at the same time does not exceed the concurrent user limit.

Where the software is licensed per device, this may need to be carefully managed, since one user could conceivably have two or even three devices to do their job, and access the software over the internet at will. In a cloud context, this may require technical safeguards to be put in place to make sure that extra instances of the software are not made available where the licence does not allow them to be run.

4. THIRD PARTY SUPPORT

Sadly, the complexity does not end there. Many cloud deployments include a level of managed services i.e. essentially IT outsourcing. However, software licences are commonly limited to a particular organisation, such as a limited company or group of companies for their own internal business purposes.

If the cloud provider’s employees need to access the software, they may not be able to do so without infringing the licence that was originally granted.

5. “END USER” RIGHTS

While suppliers may impose restrictions on the business licensee, they may also prevent or curtail the use of the software by end users. As an example, if a company uses a third-party portal to allow customers to check on the status of their orders, each individual consumer who accesses that platform will, technically, need a licence to do so. This requirement extends to
self-service checkout stations or electronic weighing scales at retail outlets. Many licences are restricted to employees, agents and sub-contractors of a given company or group. When purchasing a software package, it is therefore important to make sure that the use to which it will be put is covered by appropriately broad language in the licence itself. This is known as “indirect licensing”.

Since traditional software licensing models have begun taking a back seat to more flexible cloud-based Software-as-a-Service architectures, vendors of popular applications and databases have become increasingly keen to investigate potential infringements and take legal action to recover lost revenue. Last year, the High Court ruled that Diageo, the drinks manufacturer, had provided indirect access to SAP systems by its customers through a third-party platform. The cost of that mistake was £54.5m, though the parties later reached a settlement for an undisclosed amount.

This continuing trend towards enforcement lives or dies on the strength of the audit clause, which has become a staple of modern software licence agreements. In essence, the audit clause allows suppliers to physically (or digitally) examine how many copies of the licensed software the customer is running, and compare that to the number of permitted licenses in the agreement.

Large IT service providers have been known to aggressively pursue companies which they believe to have violated their licences. One notable case occurred in 2016, when Oracle brought a claim against Mars following an audit. The claim argued that Oracle’s database was being run on a greater number of virtual cores than the licence permitted, since Oracle’s licence defined a core as one which was “available for use”.

As more and more suppliers move away from the on-premises business models which have been their bread and butter for the last few decades, audit rights have increasingly been used as a means of moving large customers into the cloud. This allows suppliers to more closely monitor software usage, and build tools which will prevent any usage which is not permitted in the Software-as-a-Service agreement.

In the case of Mars, the parties reached an out-of-court settlement, but Oracle’s litigious approach to licensing disputes has caused many sleepless nights for IT professionals on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years.

When considering a cloud deployment of pre-existing software resources, technical and legal teams may need to work closely together to make sure that old, or on-premises licences are suitable for the new architecture. Failure to appropriately plan and budget for this may result in an unpleasant surprise when a key software vendor decides to exercise its audit rights.

At Freeths, we have experience of guiding customers through the process of drafting and negotiating agreements with IT suppliers, from simple SaaS contracts through to implementing SaaS based solutions costing in excess of £100m. For further information, please contact Mark Neale, a partner in the IT and Data Team, on 0845 077 9626, mark.neale@freeths.co.uk
I’m not quite myself today.

I could use some help.

I’m feeling overwhelmed.

How are you?

I’m fine.

It’s time to open up about mental wellbeing.

At CABA our mission is to empower all members of the chartered accountant community to take care of their wellbeing, through all of life’s ups and downs. To have the confidence to reach out for support, and in turn support others too.

