

2025 ISSUE 1

INNOVATE + INFLUENCE PRESTON



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invest PRESTON

This magazine was produced by Invest Preston. If you have an interesting story to tell about innovation, tech, digital or cyber in Preston please let us know: innovate@preston.gov.uk

PRESTON IS A POWERHOUSE OF INNOVATION.

Innovation is in our roots. Notably, we are known for being the first English town outside of London to use gas lighting; where Richard Arkwright invented the water frame; and the birthplace of the temperance movement.

Looking forward, the city is on the precipice of opportunity.

With established strengths in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, and health, Preston has burgeoning opportunities in cyber, data, and digital with the £5bn National Cyber Force (NCF) facility being built on our doorstep.

Having recently been ranked one of the top UK cities for SMEs, we have an impressive range of businesses and organisations working across the city, innovating across digital, tech, and cyber.

What follows is some of the people, businesses, and organisations doing interesting things in this space.

THE STUDENT INVESTIGATORS



“ The best part of the role is getting to work with the family and friends, and seeing the impact it has on them, the fact that we are still looking for their loved one makes all the difference.”

Since opening their Missing Persons Unit in 2020, staff and students at the University of Central Lancashire have collaborated with families of missing people to help investigations.

The programme offers real world experience to students, working with Locate International as a “specialist digital investigation team.” This year, they received more than 100 applications to join their volunteer programme, from students taking courses such as Policing, Forensic Science, Law, Criminology, Psychology, and Computer Science.

Working on cold cases, the successful students act as volunteer Missing Person investigators - working across eight teams, with a total of forty student investigators, with oversight from University lecturers who specialise in investigation.

Leader of the Missing Persons Investigation Unit (MPIU), Ashleigh Thompson, who is currently an MSc Criminal Investigation student at the University said,

“I joined the MPIU in 2021 as a beginner investigator who was interested in finding missing people. I have worked directly with friends and family of missing persons, led my own team of investigations and I am now leading eight teams of investigators within the MPIU. Having access to experts across all points in the process has allowed me to gain experience, knowledge and confidence in all aspects of my life.”

The best part of the role is getting to work with the family and friends, and seeing the impact it has on them, the fact that we are still looking for their loved one makes all the difference.”

To date, this work has led to student-led missing person investigation research, and one PhD registration.

Dr John Demspey, Principal Lecturer and Director of Cyber Investigations told us,

“The School of Law and Policing’s mission is to serve our communities, and the work carried out in our Missing Person Investigation Unit is just one example of this. The student volunteers get access to expert training, mentorship, and a network of experts working across the UK, Europe and the World. This opportunity to obtain real world experience doesn’t come easily, yet our volunteers are both aspirational and inspirational – and I couldn’t be prouder of the impact they make.”

WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED

“We built Viddyoze to make it simple. Now, anyone, regardless of tech skills can turn their ideas into captivating videos - with just a few clicks.”

Viddyoze started with a straightforward idea: making high-quality video animations accessible to everyone. The Preston-based company started in 2015 with a trio who would later win the Judges Young Entrepreneur Award at the Northern Tech Digital Awards, being described as a “young beacon of inspiration.”

They now operate on a global footprint.

When asked what makes them different, co-founder David Chamberlain said, “Our approach is all about simplicity. Viddyoze removes the hassle from animation, enabling anyone to create stunning, professional content without hours of editing. We design our templates to look fantastic right from the start, giving users that extra boost in visual quality and appeal.

“We’re constantly innovating. Tools like Beatwave, which lets users sync visuals with music, plus recent additions like Klippy and Summify.io, expand what creators can achieve on our platform. Each new feature is developed with a single goal in mind: helping people make videos that stand out in today’s fast-paced digital landscape.”

Viddyoze’s clients are diverse and range from starts-ups to well-established brands who are looking for a solution that is quick, high-quality and easy to use. “We see a lot of creators, marketers, and social media managers who are creative, driven, and eager to stand out in a crowded market.” They find many of their clients are from fast-moving sectors where growth and strong visual content are key.

Their ambitions remain tied to their original purpose - to make pro-level video creation accessible to everyone, without the need for specialised skills or large budgets. “We want brands, creators, and businesses of all kinds to be able to make impactful and memorable videos that tell their stories.”

“And we’re just getting started.”

The company has made some exciting acquisitions, most recently the AI firm Summify, intended to create comprehensive platforms for their clients to level up content and take advantage of AI.

The team describe Preston as the perfect home-base for Viddyoze - “close to our roots, but with room to expand.” While they have broadened their horizons onto a global scale through remote working, Preston remains an important part of their identity.



Q&A ISSY HAYES

FOUNDER/DATA ANALYTICS
LEAD, ONMETRIX,
WWW.ONMETRIX.COM



“ Success is when we can make a client’s business achieve growth and gain insight they didn’t have before.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND / CAREER TO DATE WHAT ARE THE HEADLINES OF YOUR CAREER TO DATE?

I began my career at EY, working on a fast-track programme to the Chartered Accountant qualification, while working with a variety of businesses in the North West.

I then spent over 5 years at AO.com, leading the UK and Europe pricing strategy and commercial analytics teams. Whilst there I managed an IT development team which equipped me with technical expertise, which I now apply at OnMetrix to help businesses navigate complex data challenges. More recently, I was the Head of Financial Planning & Analytics at Wigan-based ArrowXL. There my role was focused on improving financial reporting and working with teams to drive increased profit.

WHAT MADE YOU MAKE THE JUMP AND START ONMETRIX?

When I left my last role in October 2023, I travelled to Southeast Asia for 3 months, knowing that on my return was the chance to make the move to starting my own business.

