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## Wee Blue Crew now own Wee Blue Coo!

Edinburgh based print and design firm , Wee Blue Coo, has rewarded its employees with the keys to the business following their hard work during the global pandemic. In a quirky move typical of this innovative and unique company, they named their Employee Ownership Trust Wee Blue Crew.

Launched from the living room of couple Bob and Joelle Kirkpatrick in the middle of the 2008 financial crash; the Wee Blue Coo Ltd has established itself as a successful business, dispatching thousands of products globally each week and selling its products on multiple online marketplaces.

Bob and Joelle were both made redundant from their jobs in 2006 before setting up their business, creating posters from public domain images to retail on eBay. Fast forward 15 years, they now have a strong team of 30 members of staff – some of which have been employed for more than 10 years – and have an annual revenue of more than £2 million.

Having previously gifted a 10% shareholding to long term employee Allan Gray for his hard work and dedication, the three shareholders agreed that the move to employee ownership was in line with the

company's values by safeguarding the future of the business for the benefit of its employees.

The entrepreneurs began exploring the succession model in 2019 and decided to go ahead completing the transition in November 2021.

Bob Kirkpatrick said: "Employee ownership was the only real option for us to ensure we safeguarded the futures of those who have contributed to our company's success. The Employee Ownership Trust seems like a perfect and logical way to structure any business."

Joelle Kirkpatrick added: "Being a people led business has always been the very essence of who we are, which is why becoming an Employee-Owned business was the only option that was seriously considered.

"Running our business this way has ensured we have a motivated and dedicated team who feel valued. That has always been more important to us than the bottom line. Relaying this news to our team has, without a doubt, been the highlight of my career so far."

Bob and Joelle have always sought to take care of their staff with perks such as flexible working

**First Friday**  
January 7th

**Trustee Training**  
January 27th

(more info on page 10)

and even providing private healthcare to all employees with more than one year's service.

Naturally the couple felt this was the next step for their business. The team were shocked and delighted at the news and are very excited at being given the opportunity to shape the future of Wee Blue Coo Ltd.

## Greentech Sportsturf Moves to Employee Ownership to Secure Long-term Future

Leading sports surface specialists, Greentech Sportsturf Ltd has set up an Employee Ownership Trust to hold 100% of the leading sports and recreational surfaces firm and put it into the hands of the people who work for it - making them the direct beneficiaries of the company's future success.

Started in 1998 by Kevin Brunton, Hugh Murray, and the late Tom Brannan (who sadly passed away in 2015) the company has grown successfully over the years and has worked on world-renowned fields of play such as Gleneagles, St Andrew's Links, Hampden Park and Murrayfield Stadium. With Hugh Murray now retired the Directors wanted to look at an ownership succession option which secured the long-term future of the business, its employees and would work well for both clients and founders too. The co-founders were keen to avoid the potential pitfalls of traditional trade sale or merger options, keenly aware of the risks these options can present to employees and the business as a whole. They saw many advantages to employee ownership and believe that it is the 'win-win' proposition for everyone - founders, employees and clients.

"The establishment of employee ownership through the EOT at Greentech Sportsturf will provide continued job security for all staff," said Kevin Brunton. "It will also enable the employees to have collective control of their future, directly benefit from the ongoing success of the business and to continue to deliver market-leading projects in the design, construction, renovation and maintenance of sports surfaces."

Eric Carroll, Financial Controller at Greentech Sportsturf, commented: "I'm delighted that Kevin and Hugh have chosen this option for ownership of the business and I think this is great

Graeme Slater, Warehouse Manager, said: "Now that we are an employee-owned company it means that we all have a say in the direction the company takes in the future. This is a great opportunity to help us to grow as a company and offers us the chance to enjoy a more secure and prosperous future."



news for all the staff at Greentech Sportsturf. Everyone one of us now has a stake in the business and can share in the success and profits that are made going forward."

Kevin Brunton believes that employee ownership is good news for clients too and will help to secure the long-term future of the company. "Employee ownership means clients need not be concerned with Greentech Sportsturf being acquired and the potential associated disruption that can lead to. They can feel secure in the knowledge we will continue to deliver the highest quality sports surfaces projects with our talented team of people and the best technologies for the job in hand." Said Kevin. "It also gives the co-founders the opportunity to consider retirement and eventual exit from the business in a planned manner, mentoring the successor team whilst withdrawing slowly and ensuring continued growth and success. It really is a win-win all round."