- Understand what mental wellbeing really is
- Learn how to spot the signs of low mental wellbeing and how to take action
- Get practical tips and tools to help you build your resilience
- Explore the benefits of counselling, life coaching and more

For practical tips and tools visit cabamentalwellbeing.org.uk

CABA’s services are available to all past and present ICAEW members, ACA students, past and present ICAEW staff and their families. Wherever they are in the world.
7 tips to boost your morning routine

**01 GET UP EARLY (EVEN AT WEEKENDS)**
Extra time in the morning gives you space to prepare calmly for your day. Train yourself to wake up earlier by setting your alarm back by just a few minutes each week. Get up at the same time every day to reinforce your new habit. As a bonus, regular hours will help improve the quality of your sleep every night too.

**02 HAVE BREAKFAST**
Skipping breakfast means starting the day with low blood sugar. Grabbing a sugar loaded breakfast on the go will only mean you’ll be craving a snack long before lunchtime. It only takes five minutes to make porridge, bircher muesli or granola. Or opt for protein like scrambled eggs or beans on toast to keep you feeling fuller for longer.

**03 GET MOVING**
Exercise releases feel-good hormones called endorphins, putting you in a positive state of mind for the day. According to a study by University of Bristol researchers, exercise doesn’t just lift your mood; it improves your productivity. They discovered that being more active can help with concentration and problem solving. Short, high intensity workouts can be effective if you’re short of time. If you prefer to take things more gently, even a brisk walk around the block will produce those feel-good hormones and the fresh air will wake you up so you feel ready to start your day. There are more ideas to get you moving at cabaphysical.org.uk

**04 CLEAR YOUR HEAD**
Make time every morning – even if it’s only a few minutes – for something that helps you to feel calmer and more focused before you leave for work. It could be reading, listening to music, stretching or meditating. It could even be as simple as sitting quietly with your morning cup of tea.

**05 SET YOUR GOALS**
Make a list of your priorities for the day or review your long-term goals. By deciding what you want to do and where you want to go before your working day starts you’ll focus more effectively on your plans.

**06 LET EMAILS WAIT**
It may be tempting to check your emails before you leave the house to get ahead. But that means you’re dealing with other people’s priorities before focusing on what you want to achieve first. Set reactive tasks aside until you have your own priorities planned.

**07 DISCOVER SOMETHING NEW**
Set time aside to learn something new for your personal or professional development. You can combine it with one of your other morning activities. For example, listening to a podcast while you make breakfast, taking a brisk walk, or on your journey to work. You might learn a few words in a different language, practice a new skill or draw inspiration from a TED talk.

**HOW CABA CAN HELP**
CABA are there whenever you need help, support or information that could help improve your wellbeing. Their services are free and confidential for ICAEW members, ACA students and their close family. For advice and information call +44 (0) 1788 556 366, email enquiries@caba.org.uk, or chat to CABA online at caba.org.uk/letstalk.

People are often at their most productive early in the morning so you have an opportunity to achieve a lot before you arrive at your desk. Follow these tips to establish a good morning routine of your own and maximise your energy and productivity throughout the day. Plan ahead and you’ll have time to think clearly and focus on what’s important to you.
Technology and innovation

Recruitment company Adlestrop Consulting gives some advice on futureproofing your career as new technologies become more commonplace in the office.

As the accountancy profession approaches a period of significant change with the adoption of new technologies, what does this mean for accountancy professionals? Automating accounting practices will provide efficiencies for firms and businesses as Making Tax Digital, artificial intelligence, and blockchain are introduced.

This market shift means that tax and audit professionals need to take the time to assess what the changes mean for their current roles and future careers. As much as there is a lot of negativity suggesting that the number of jobs will decrease with the adoption of automation, this simply isn’t the case! The changes will open new opportunities for professionals to become more of a trusted adviser, reducing the amount of manual data inputting and building client relationships.

Digital transformation isn’t going to happen overnight. We envisage a wealth of opportunities arising to help businesses adopt and integrate new technologies.

Managing your career has never been so important - this shift will transform the profession like nothing seen before. Taking the time out to allow you to sit back, analyse the landscape and assess what the changes mean for you is essential.

This could be an appropriate time to refocus your career and view this digital transformation as your friend, not foe.