This was something I had wanted to do for quite a long time and always had ideas, and I knew this was the time to do it. I didn’t want to look back and wonder “what if?”

Since launching OnMetrix, I have had so much fun talking to business owners and learning about businesses, something I used to love about the external audit world at EY.

I saw a clear opportunity to help mid-sized businesses use data analytics tools like Power BI to gain deeper insights and drive strategic growth backed by a knowledge of Accounting. OnMetrix focuses on Business Intelligence, we help businesses turn their data into actionable insights through data visualisation and data analytics.

Whether that is outsourcing analytics to our team to help you drive better decisions or building Power BI reporting for your business.

WHAT KIND OF CLIENTS DO YOU WORK WITH?

We generally work with mid-sized clients. They may already have a finance or IT team doing some of the analytics for the business leaders but they want to get more from their data and introduce some new tech to the process.

We also work with companies who have existing analytics teams and want specialist support to introduce Power BI into the way they work. We predominantly work with Power BI, a great Microsoft Visualisation and data modelling tool, but also to help clients to get insight from their data and not just access to it.

Having a Chartered Accounting background meant I was able to add value in analytics in a different way as building a P&L is second nature to me.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Success is when we can make a client’s business achieve growth and gain insight they didn’t have before. It genuinely makes us happy to help and hear the impacts we have helped a business achieve.

For me personally, I’ve always been someone who helps other people and thrives off that, so being able to give back and inspire the younger female generation to help them see they can work in tech, STEM subjects and also own their own business one day if they want to.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT IN DATA ANALYTICS?

Don’t get caught up in thinking AI can automate everything in data right now (it can’t!), start with some solid Excel skills. I must have interviewed over 100 budding analysts and graduates over the years, and everyone rates themselves 7/10 on Excel then quickly realises that there’s way more that they didn’t know about!

There’s amazing free and paid (but super cheap) courses online for Excel and I’d start there. Then you can build on that to learn Power BI, Google Analytics and more technical languages such as Python and R where required.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT HOT TOPICS IN THE INDUSTRY?

AI is a hot topic in nearly every industry right now, I think it’s great, but I’d recommend people learn the basics of what AI is and how it generally works. AI is a massive buzzword but it is already all around us, i.e when your music app gives you recommended artists or your TV recommends things you might want to watch, these are built on machine learning algorithms. In data analytics, AI plays a crucial role in automating tasks, predicting trends, and delivering insights that drive faster, more informed decisions. By integrating AI, businesses can improve efficiency and make data-driven decisions in real time.

IF YOU COULD GIVE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO POTENTIAL CLIENTS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Data can be overwhelming and hard to see the wood for the trees when there is so much of it, trying to find trends in millions of rows of data can be difficult. However, making decisions backed by data rather than “I’ve got a feeling this is the outcome” is massively beneficial to growth, profit and reducing risk. It doesn’t need to be complicated, some of the best insights of my career were ‘simple’ visuals ensuring business leaders had base knowledge about aspects of their business.

WHY WORK FROM PRESTON?

Preston is full of amazing, welcoming, and friendly people but also there are so many beautiful areas on our doorstep we forget about. The business community in Preston is thriving, the opportunities in the area are growing each year. Preston’s location is prime for getting to and from places so easily making it really accessible. Most importantly for me, Preston is home.



POWERING UP PRESTON'S INNOVATION POTENTIAL

RACHEL WESTRAY, COMMUNICATIONS LEAD FOR THE WESTINGHOUSE SPRINGFIELDS SITE, CONSIDERS PRESTON'S ROLE AT THE HEART OF A GROWING LANCASHIRE INNOVATION ECONOMY

As a member of the Lancashire Innovation Board (LIB), the strategic private and public sector advisory group helping to deliver Lancashire's five-year innovation growth plan, I get to see how pioneering research, new technologies, and increasing convergence, is rapidly transforming the county's economy.

Established industries like aerospace and advanced manufacturing, specialist subsectors such as electech and cyber, and startups looking to tap into emerging markets like space and satellites, are embracing more disruptive ways of working, pursuing ambitious collaborations, and diversifying their offer.

Westinghouse's work within the nuclear sector is no different, whether that's supplying nuclear fuel to UK power stations, supporting the future of civil nuclear power through our advanced fuels, partnering with regional businesses, or providing the technology solutions of tomorrow with our AP300 small modular reactors.

Something that unifies many elements of this growing Lancashire innovation economy is Preston. The AMRC North West, BAE Systems' Factory of the Future, the University of Central Lancashire's Engineering Innovation Centre, and Westinghouse itself, are based in the Preston city-region. In addition, both the incoming National Cyber Force HQ, and the county's new £12m Innovation Hub, will be sited at Samesbury.

As well as helping to turbocharge high-value sectors such as future flight, cleantech, cyber, AI and robotics, such assets are set to play a crucial role in Lancashire's evolving inward investment offer focused on physical security, digital defence, future manufacturing, and applied industrial technologies.

Further underpinned by Lancashire's capabilities in critical infrastructure, aviation, automotive, chemicals, telecoms and utilities, this positioning aims to maximise the experience and expertise which exists within the county's deep and diverse supply chains.



Much of the technical talent set to facilitate this cyber-physical proposition resides in and around Preston, as do the networks of professional service providers, specialist consultants, and back-office staff, which will be needed to support it.

One challenge Preston – and Lancashire as a whole – faces in pursuit of such an increasingly holistic and integrated innovation-led economy is joining up the dots, which is why programmes like Innovate Lancashire have been established. Overseen by the Lancashire Innovation Board, and chaired by the University of Central Lancashire's Vice Chancellor, Graham Baldwin, Innovate Lancashire is a Lancashire County Council initiative focused on accelerating innovation activity by aligning the county's commercial and academic innovation strengths, research assets, and strategic investments, at a district and pan-regional level.