Greentech Sportsturf is a Scotland-based, leading sports turf contractor, specialising in the design, construction and renovation of all sports surfaces. The company has a diverse client base comprising world renowned fields of play including St Andrews and Gleneagles Golf Courses, Scotland's national football and rugby stadiums, as well as smaller and regional sports facilities. Located on the outskirts of Stirling at Throsk, the company operates throughout the UK.

# ALTAR Group now owned by employees

The Broughty Ferry based agency has created an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT) with the majority of the company's shares held within the trust, and all 38 staff members now employee owners.

Established in 2013, ALTAR Group, formerly named Avian Communications Network, was formed when Avian acquired competitor agency Blue Square Design. In 2020 the agency rebranded as ALTAR Group giving more clarity and gravitas to its combined creative offering.

Today, ALTAR Group comprises four consultancies; Avian - a design studio specialising in brand development & graphic design; Blue2 Digital - a web design, development and digital marketing agency; Ginger PR, public relations and communications specialists, and Kolabo - a digital research and development consultancy.

The business has grown from 22 employees to 38 with team members as far afield as London, Rome and Chicago. Clients include Walkers Shortbread, Highland Park Whisky, Edinburgh Gin, Simon Howie, Gillies and St Andrews Links Trust. The move to the EOT model, sees ALTAR Group follow in the footsteps of 112 Scottish companies that have made the transition since legislation passed in 2014 to provide a route to employee ownership.

Scott McCallum, Chief Executive, ALTAR Group, said: "We have gone through significant and hugely transformational changes during the past two years. A time when most businesses battened down the hatches, we chose to forge ahead with a progressive strategy, each positive decision leading to the next, a strategy that will have long lasting benefits for our business and everyone who works here, who are all now shared owners.

"We have chosen to invest in our people with several senior appointments, we have made bold moves and acquired another business, and we are now putting our trust in the people who make this business what it is. Ultimately, we have emerged as an extremely dynamic group of creative agencies whose future has been safeguarded for the benefit of its employees."

Working with employee ownership



Scott McCallum



Front Row L-R David Ednie, Nial Chapman

specialists, Ownership Associates, EQ Accountancy and legal advisers Blackadders, ALTAR Group made the decision to move to employee ownership to directly involve employees in the growth of the company, reflecting its culture of creating a community of likeminded people.

ALTAR Group employees will now indirectly own a majority stake at 60 per cent of the business, with the remaining 40 per cent being held by original shareholders and key staff members.

The governance structure of the business will also see the management team joined by an employee board representing the interests of employees from all areas of the business.

Nial Chapman, Blue2 Director, said: "With employee ownership there is no individual risk but the success is in the hands of all of us. We have an incredibly skilled and fresh thinking team at ALTAR and we hope that this exciting move will not only encourage retention but that it will also attract new talent.

"We are only the second creative consultancy in Scotland to make this transition and truly believe it will enhance our position as a flexible, forward thinking agency that puts its people at the forefront of all we do, where ability is rewarded and potential nurtured."



# OAUK News

As we come to the end of another challenging year, it's good to reflect on all the positives there have been. 2021 saw Scotland's 100th employee-owned business. Hamilton based Dazzle Inkspot managed to time their completion to bag that landmark position, amongst the 18 other Scottish head-quartered businesses that entered employee ownership this year. There had been several more forecast, but delays have slowed down the process for a few more transition projects. The good news is that it looks like January is going to get off to a bumper start with a record number of transitions- watch this space!

You'll see news of three of this year's companies in this edition. Wee Blue Coo were a lovely company to work with and I was so impressed they gave their EOT a very specific name - The Wee Blue Crew - definitely stands out from the crowd! If you're looking for unique Christmas cards or gifts then check out their online store <https://weebluecoo.com>.

The ALTAR Group of companies is another exciting business that became employee-owned recently. The group comprises design, digital, research and communications consultancies. Based in Broughty Ferry, the company has employees far and wide including Chicago, Rome and London.

Greentech Sportsturf is well-known in the sports sector for the superb work they do in sportsgrounds. This wasn't an OAUK transaction but it's always good to hear of another Stirling company move to employee ownership. I hope to drop in for a visit soon!