There will be a greater need to analyse and interpret data before delivering it to clients. Business development could increase in importance as the efficiencies reduce fee income, yet present the opportunity to work a larger client base.

Planning as early as possible will allow you to make informed decisions on your career as you begin to see the changes taking place.

As the audit and tax functions in firms begin to shift towards automation, you need to be in a position to either appeal to your current firm or be equipped with skills and market intelligence to make a move.

One interesting point to consider is that different firms will set out their offerings in different ways. In some instances, firms will be looking for candidates to perform a combination of compliance and advisory work. You will come across roles that are strictly compliance or advisory.

Investing the time to understand what your strengths are, allowing time to develop the required skills and knowledge along with understanding which firms are best suited for is imperative.
Discounts to members

Six of the best reasons to be an ICAEW member in Birmingham and the West Midlands – perks that are good for you and good for local businesses

LOCAL REWARDS

**UMBERTO GIANNINI**
umbertogianninisalons.com/salons/50-newhall-street-birmingham
10% off salon services at hairdressers Umberto Giannini (excluding salon director). Available Monday-Friday (T&Cs apply). Situated at 50 Newhall Street, Birmingham. Be prepared to show your ICAEW membership card.

**PRIMITIVO**
primitivo-birmingham.co.uk
10% discount available when you eat at Primitivo. Situated on Barwick Street behind Barclays Bank on Colmore Row, it has been completely refurbished as part of the Grand Hotel redevelopment. You can pop in for a glass of wine or beer and either a quick bar snack or longer lunch. Primitivo has been really busy since reopening after the refurbishment so you may want to reserve a table by calling 0121 236 6866. Be prepared to show your ICAEW membership card.

**LOKI**
lokiwine.co.uk
10% off your favourite wines at LOKI Birmingham’s award-winning wine merchant, based in the Great Western Arcade. Present your ICAEW membership card to enjoy the discount and perhaps try a glass or two from their unique wine tasting facility. If you are not sure about wine, talk to Phil and his team who will guide you to some great wines at sensible prices.

ICAEW MEMBER REWARDS - To find out more, visit icaew.com/memberrewards

**AUTOMOTIVE**
Whether you are looking to hire a car in the UK or abroad, get roadside assistance or purchase a new vehicle, there are preferential rates in place with some leading brands. Members are entitled to corporate rates from Volvo and Sytner (who lead on BMW, Mercedes and VW sales nationwide) and discounts from Hertz and the AA.

**TRAVEL**
Wherever in the world you go, for business or leisure, we can look after your travel insurance needs with Insure & Go and Hiscox. You can also take advantage of discounted rates at IHG hotels who have hotels across nearly 100 countries. Why not enjoy your time away, sit back, relax, and let our chosen partners look after the details for you?

**INSURANCE**
Member Rewards partners can help ensure that your health, home and business receive the best possible cover with our appointed insurance partners. Join over 4,500 members who already take advantage of Bluefin Professions professional indemnity insurance. Talk to a dedicated member of the Hiscox team who lead the way on home insurance cover or get in touch with Bupa who will look at the health and wellbeing of you and your dependents.
Just 207 sleeps till Christmas...

Bookings for Christmas activities are already open at many of the city’s hotspots. Richard and Adam from OutInBrum.com suggest some great things to organise with your teams having a beer and realising that the FD’s mental arithmetic isn’t what it could be?