This combination of Preston's embedded innovation experience and skills base, the presence of globally recognised anchor employers and industry-leading research hubs, and the deployment of an innovation support programme which facilitates both local and countywide growth, gives the city a fantastic opportunity to be at the heart of a booming Lancashire innovation economy.

As a member of the Lancashire Innovation Board, a fellow Prestonian, and working for a business located on Preston and Fylde boundary which itself engages in the development of transformational technologies and world-leading R&D, that's an incredibly exciting prospect.

LIVE WORK CREATE

WWW.SOCIETY.CO.UK

SOCIETY



Society 1 is a coworking space in Preston city centre. It is home to a friendly community of freelancers, consultants, solopreneurs, small businesses and people who work from home and need a second base. Its relaxed and welcoming atmosphere makes it a perfect place to work from and connect with local businesses in an informal and friendly, yet professional environment.

COMMUNITY

People, community and service sit at the heart of Society1. Their small but mighty team works hard to foster an atmosphere where everyone feels welcome and comfortable. Their diverse, loyal community makes Society1 a wonderful coworking destination for Preston.

COWORKING AND MEETING ROOMS

Coworking offers a great opportunity to work from a different location, providing inspiration and focus away from home distractions, as well as meeting spaces for client interactions. External businesses can also access these meeting rooms. The friendly reception team pride themselves on excellent customer service and are on hand to assist with bespoke meeting requirements, to greet guests, arrange lunch and ensure your meeting runs smoothly.

EVENTS

Society1 also boasts an active monthly events schedule open to members and non-members. Their carefully curated events are aimed at supporting people in business and foster connection and community. Their strong ties with local bodies such as Creative Lancashire and Lancashire Digital Hub enable them to bring valuable and interesting talks and seminars to Preston, which anyone can attend.

WORKSPACE

Society1 is equipped with everything you need from a professional work space. Set across three floors it has a variety of workspaces, with seated-to-standing hot desks, breakout spaces, meeting rooms, call spaces and a kitchen with a bean-to-cup coffee machine serving Atkinsons coffee on tap. Two dedicated gigabit fibre lines into the building means a super fast and reliable internet connection. They have a variety of membership options to select from, offering you versatility and choice, no matter the stage of business you're in.

LOCATION

Society1, 9-10 Cross Street, Preston, PR1 3LT



CONNECTING THE CITY

Everyone wants you to be online – to buy their products, access their services, and to communicate with them. In a society where there is an increasing emphasis to be online, having the right devices, the skills to use them, and an internet connection is becoming essential for people to access the services they need.

The evidence is clear that people who are digitally excluded – who don't have access to the right devices and skills – face greater challenges getting jobs, as well as receiving the best offers and value for money products and services.

Simply put, digital exclusion can lead to social isolation and economic deprivation.

This was intensified during the pandemic, with the biggest impact being felt by those in lower income households and deprived communities. The Lloyds Consumer Index 2019 indicated that 10% of people in the north west were offline, and that this figure had improved by only 1% in the previous four years. Among benefit claimants, 16% in the north west were digitally disengaged.

Looking to address the impact on health, wellbeing, and life opportunities for residents, Preston City Council has worked with partners to establish the Preston Digital Cooperative (PDC) through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The PDC is designed to support digital infrastructure across the city, and to proactively tackle digital exclusion by providing devices, free Wi-Fi in hot-spot areas, and free digital skills training.

Councillor Valerie Wise, Cabinet Member for community wealth building at Preston City Council, said:

“As a Council, we want to lead by example, tackle the digital divide and improve digital inclusion. A growing number of our own services are digitally based, and it is important to us that all of our residents have access to them.”

This is why we want to use Council-owned assets to contribute to the infrastructure and connectivity required to meet our ambitions. This is also why we decided to spend the £5.2m of UK Shared Prosperity Funding awarded by Government in 2022 across three of our priority areas: Community and Place; Investment in Local Business; and People and Skills.

Our vision was to use the funding to build pride in place and increase the life chances of Preston residents. Connecting the city and tackling digital exclusion plays an important role in bringing that vision into reality.”

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now that the PDC is being established, the next step is to scope out costs and timescales for an initial dark fibre network (fibre optic cable that is installed underground and can be used by businesses). This network will initially connect Preston Town Hall with community centres that can support digital inclusion work and act as “jumping-off” points for later network extensions.

As a pilot, to demonstrate feasibility and capacity, the network will connect the Town Hall to the Sahara Centre's community and training centre, in Fishwick. Other pilot locations are currently being considered, with a further two to three centres to be connected early in 2025.

The Cooperative Network Infrastructure (CNI) will deploy the new dark fibre network on behalf of the PDC, making the network available for all CNI members (which includes a number of agencies in Lancashire). At the same time, CNI members are being engaged to add wireless services, providing state-of-the-art connectivity for users.

Alongside this, survey work for Preston City Council is being undertaken to see what network assets there are in public sector hands, including across the health, housing and education sectors, which may be usable to extend and sustain the network during 2026 and beyond.

While the practical, and often unseen, work around infrastructure is delivered, there remains an emphasis on upskilling residents, communities, and businesses – a vital priority as the local jobs market is expected to expand with the arrival of new investment and technology businesses in the region.

Combined, this work is designed to connect and equip the city and its residents, taking an essential step towards closing the digital divide.

“ As a Council, we want to lead by example, tackle the digital divide and improve digital inclusion.”