Recent First Fridays have been focussing on communications with attendees sharing what they use to ensure that employee owners are kept informed about how their company is doing. We agreed that telling people is easier than trying to encourage them to speak up and contribute comments and ideas. Aquascot described how they use technology with an intranet that captures people's thoughts. Jerba have small group meetings that work well for employees sharing their views. We concluded that having a cohesive culture can make communication



so much easier at work and agreed that in the January session we would look at teambuilding – whether that's voluntary or community involvement or social events. Indeed, a few companies felt that the restrictions on social events as a result of the restrictions of the pandemic had led to a negative impact on the team spirit in companies. If you want to attend the January First Friday, let me know and I'll send you the link if you're not already on the list.

Good to see both Aquascot and Collective Architecture pick up more awards. It really does do so much to raise the profile of employee ownership and prove that employee-owned companies do it better! Of course, there is always stiff competition and fingers are all crossed for two MD of employee-owned companies who are through to the finals of the Institute of Directors Director of the Year awards. Simon Poole of Jerba Campervans is in the running for the Small to Medium Business category and also for the Edinburgh & Lothians region. Kevin Shaw of Heatherlea is a finalist in both the Innovation category and the Highlands & Islands region. Rooting for you both!

Thank you to all who supply stories for the newsletter, and also to all those who circulate to colleagues. There are now over 230 subscribers and regularly read by 400-500 people per month – when I started to give myself something to do during lockdown I thought 30 readers might be good going!

Have a lovely Christmas break and wishing you all a successful, happy and healthy New Year.

Until next time,

- Carole

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# Growing interest in EOTs in Australia

Professor Andrew Pendleton, one of the world's leading academics in employee ownership has been promoting the benefits of the Employee Ownership Trust model in Australia. Formerly at the Universities of York and Durham, and a founder of the White Rose Centre, Professor Pendleton has continued to push for widening adoption of employee ownership. He says, "Employee Ownership Trusts are a very simple structure. An employee trust owns all or some of the equity of the company for the benefit of its employees. The principle is that it's a trust that collectively owns the company for the benefit of the employees."

The Australian tax regime doesn't allow for the Capital Gains Tax exemption enjoyed by shareholders in the UK. But even without a CGT concession – as is the case currently in Australia – the Employee Ownership Trust still provides benefits to owners and workers, says Professor Pendleton. He adds that another major advantage of the EOT model is that employees are protected during business succession. "The big danger is that if the owner wants to retire, and the company is sold to private equity or some other third party, they'll take the goodwill and shut the company down or move it to another part of the country. The EOT very much maintains and protects the company as it is, while facilitating future development and growth." According to Janna DeVyllder, Co-Founder of Meld Studios, an Australia-based design studio, the choice to set up an EOT at the company was based on the issue of succession.

"For the past 10 years, a lot of people that we know that own smaller independent design studios have been acquired by much larger organisations. That felt antithetical to us – we still wanted to be doing the work, we still wanted to be in it. But we didn't want to lose our independence."

DeVyllder, who is now a Board Member at Employee Ownership Australia, says the team instead looked into ways that Meld could make their 'Meldsters' owners, and contacted Employee Ownership Australia. From there, Meld Studio started on the journey to becoming the country's



Andrew Pendleton



Janna DeVyllder

first 'test case' for an Australian-originated business as an EOT.

While there aren't the same tax mechanisms or tax incentives in place to reap the full benefits of EOTs in Australia, the House of Representatives released a report this August with recommendations to promote employee ownership in Australia. It concluded that in Australia, frameworks to make Employee Share Schemes (ESS) attractive to companies did not exist yet.

"They've called for the Productivity Commission and the Australian Government to take a good look at employee ownership trusts with a view to promoting them here in Australia," explains Prof. Pendleton. "At the moment, you can set up an employee ownership trust, but there aren't the particular tax benefits that you get in the UK."

So, are Australian employees and business owners likely to see a similar EOT setup in the near future? Prof. Pendleton says this is hard to predict (though several companies are currently looking to follow Meld's example). "The Australian Government and the Opposition are generally sympathetic to forms of employee ownership," he says. "But whether they'll go the extra mile and establish a set of specific tax advantages for EOTs, it's just too early to say."





