

Gripple boss flies flag for region

THE Managing Director of a leading Sheffield company is flying the flag for South Yorkshire as part of a select group of leaders from across the country after spending a week with some of Europe's foremost economists, entrepreneurs and scientists.

Chris Middleton, Managing Director of Gripple Ltd was one of 32 people taking part in a unique programme developed by international leadership organisation Common Purpose. Called 20:20, the bi-annual programme brings together participants from across the UK to examine the forces that will drive change in society, so that they and their organisations can be better prepared to meet future challenges.

Through briefings from top businesspeople, politicians, civil servants and economists, participants expand their horizons; develop their strategic vision by sharpening their understanding of national and international issues; and raise their game at a national level.

Taking care of offshore assets

A STARK warning to holders of offshore accounts of the dangers of disclosing the details of their overseas assets to investigators from HM Revenue & Customs without first seeking expert advice has come from a leading tax accountant.

"I have no doubt that the investigators will act in a thoroughly professional manner but tax is an extremely complex subject and investigations are full of traps for the unwary," said Chris Humphreys, tax partner in the Sheffield office of accountants and business advisers PKF.

"The right guidance and expertise can help to achieve a positive outcome from a Revenue investigation and minimise any potential penalties which is why it can prove a false economy not to seek expert help."

Chris said most people have no experience of handling an HMRC investigation into their errors or fraud. They were also likely to be ignorant of the double whammy penalty regime under which a fine can be imposed on top of the tax due of up to the same amount again.

His comments come in the wake of HMRC winning the right to force Barclays Bank to disclose details of its offshore account holders in the latest attempt to clamp down on tax evasion.

"Anyone with an offshore account is now open to scrutiny," warned Chris. "The bad news for the banks is that it makes much more sense for investigators to come straight to them for information rather than to individuals themselves. Why spend time asking individuals for their details when banks can provide data on a huge number of customers in a single hit?"

He added: "It's likely that the main UK banks will be HMRC's first target and in the 21st century world of electronic data there is nowhere to hide. Banks will need to be prepared for both demands for information from investigators and advice from their customers on how to react to any enquiries they may receive."

He said it would be in the interest of both banks and customers to seek expert help before the HMRC campaign gets going in earnest.

Speakers taking part in 20:20 included the Prime Minister's Political Secretary John McTernan, Group Finance Director from HBOS plc Phil Hodgkinson, the BBC's World News Editor Jon Williams and Dr Hans Reckers, Board Member of German bank Deutsche Bundesbank.

Speaking under 'Chatham House Rules' terms - which allows both the speakers and delegates to speak freely, on the understanding they'll never be quoted outside the session - 20:20 presents an unprecedented look at what's really going on in the national and international corridors of power.

Providing a combination of insider insights in both London and Brussels, and top-level contacts, 20:20 aims to help delegates better understand the workings of the systems that directly or indirectly touch on every area of life in South Yorkshire. In addition, it arms them with the contacts and know-how to affect real social change.

Chris, who is also Chair of the Common Purpose Sheffield Advisory group says: "20:20 was a fantastic opportunity to add to the experiences I have gained through Common Purpose. Since joining the programme I have learnt what makes South Yorkshire tick, and more importantly what I, and those around me can, and should be doing, to take South Yorkshire forward."

Sara Clarkson, Programme Director says: "Chris shows strong leadership skills. 20:20 is a challenging programme and Sheffield can be proud to have a voice in this unique arena. I'm sure the insights he brings back will benefit the whole community."

Anyone wishing to learn more about Common Purpose and the 20:20 programme should contact Sara Clarkson, Programme Director on +44 (0)114 259 3066 or email sara.clarkson@commonpurpose.org.uk. The South Yorkshire based sister programme to 20:20, Focus, is open to those in senior roles



Chris Middleton of Gripple

in the private, public and voluntary sectors that can demonstrate exceptional leadership ability. To find out more information about Focus visit: www.commonpurpose.org.uk.

FUNDING SUPPORT AS JAY GOES FLAT-OUT FOR SUCCESS



Flatworld's Gareth Jones, founder Jay Cousins and Joff Fisher from Flatworld, with Graham Nevin from NatWest

NATWEST and RBS Invoice Finance have provided funding to Sheffield-based entrepreneur Jay Cousins for the expansion of his business Flatworld (UK) Limited.

Flatworld (UK) Limited was set up in 2005 by former Sheffield Hallam University industrial design innovation student Jay Cousins with premises on the Sheffield Technology Park. His first venture into the international market was with his flat-pack Oriaso (a Japanese phrase meaning folding plastic) picnic set. Lighter than conventional camping products, they could be folded flat and slipped down the back of a rucksack.

This early success led to him designing a range of flatpack space-saving bowls for salads, fruits, dips and chips. Initially using his own and family funds, Jay developed the concept into a manufactured product sold through outsourcing to manufacturers and sales

via distributors to the retail market which has a strong foothold in the US.

In addition to this Jay was featured on the BBC programme Dragons Den last November and received two offers of £100,000 equity, however the Dragons wanted too high a stake in the company (40% and 50% set against the 10% that Jay's advisors had set).

Looking to fund the expansion of his concept in another way, Jay approached NatWest who have provided working capital facilities and invoice finance. Jay is currently working on a number of new lines with new colour ranges to suit military, male and female markets - the latter now representing 45% of the outdoor market.