Q&A CRAIG TOWNLEY

CHAIR OF PRESTON PARTNERSHIP'S
INNOVATION STEERING GROUP & MANAGING
DIRECTOR OF CORE NETWORK GROUP

WWW.PRESTONPARTNERSHIP.ORG



WHAT IS PRESTON PARTNERSHIP?

Preston Partnership is a membership organisation that brings businesses and public sector organisations together, with a focus on helping the city reach its potential and shaping its future. To date, we have more than 200 members representing every sector you can think of.

While its core purpose is not to be an events-led organisation, in 2024 we hosted a series of sold-out events on themes ranging from innovation to sustainability.

WHY DOES IT HAVE AN INNOVATION STEERING GROUP? And what does the Innovation Steering Group want to do / achieve?

The partnership plays an important role in collaborating with public sector organisations, such as the University of Central Lancashire, Preston City Council and Lancashire County Council. Its position as a business-led organisation can unlock different opportunities, offer flexibility and a different perspective when approaching often complex and long-term issues.

Innovation is the topic de jour, with increased attention and activity due to the upcoming opening of the National Cyber Force HQ just outside of the city. Our Innovation Steering Group has been set up to harness the groundswell, make sure Preston is being represented in the right conversations, and make the most of opportunities that arise.

WHY DID PP COMMISSION THE PLEXAL REPORT?

In spring 2024, we commissioned Plexal - which describes itself as the innovation company solving society's challenges through collaboration with government, startups and industry - to produce a report on Preston's Innovation Ecosystem.

You can see the report on Preston Partnership's website. It sets a baseline for activity (as it was at the time the report was written), outlines a series of recommendations, and insight into the wider context.

What has happened since the report is what is really interesting. It has brought focus to the city, galvanised partners into action, and progressed the conversation from hypothetical to progress.

Two easy examples of this are Preston City Council's appointment of an Innovation Ambassador, and the busy tech, digital and cyber events schedule taking place in venues across the city.

WHY IS IT SUCH A BIG DEAL THAT THE NATIONAL CYBER FORCE IS OPENING ITS HQ CLOSE TO PRESTON?

First of all, it's good for all of us when any business chooses Preston as its home base - it adds to the local economy, creates new jobs and offers new opportunities for the supply chain.

The National Cyber Force, or NCF, is a large-scale example of this. The region can expect hundreds of jobs to be created, new opportunities to be available for a more local supply chain, and a contribution to the local economy, whether through the NCF directly or their partners and already established supply chain.

It hasn't happened yet, so it's difficult to be too specific, but the reality is that having an important government function based in our area raises our profile and opens new doors. That has to be a good thing.

HOW DO I JOIN PP?

Preston Partnership is easy to join. Visit our website, choose your preferred membership package (standard or strategic) and register your interest.



UK FIRST: INVESTING IN CYBER SECURITY

“The availability of these grants can be a game-changer for schools seeking to boost their cyber resilience.”



Preston-based Moor Park High School and Sixth Form was the first school in the UK, selected from hundreds of applications from across the globe, to be awarded an in-kind grant by IBM, valued at close to £400,000. Through this grant, the school will receive security services, free training for staff and students in AI and cyber security, and have support in improving their cyber security resilience.

George Walker, Teacher of Computer Science and CyberFirst Lead for Moor Park High School and Sixth Form told us,

“Cyber security has been a major focus for us over the past two years, and we are thrilled to welcome this partnership with IBM to help us protect our students and staff from unwanted threats.”

“This will help us to confidently develop innovative digital learning techniques, enhance our educational offer, and reassure our entire school community that we are prepared against cyber threats.”

The recent cyber attacks against schools in Blackpool highlight the reality that education is a highly targeted sector for cyber attacks – often taking advantage of weaker security systems to make access.

Troy Bettencourt, Global Partner and Head of IBM X-Force said,

“Every year, new students are enrolling, bringing in new devices that they connect to the network, and inadvertently establishing new behaviours and patterns that need to be monitored and secured...the attack surface and risk posture that school districts need to manage is constantly changing, yet limited security resources remain an inhibitor – which is why the availability of these grants can be a game-changer for schools seeking to boost their cyber resilience.”

WHY PRESTON?

Preston is a city full of life and warmth, where friendly faces greet you at every turn and I'm proud to call this city home.

Preston is not just a place to work, the vibrant business scene and accessibility makes it a great place for businesses to grow and succeed. **It's a hub of opportunity and innovation that fuels my passion every day.**

NILU PATEL REGUS, THE DOCKLANDS



TRADITIONALLY INNOVATIVE

“ The paper-based system that we were using was no longer fit for purpose, it created unnecessary delays and made it very difficult to get the full range of information we needed our consultants to collect from customers. We needed a solution that could make our processes more efficient, and easy for our consultants to manage.”

Plumbs is known for being a traditional family business, based in old brick mill buildings in Preston. For four generations, Plumbs has provided customers across the UK with quality crafted upholstery.

Having operated for more than 60 years, it should come as no surprise that the story of Plumbs is also a story of innovation and evolution. What began as a market stall selling rigid cotton seat covers and cushions has evolved into a market-leader for reupholstery, curtains, and loose furniture covers.

Proud to still be a family business known for their “in home” services, Plumbs now operates in a predominantly digital space, enabled by tech solutions that have been developed by their in-house developers.

One of these game-changing solutions was the development of a complete sales order processing (SOP) system to streamline processes – dramatically improving lead times and providing Plumbs’ network of consultants with an easy-to-use system to replace physical order books, while collecting enhanced information for the manufacturing process.