It was a successful night for Alness based Aquascot at the Scottish Highlands and Islands Rural Economy Conference and Awards Ceremony in November.

Nominated for two honours on the night, Aquascot picked up the Rural Digitisation award, following the extensive work over the past year working towards ‘smart factory’ status.

Alongside fellow nominees Yellow Cherry and Fibre 1 Ltd — based in Elgin and Inverness respectively — this award category recognised rural businesses in the Highland and Islands that have invested in digital infrastructure, making a virtue of connectivity to open up new markets, deliver products/services better and capitalise on opportunities. The company were delighted to be nominated with two great businesses.

A major part of the digital transformation work over the past year or so has been in close collaboration with FluidIT, and Aquascot acknowledged them for their expertise, support and hard work alongside our dedicated partners. Awards recognition is a really encouraging thing for all at Aquascot, a welcome boost as they enter the busy festive period — and the company expressed appreciation to the organisers, Harper Macleod LLP, Highland News and Media and category sponsor Openreach for making The SHIREs 2021 happen.



Sponsored by: **openreach**



## Mediascape work magic at Surgeons Hall Museum

Audio-visual expert Mediascape was selected by The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh to design, supply, install and configure the AV system for a new central exhibition in the Surgeons' Hall Museums.

The Surgeons' Hall Museums are owned by The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and consist of the Wohl Pathology Museum, the History of Surgery Museum and The Dental Collection.

With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2014, the Museums underwent a major redevelopment that focused on the College's heritage and helped create a new and enhanced public space within the Museums to inform and share with the general public the historical journey of surgery and its advances.

The Museums also feature exhibits that inspire public engagement through interactive computer simulation, audience participation devices, film and user-friendly textual explanation, encouraging people to think about health and wellbeing.

Mediascape was selected via competitive tender to design, supply, install and configure the AV design for the new central exhibition in the History of Surgery Museum. All AV technology, configuration, set up and control provided by Mediascape; Multimedia creation was provided by Heritage Interactive.

The centrepiece of the project would be a 3D model of a human body onto which 2D graphics demonstrating an autopsy would be projected. This was designed and built to our specification and then coated for rear projection. Working within tight tolerances, we blended bespoke multimedia and used 3D geometric correction to display dynamic multimedia and created AMX timeline links to trigger video displays.

Heritage Interactive created and delivered 26 touchscreen interactives. The software included a large format 3D model of the human body, interactive timelines, layered content interactives for surgical specialisms, and a live interactive news feed application.



Heritage also created footage for 10 different film stations throughout the museum. A total of 39 short films were used showing various aspects of surgical practice. Each film was edited to ensure content was appropriately paced. Title graphics and subtitles were added for accessibility. To enable museum staff to update the interactive timeline, Heritage Interactive developed a bespoke CMS that allows for adding new items to the timeline, and update existing items, adding text and imagery.

This software and footage were all setup on the digital displays and touchscreens provided by Mediascape. This was a high-profile installation opened by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh and broadcast on national news channels, both on TV and online. The team at Mediascape is proud to have successfully tendered for the project and we are glad have delivered such an interesting, interactive AV experience for visitors to the Surgeons' Hall Museums.



## A Double Win for Collective Architecture!



Being shortlisted for two AJ Architecture Award was fantastic news however, finding out that both Meadowbank Masterplan and the Larick Centre won their respective categories at a UK wide award ceremony, was an outstanding result. A true credit to the client, communities, and design teams involved in both projects.

Meadowbank, a £100 million green neighbourhood on a challenging brownfield site was praised by the jury for its 'true placemaking'. The judges were also impressed by the whole-team's collaboration on the 596-home 'low-car, low-carbon' community, the way the scheme will knit into the existing urban fabric, and how public consultation and debate had properly and positively informed the proposals. They said: 'At no point has the team been on automatic pilot. There has been a real clarity and depth of thinking.'

For the Larick Centre in Tayport, the judges were especially impressed by the 'thoughtfulness in how the brief was developed with the community, and how there was a clear and expressive unity between inside and out. Unlike some schemes in the category, the judges felt the architecture was a highly-considered response to community and public need, both now and in future.