Jay, Managing Director, Flatworld (UK) Limited, said: "The support provided by NatWest and RBS Invoice Finance will help me to take the business to its next stage. I am excited by the development of new product lines and although the offers

from the Dragons Den programme were not what I wanted they did demonstrate the support for the concept."

Graham Nevin, Commercial Manager at NatWest, said: "Jay is a fantastic example of a local businessman who has striven to succeed and create an innovative product which can be marketed in the UK and on the international arena. We are delighted to support the future growth of the business and look forward to assisting the successful development of the product range and expansion of Jay's vision into new UK and international markets." Graham Nind, Manager RBS Invoice Finance, said: "We are committed to working with Jay and have been impressed by the success of the business to date. The funding provided provides a platform for future success. Jay has established new distribution outlets and we are sure he will continue to develop and market the Oriaso range through new avenues thereby increasing profit."

Blunkett to join SBST 10th birthday celebrations

THE pioneering Specialist Building & Services Training organisation (SBST) is to celebrate its 10th anniversary as a leading provider of accredited and in-house training to the construction industry on July 7 with David Blunkett MP unveiling a commemorative plaque to mark the occasion.

The former Home Secretary and MP for Sheffield Brightside will be at SBST's purpose-built training facility in Sheffield, alongside VIPs from Gleeson Services and Powerminster, who established the training body.

Focused on improving skills and safety throughout the construction industry, SBST has acquired an impressive reputation for delivering training excellence across a wide range of construction and building services-related fields over the past ten years, becoming one of the UK's leading providers.

Managing director Martyn Horton of SBST explained: "There has been a significant shortage of skilled professionals in the building services and construction sectors for some years and Powerminster originally

established SBST with a £40,000 investment as part of a long-term strategy to address this skills gap. Ten years on and after joining forces with MJ Gleeson's training resources, we have trained hundreds of professionals and are continuing to make a significant contribution to closing the skills gap and raising standards across a wide range of disciplines."

Based at two sites, The Riverside House Centre at Powerminster's headquarters and the Waleswood Centre, close to junction 31 of the M1, SBST has impressive training

facilities including workshops, a streetscape site and a soft dig site as well as lecture and training rooms.

David Blunkett will be taken on a tour of the facilities and is already impressed by SBST's successful track record. He commented: "While some companies simply bemoan their difficulties in finding suitably skilled employees, Powerminster took decisive action to address the issue and over the past ten years have successfully answered their own skills requirements through SBST."

BUSINESS BRIEF

SCF expansion plan

A SHEFFIELD firm of dealmakers with a leading reputation for helping companies grow is itself expanding.

Strategic Corporate Finance, whose specialists form the largest team of dedicated dealmakers in South Yorkshire, is taking over another floor at its premises in south west Sheffield to accommodate its growing team of experts.

The firm, one of the biggest corporate finance houses in the North of England, already occupies the ground floor of the three-storey office block and will now use the second floor as well.

Managing director Andrew Coates said: "We adopt a pro-active approach to deal-making and work hard to create deals rather than sitting back and waiting for business to come to us. This has resulted in us taking on new staff to handle the volume of work which, in turn, has created a need for more office space."

Strategic Corporate Finance's pro-active philosophy is also bringing in more work for the region's lawyers, accountants and banks. Since the start of 2005, the firm's deals have led to 63 assignments for lawyers, 20 new relationships for banks, 18 due diligence assignments for accountants and seven venture capital investments.

Stagecoach profits up

PROFITS have risen by 7.2 per cent to £140.6 million at Stagecoach Group, the bus and rail operator which runs Sheffield's Supertram and six months ago acquired the Barnsley-based Traction Group in a £26 million deal.

Traction Group, which has operations in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Tayside, contributed £21.1 million to Stagecoach's £1,530.00 revenue for the year to the end of April - an 8.2 per cent increase on the previous year.

The 103 year old Barnsley firm, which was Britain's biggest privately owned bus company, made an operating profit of £0.4m in the four months between its acquisition and the end of April.

Since its acquisition by Stagecoach, Traction has been making a determined effort to boost its services in Sheffield and challenge dominant city bus operator, First.

Earlier this week the group announced a £1 million investment in new buses for Sheffield.

Interlink takes award

LEADING parcels carrier Interlink Express, whose local depot is at Meadowbrook Industrial Estate, Sheffield has scooped the top award in the industry's equivalent of the Oscars for its customer service.

The awards recognise the highest levels of achievement and are sponsored by leading trade publication International Freighting Weekly. Interlink Express was commended by the independent panel of judges for its "investment in customer care skills bringing tangible benefits which Interlink Express laid out clearly with quantitative research, strong customer testimonials and performance transparency".

From the local depot in Meadowbrook Industrial Estate, Sheffield franchise owner Kevin Morrissey said: "We operate in a very competitive market, where premium service is a pre-requisite for every delivery and is critical to the success of the small businesses we serve. This is a great accolade that demonstrates we are delivering what our customers need."

Sponsor boost

CLIENTS of Sheffield-based company BeyondPR joined forces to support employee Emma Moorhouse and her friend Sarah Copley - by sponsoring them as they ran in Sheffield's Race for Life recently, raising over £250 for cancer research.

The five local companies who all sponsored Emma and Sarah £50 each, were: Barnsley-based Lifting Solutions; Wentworth Brewery; Hathersage restaurant and bar, The Walnut Club; Reflex Systems of Rotherham and BeyondPR.