Plumb’s Development Manager, Carl Hine said,
“The paper-based system that we were using was no longer fit for purpose; it created unnecessary delays and made it very difficult to get the full range of information we needed our consultants to collect from customers. We needed a solution that could make our processes more efficient, and easy for our consultants to manage.”

The system was first created almost a decade ago, by Plumbs’ small in-house team of developers, led by Carl Hine who has now worked with the company for 31 years! Having discussed options with potential suppliers, Carl quickly realised that the solutions they were being offered didn’t meet their complex needs. Instead, he started looking to Apple’s newly launched app development ecosystem and proposed what was a radical idea at the time – that they build their own system.

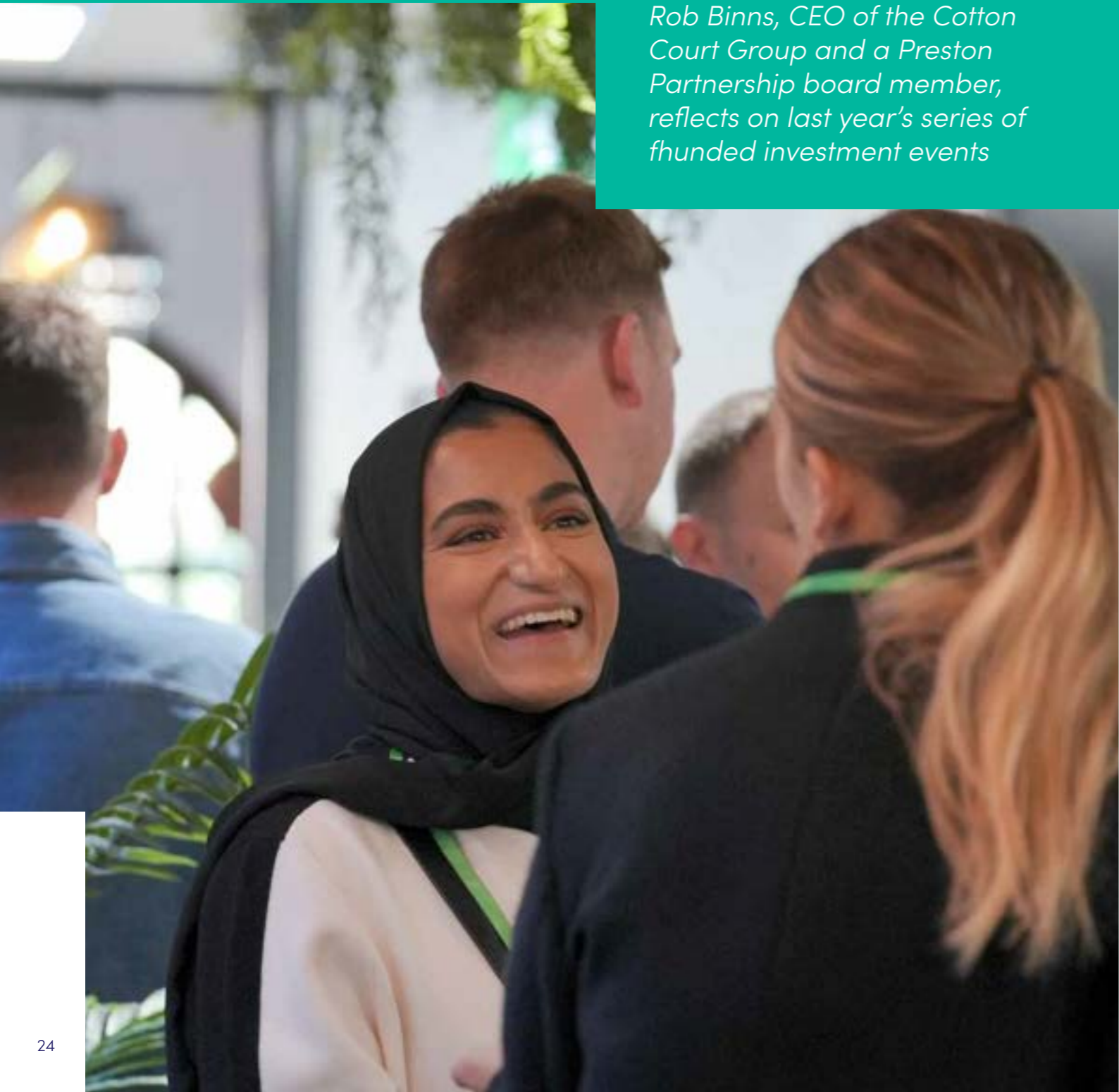
The native SOP has evolved since then – now including customer friendly technology such as artificial reality, enabling the consultants to demonstrate how the reupholstered furniture, curtains, or furniture covers will look in situ – and Carl has even bigger plans for the coming years, integrating new AI and other technologies into the systems that support everyday operations at Plumbs.

Carl continued,
“Moving forward, we are looking to implement innovative solutions as we upgrade hardware and review processes.”

Plumbs

PUTTING SOME FUN INTO FUNDING

Rob Binns, CEO of the Cotton Court Group and a Preston Partnership board member, reflects on last year's series of funded investment events



As the owner of a business which works with entrepreneurs and startups, I am aware of how important understanding and unlocking funding options is when trying to grow a company.

For businesses in the early-stage space, such funding can also be the difference between success and failure.

However, navigating that landscape, knowing who to talk to, and understanding what potential funders are looking for, can be very challenging – and no amount of LinkedIn outreach or speculative pitch deck emails are as powerful as face-to-face time with a real-life investor.

That's why it was great that the Preston Partnership and Preston City Council collaborated with the Lancashire County Council (LCC) funded programme last year.