The Larick Centre was designed to be adaptable through moveable walls and flexible services, the new centre proved its versatility during the Covid pandemic by being used as a local NHS vaccination hub. Its

sustainability credentials include the retention of a 4,000m<sup>2</sup> concrete ground slab from the former industrial shed, keeping 820 tonnes of concrete in situ. The building also employs a range of materials, such as screw-fixed metal corrugated panels, that can be easily disassembled and re-used, emphasising a prevailing ethos of long life, loose fit.

A big well done to everyone who has contributed to these projects, these awards highlight the enormous value well considered design will bring to the future of both Meadowbank and Tayport communities.





## International accolade for Graeme Nuttall OBE

Leading employee ownership expert, Graeme Nuttall, partner in Fieldfisher's Tax and Restructuring practice, has been recognised for his role in defending and promoting the social economy.

The 'Txemi Cantera' International Social Economy Award was awarded for his fostering, and advocacy of, Employee Ownership in the UK, having produced this preeminent roadmap for the ownership model.

Awarded by ASLE, the business association of employee-owned and investee companies in the Basque Country, Fieldfisher said the 'Txemi Cantera' award acknowledges Nuttall's contribution to the trend towards Employee Ownership in the UK, currently home to over 750 employee owned businesses, and beyond, with his work credited by both the USA's National Centre for Employee Ownership, and Employee Ownership Australia as an influence.

In 2012, as an independent advisor, and at the request of the UK government, he penned the 'Nuttall Review of Employee Ownership' on the barriers to promoting this business ownership structure.

The UK Government used the Nuttall Review's 28 recommendations as its agenda to "break down the barriers" to employee ownership and, in particular, to support employee ownership trusts as a business succession solution.



It added his work as part of Fieldfisher's leading Employee Ownership practice has helped it to support over thousands of employees to become owners, averaging one transaction a month over the last year.

Nuttall said: "Thank you very much to ASLE for awarding me the Txemi Cantera International Social Economy Prize. It is a big honour to be recognised for my contribution to upholding the values that define employee-owned companies, such as participation, democracy and solidarity, and for me to join the list of well-known people who have been honoured in this way.

"It is very important that employee ownership organisations around the world share ideas and good practice, so that we may learn from one another and build stronger, better ways of promoting and maintaining employee ownership. By awarding an international prize ASLE celebrates this global co-operation."

## Page\Park celebrate 40 years

Award-winning architects practice Page\Park celebrated 40 years in business recently. Page\Park, responsible for such iconic projects such as the extension to Glasgow's Theatre Royal, Leeds Playhouse and more recently the Great Tapestry of Scotland has been in employee ownership since 2014. To mark the occasion, the Page\Park team have compiled some landmarks of their journey which you can read on their website [pagepark.co.uk/cog/40th-anniversary/](https://pagepark.co.uk/cog/40th-anniversary/)

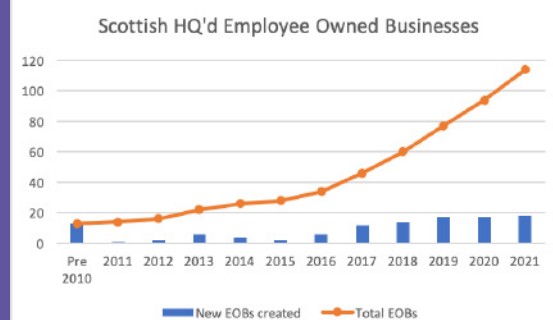


# Employee Ownership in Scotland

There are now **114 employee-owned businesses** headquartered in Scotland... and counting!

Our map shows head office locations.

**OA** Ownership Associates uk  
let's make it happen



## Trustee Training - January 27th

This two hour session aims to equip Trustees to fulfil what is a pivotal role within the employee-owned company. The session is in two parts and is delivered over Zoom. You can join for both parts, or if you have already attended Part 1 or a previous session, you're very welcome to join only for Part 2.

**Part 1: Information giving – legal duties of trustee, responsibilities, the Trust deed, the Trustee role. 9.30am – 10.30**

**Part 2: Case Study – group work on a trustee dilemma in an employee-owned company. All groups work on same case study, come together to report on discussions. Everyone says this is tremendously useful. 10.30 - 11.30**

To register your interest email [carole@ownershipassociates.co.uk](mailto:carole@ownershipassociates.co.uk)