• Whisky Tasting @ Birmingham Whisky Club Try tots of the of the world’s finest whiskies with great instruction from the very knowledgeable staff. thebirminghamwhiskyclub.co.uk/, Vyse Street, B18 6HA

• Wine Tasting @ Loki Wine Not sure how to drink wine? The team here will see you right, and once you’ve learned about it they’ll let you loose on the wine tasting machines. lokiwine.co.uk/, Great Western Arcade, B2 5HU

• Street Food @ Digbeth Dining Club Spend an evening trying one of the dozens of vendors offering everything from Thai to Toasties. digbethdiningclub.co.uk/, Digbeth, B9 4AG

If you’re after more traditional options (though I have no truck with turkey and tinsel being a necessity) then maybe lunch or dinner at one of these:

• Pint Shop Christmas lunch with wine plus 20 draft beers and dozens of bottles. pintshop.co.uk/, Bennetts Hill, B2 5SN

• Fazenda Perfect for larger groups, this new Brazilian offers traditional rodizio-style dining in an elegant dining room, and has delicious pescatarian and vegetarian options too. fazenda.co.uk/, Barwick Street, B3 2AA

• Opus Restaurant Stalwart of the Birmingham dining scene, choose here for a swanky dinner. opusrestaurant.co.uk/, Cornwall Street, B3 2DE

• Pure Craft Modern bar with good food. purecraftbars.com/, Waterloo Street, B2 5TJ

• JuJu’s Cafe Dining here comes complete with a hug from wonderful and charismatic owner Julia. jujuscafe.co.uk/, Canal Square, B16 8EH

And there are so so many more options in Birmingham! Keep up to date with Brumme food, drink, arts, and culture at OutInBrum.com Merry Christmas!

ACTIVITY AFTERNOONS
The number of venues offering an activity other than boozing in the city centre has risen dramatically. Why not use your Christmas party as an opportunity for some team building and socialising that doesn’t need to be white wine fuelled? OK, you can have the wine after...

• Axe Throwing @ Whistle Punks Unleash your inner lumberjack and compete with colleagues. whistlepunks.com, Holloway Head, B1 1QP

• Escape Rooms @ Escape Live Get locked up with your team and work through puzzles to escape. escapelive.co.uk, Henrietta Street, B19 3PS

• Table Tennis @ Serve Food, drink, disco, and… table tennis. servebirmingham.co.uk, Temple Row, B2 5LS

• Crazy Golf @ Ghetto Golf! Grab some street food with a cocktail or two and play a round on this funky (and slightly rude) Digbeth hangout. ghettagolf.co.uk, Gibb Street, B9 4AA

• Bowling & more @ Lane 7 Eats, drinks, and bowling, plus shuffleboard, retro arcade games, mini golf, and beer pong. lane7.co.uk/birmingham, B1 1RN

• Darts @ 180 Club What’s more fun than throwing little pointed sticks while

FOOD AND DRINKS
We started blogging about Birmingham’s food, drink, arts, and culture scene seven years ago - and what a different place it was back in 2012. While there were some independent gems already doing well, such as Opus and Purnell’s, the number of interesting places owned and run by passionate Brummies has risen incredibly since. There is definitely a place for restaurant chains, and we have many good ones in the city (who doesn’t love a Nandos, cheeky or otherwise) but we love the energy and enthusiasm that comes from owner-operated independents and
MTD FOR VAT:
SIMPLER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

Are you a VAT registered business with concerns about how you will meet HMRC’s new Making Tax Digital (MTD) for VAT regulations? Are you worried about how by April 2019 (or October 2019 for those with complex tax requirements) you will support digital record keeping and audit trails and convert your spreadsheet based accounting systems to work with HMRC’s API filing mechanism? Have you thought about how to create digital links for every component of your VAT reporting process to meet the full compliance requirements which will be mandatory come April 2020?

- Join us as we DEMYSTIFY MTD for VAT and show you how you can become compliant in just 20 minutes
- Practical guidance on preparing for April 2019 and 2020; what you need to do and when
- See a live demonstration of Tax Systems fully compliant MTDfVAT digital end-to-end solution
- Ensure what you do now will prepare you for MTD for Corporation Tax

Register now at https://www.taxsystems.com/mtd-vat-are-you-ready
By your side for MTD

Xero has been listed by HMRC as software that will support Making Tax Digital for VAT. But our support for you won’t stop there.

To learn how Xero can help you prepare for MTD, visit xero.com/partners or email sales@xero.com