Led by LCC's investment ecosystem manager Rory Southworth, funded is a dedicated investment initiative which supports the county's early-stage finance and funding community.

At the heart of funded's activities are carefully curated in-person gatherings which put founders and funders in a room together.

The clever use of coloured lanyards tells everyone who's got the cash – and who's looking for it – and the emphasis is firmly on practical advice, making new connections, and relationship building.

Over a series of events hosted at OneCoWork, Society1 and The Artistry House, this refreshingly candid approach to B2B networking saw over 20 VC funds coming to Preston and engaging with more than 100 founders, influencers and intermediaries.

Key local partners such as Rosebud Finance, RedCAT, and Boost: Access to Finance, were also in attendance, as were representatives from Manchester and Liverpool angel networks, the British Business Bank, and mainstream lenders like Barclays and NatWest.

As someone who was actively involved in one of these sessions (interviewing a VC investor from Mercia Asset Management), I can testify to the positive impact they had on the businesses looking to raise, and the funders looking to invest.

Some of the VCs later admitted they'd never visited Preston before, and had been sceptical about both the calibre of the investment opportunities – and the quality of the business support provision – which existed in the city.

I'm delighted to say that in addition to facilitating some great conversations and, more importantly, kickstarting some potential VC deal flow, these events went a long way to change those perceptions. I'm therefore greatly looking forward to us building on the momentum these events generated, and seeing what more we can do to increase Preston's reputation as a growing hub of early-stage investment activity.



COTTON COURT BUSINESS CENTRE: AFFORDABLE PROFESSIONALISM FOR EVERY BUSINESS

Located in the heart of Preston, Cotton Court Business Centre is where businesses come to grow, collaborate, and thrive. Offering a tailored, personal approach, we ensure that no two businesses are treated alike. Whether you're looking for flexible office space, large meeting rooms, or virtual office services, we create packages that are unique to your business needs.

MEETING AND CONFERENCE SPACES WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH

Our large meeting and conference rooms are designed to suit any type of event, from corporate board meetings to workshops and training sessions. Each room is equipped with high-speed internet, advanced AV equipment, and video conferencing capabilities, ensuring that your business has everything it needs for a seamless and successful event.

At Cotton Court, we understand that professionalism shouldn't come at a high cost. That's why our spaces offer affordable professionalism—you'll benefit from a premium experience without the premium price tag. Located in Preston City Centre, our venue provides convenient access, including free onsite parking and public transport options nearby.

FLEXIBLE AND TAILORED WORKSPACE SOLUTIONS

We believe in creating flexible workspaces that adapt to the diverse needs of businesses. Whether you're seeking a dedicated desk, a day desk, or a long-term office rental, we provide options that fit your exact requirements. Our focus is on offering a tailored approach, ensuring that each business gets the support and services it needs to flourish.

At Cotton Court, we understand that no two businesses are alike. We pride ourselves on delivering bespoke packages, designed specifically for your business goals. Whether you're a freelancer, startup, or established company, we'll work with you to create a space and service package that's as unique as your business.

VIRTUAL OFFICE SERVICES: ENHANCING YOUR PROFESSIONAL PRESENCE

For businesses looking to maintain a professional image without the need for a physical office, our Virtual Office Services offer an ideal solution. Starting at just £25+VAT per month, you can establish a prestigious business address in central Preston, along with professional call answering services and mail handling.

These services are perfect for small businesses and entrepreneurs who want to enhance their credibility while staying flexible. By choosing Cotton Court, you'll be able to focus on growing your business, knowing that we're taking care of the day-to-day administrative tasks.

NETWORKING AND BUSINESS GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Small businesses at Cotton Court benefit not just from our facilities, but from being part of a dynamic business community. Our co-working spaces foster opportunities for networking, enabling you to connect with like-minded entrepreneurs and access valuable advice from other business owners. We also provide introductions to key players in the local business network, helping you expand your contacts and accelerate your growth.

As part of our community, you'll be invited to Cotton Court-hosted events and workshops, where you can meet other professionals, learn from industry experts, and develop new skills.

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

At Cotton Court, we're more than just a workspace provider—we're your business partner. With a focus on helping you succeed, we offer bespoke business services, including administrative support, event planning, and social media management, all tailored to help you thrive in today's competitive market.

Whether you need a professional environment to host clients, or a flexible workspace to call your own, Cotton Court Business Centre provides the resources and support you need to Do Business – Better.

LOCATIONS:

Cotton Court, Church Street, Preston, PR1 3BY

Cotton Court Meeting Rooms, Adelphi Street, Preston, PR1 7BE

Cotton Court Leyland, 317 Golden Hill Lane, Leyland, PR25 2Y



Join our community of forward-thinking businesses and take advantage of everything Cotton Court has to offer. From affordable meeting spaces to personalised virtual office services, we're here to support your journey to success.

Q&A JAMES EASTHAM

FOUNDER & DIRECTOR OF SCION COMPLIANCE LTD.



WHAT ARE THE HEADLINES OF YOUR CAREER TO DATE?

One of my earliest roles after graduating (Accountancy & Finance at the University of Lincoln) was at Lancashire-based Personnel Checks, where I worked as a background screening and safeguarding sales specialist. In this role, I worked on projects with local authorities and private businesses to provide best-in-class screening solutions.

In Spring 2019, I moved to Cardiff to join Monzo's team of customer service agents. Within 3 months I was given the opportunity to join the financial crime team working on inter-bank communications (fraud reports and chasing victim money) and found myself working in Transaction monitoring, suspicious activity reporting and a whole lot more. Over the next year, I learned everything about the financial crime function at Monzo and joined their night team as the overnight financial crime expert (9pm-6am) - this allowed me to relocate to Lancashire and work from home.

I left Monzo to join the team at eToro, working hybrid between Lancashire and their offices in Canary Wharf. At eToro I was involved in risk assessments, policy revisions and essentially the wider requirements of building and maintaining a financial crime function.

After less than a year at eToro, I joined Algbra, an early-stage start up, and worked closely with Jamie Martin, who I'd worked with at eToro to build a financial crime and compliance function. During my time at Algbra, I took on a senior manager position within the team and worked on everything from reporting, to creating and maintaining the monitoring and systems.

While at Algbra the customer base increased by 3x.

Proud Alumnus of Hutton Grammar School, James knew that Preston was where he wanted to start his business.

WHAT MADE YOU MAKE THE JUMP AND START SCION COMPLIANCE?

I have always wanted to start my own consultancy firm in the FinTech space, with a desire to work with other startups and engage with the wider community with my experience in scaling up start-ups.

When I was ready for pastures new, I found a contract opportunity which would give me the jump start I needed. I believed I had the experience and expertise I needed, so I won the contract, started the company and began to build my client list!

WHAT KIND OF CLIENTS DO YOU WORK WITH?

At the moment, I work with clients ranging from a world-leading crypto company to a start-up building an independent review site. My work includes partnerships and growth, licensing applications, compliance strategies and other risk support. I've also recently joined the team at the University of Central Lancashire as a visiting fellow to provide support to their financial investigations, criminology and cyber courses.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Success is growing a consultancy that works with anyone connected to the startup space. I'm particularly keen to support businesses raising funds and equity funders who are maybe looking to deploy an embedded support consultant who has experience in the scale up stage and is able to roll his sleeves up and help more businesses in those high growth stages.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT IN FINTECH?

Find the area within the industry or the business that you are truly passionate about.

I love the work I do around financial crime prevention and compliance, and that is the foundation of my business. My work in the wider fintech world stems from my work and passion in this particular area. There are loads of aspects, from working with vulnerable customers to lending and savings (and loads more) find where your passion is and put everything into that. The opportunities are there for people who are driven and believe in what they are doing.

IF YOU COULD GIVE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO POTENTIAL CLIENTS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Try and do it right first time (try doesn't mean you'll succeed) - work with a strategy and structure, basing your approach on a combination of commercials and risk assessments. This really helps. Most startups ignore or under resource compliance in the early stages, and bad actors will exploit this and they will do so en masse. When a certain company I worked with launched their prepaid card I had to report more than 400 accounts in the first month (if there are gaps they find them!)

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO BASE YOUR BUSINESS IN PRESTON?

"As an Old Huttonian (Alumnus of Hutton Grammar School) I have always had a love for Preston.

The thing that pushed me was firstly OneCoWork - Flexible Workspaces, which is a fantastic co-working space on Winckley Square, where I have my lovely private office.

This was supported by the transport links that mean I can be in London in just over 2 hours by train, Manchester in less than 40 minutes and the airport within the hour. Preston is so well-connected, it is a perfect hub for any business.

Beyond this, the infrastructure and business ecosystem in Preston is buoyant. There are funds prepared to deploy capital, innovative businesses and a fantastic university.

Why wouldn't you want a business in Preston?"

WHY PRESTON?

For us we recognised the potential that there is in Preston. When we opened our business 7 years ago, we saw that there was a want and need for a place like Society1. Since we have been here we have seen that energy grow. There are so many things happening in Preston that you can feel the buzz around the city.

The biggest thing that I find in Preston is how friendly everyone is. We are a city but we haven't lost the community feel of a town. So many people are connected and businesses support each other.

I think the amount of local business owners and independents there are here really help that feel. For us it's a case of why not Preston; it's a great place and we are happy to be part of the story of growth for the city.

CATARINA KING, SOCIETY 1



INDUSTRY-LED EDUCATION



...through the CyberFirst programme, students are being exposed to practical scenarios and applications, while gaining theoretical knowledge and expertise.

From robots to drones and plenty in between, Cardinal Newman College has been leading the way with cyber and digital innovation for the past few years. Last year, the College proudly accepted the first Gold Level CyberFirst Award in Lancashire, which has kickstarted even more activity and opportunities for students to learn more about the industry.

Taking this a step further, the College now also offers their students the Cyber Extended Project Qualification, known as the CyberEPQ - recognising the lack of formal cyber education available to students before university. This unique qualification has been developed in collaboration between education and cyber security partners and is aligned with the Chartered Institute of Information Security (CIIISec).

Nick Burnham, Principal at Cardinal Newman College in Preston told us, "The Cyber EPQ has been a significant addition to our curriculum, it aligns with local skills priorities and provides our students with an exceptional opportunity to gain insight into the world of Cyber while earning a valuable qualification."

What makes the CyberEPQ stand out is its significant level of industry engagement - with industry experts approving topics and reviewing final projects as part of the grading process. This industry-led approach ensures that the students are being taught relevant and valuable information for an evolving specialism. Last year's final projects focused on topics ranging from social engineering to black hat hackers, privacy in online gaming to the impact of quantum computers on cryptography.

Through the College's approach of combining this with the events and activities available through the CyberFirst programme, students are being exposed to practical scenarios and applications, while gaining theoretical knowledge and expertise.

Imaan Bhatti, who has completed the qualification said,

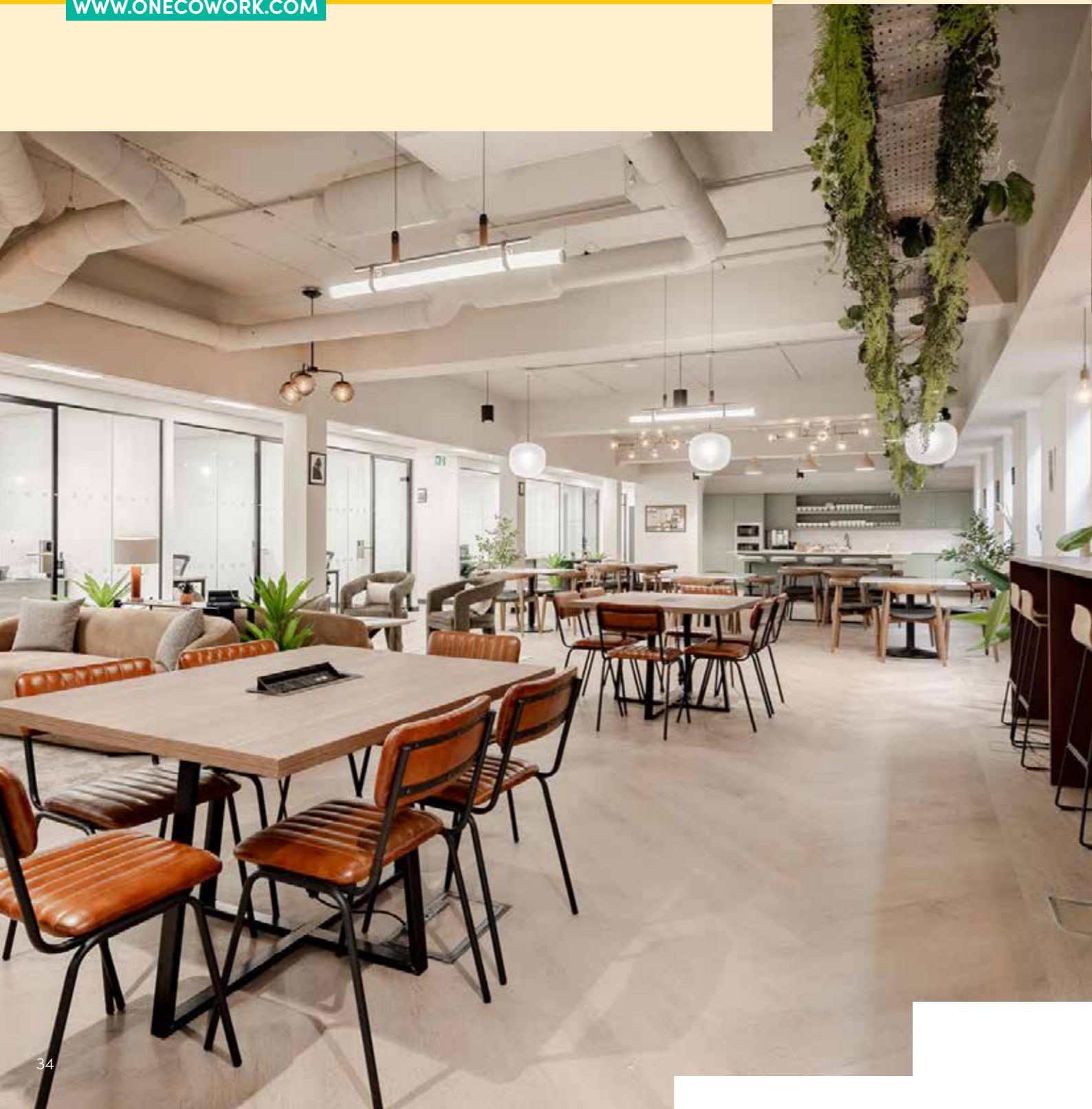
"As a young aspiring cyber security professional who wants to make a difference in the world, I decided to embark on the cyber EPQ which was offered by Cardinal Newman college. This helped me to broaden my knowledge on cyber security and give me a greater depth and insight on the vast field."

"During my time in college, I was given exciting opportunities to attend many cyber related events such as NW cyber corridor and the CyberFirst day. Being part of a Cyber Gold college has helped me apply for Cyber Security Degree Apprenticeships."

The first Cardinal Newman cohort to complete the qualification in 2023 submitted projects that achieved higher results than the national average for an EPQ and one student achieved the highest mark in the country.

PREMIUM WORKSPACES

WWW.ONECOWORK.COM



one co work.

OneCoWork, a leading provider of premium workspaces from Spain, has made a stylish debut in the UK this year. Located at the prestigious address of Winckley Square 33-34, just a 3-minute walk from Preston Train Station with direct connections to Manchester Airport, Preston's newest flexible workspace offers over 500 workstations, including flexible desks, dedicated desks, and fully equipped private offices tailored for individuals, teams, and companies. Complementing these are 4,000 sq ft of state-of-the-art communal spaces, meeting rooms, conference facilities, and an on-site gym.

More than just an office space, OneCoWork introduces a sense of community and innovation to Lancashire. Its flexible arrangements and amenities—such as ultra high-speed WiFi, free phone booths, and a warm front desk service—are designed to provide a seamless, productive experience for members, companies, and their visitors alike. Small comforts like unlimited coffee, tea, and water, plus the convenience of on-site parking, promise to make the workday easier. With professional facilities and a community-oriented ethos, OneCoWork Winckley Square is shaping up to be an inspiring workspace where established businesses and emerging entrepreneurs can thrive.





DON'T MISS A THING

If you want to know more about what's going on in Preston around innovation, tech, digital, and cyber you need to follow [Preston Innovates on LinkedIn](#).

invest **PRESTON**

This magazine was produced by Invest Preston. If you have an interesting story to tell about innovation, tech, digital or cyber in Preston please let us know: innovate@preston.gov.uk