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Why Small Business Matters Podcast talks to guests from cross-university Arrow innovation support programme

Established by Newcastle Business School's [Help to Grow Management](#) delivery team at Northumbria University, the 'Why Small Business Matters podcast', provides a platform for successful small business leaders to tell their stories, offer advice and discuss what it means to be a thriving SME in today's business landscape.

In [the latest edition of the podcast](#) released on Tuesday 7 May [Why Small Business Matters](#) focused on the multi-university [Arrow](#) innovation support

programme.

Arrow is an innovation support programme allowing North East businesses to access university expertise and facilities. Originally established by Newcastle University, Arrow has now broadened out allowing regional businesses to access support from Durham University, Newcastle University, Northumbria University and the University of Sunderland, working together in partnership.

Arrow is fully-funded for eligible businesses based in County Durham, Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland, thanks to funding from [Durham County Council](#) and [North of Tyne Combined Authority](#) through the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Guests on the podcast included two small business owners, Dik Barton from [Armatrex](#), and Janine Craig from [Shop by Shape](#) who discussed their Arrow projects, and the positive impact they've had.

Dik's experience salvaging artefacts from the Titanic led him to develop a similar technology to create expanding foam splints and stretchers which shape to support an injury, for use in remote locations. Armatrex which is based in Ponteland, Newcastle, [worked with Arrow](#) in 2019 to prototype and test their products, which are now being used around the world.

Seaham based Shop by Shape wanted to develop technology to allow women personalised styling for their individual shape when they shop online. To help develop Janine's initial idea, Arrow [devised a project working](#) with data experts from National Innovation Centre for Data based at Newcastle University. Through the use of AI, they were able to continually improve the body shape data used within the app. Fashion retailers can use Shop by Shape to ensure customers pick clothing that fits and suits them better - minimising returns and waste, reducing costs, and improving customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Janine said: "As part of the initial discussion with Arrow, we had an in depth call about my business and aspirations. It was evident during the time that they wanted me to succeed. They wanted me to get this product to market and gave me all of their expertise that I could take to help make that journey."



Arrow team members from Northumbria, Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham Universities as well as Dik Barton from Armatrex, and Janine Craig from Shop by Shape.

Arrow team members from across the four leading universities also talked about the partnership and what it's like working in collaboration to deliver the programme.

Chris Angus, Programme Manager for Arrow and Head of Business Support at Newcastle University explained how Arrow came about, and how it's helping to build a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive economy in the North East. He said: "One of the challenges in the North East region is that Research and Development and innovation is at a modest level compared to the rest of the UK. We recognise that it's often difficult for businesses to find out how to engage with universities, and for academic colleagues to devote a significant length of time to engage with businesses. What we're trying to do through Arrow is leverage the capacity that we have at the university and actually make it clear to businesses that universities are here to help you bring your new products and new services to market."

Jenny Taylor, Executive Director of Research and Innovation Services at Northumbria University discussed the advantages for regional businesses as well as the universities through collaborative working. She explained: "From a regional perspective it is an efficient, sensible way to operate and opens up opportunities for all four partner universities to enter new business areas, and allows those interesting conversations to flow more easily. As well as supporting businesses to grow, it's also enabling our academic workforce to

engage with real business problems and apply their research knowledge in new ways. It's a win-win for both sides and working together on Arrow really unleashes a lot of potential.”

Arrow Business Development Manager at Sunderland University, Mike Jurowski expanded on how unique the programme is, saying: “Arrow differs from traditional business support because it’s focused specifically on innovation. Technology is developing at such a rapid pace, and the academics working within our universities are very much on the leading edge. So, if a company has an innovation challenge that would benefit from the latest technology and the latest thinking - that’s where Arrow can help.”

Andrea Zachariou, Senior Innovation Associate at Durham University explained the benefits felt by academics to be able to work on real life projects and see the impact their work has on small businesses. She said: “Arrow enables companies, especially small companies, to engage with academia, that may not have had the ability to before or didn’t know how to tap into it. I like to see results and I like to see what I’m doing is helping. Working with small companies on innovative projects can help them out in the short term. It’s rewarding to work with someone that needs and appreciates that help. It also pushes you to work with other industries and on different projects that might be a very novel idea or just great. It’s very rewarding to see projects that result in both results and revenue.”

Arrow is currently supporting businesses to tap into resources in advanced manufacturing and AR/VR technologies at Sunderland University; energy, sustainability and chemistry at Durham University; sustainable chemistry and advanced materials at Northumbria University; and machine learning and AI, engineering and biosciences at Newcastle University.

Commenting on this episode of the Why Small Business Matters podcast, the host Sarah Stephenson, said: “In our podcast we aim to celebrate the exciting steps that entrepreneurs and small businesses are taking in the North East. In this instance we were able to meet two business owners who had benefitted from the Arrow programme and shout about the collaboration between all four local universities. Projects and programmes such as Arrow are a great way for business to engage with universities.”

Arrow is open for enquiries for its fully-funded targeted innovation projects for businesses based in the North East. [Find out more about Arrow](#), and

discover how your business can access innovation support.

The Why Small Business Matters Podcast focusing on Arrow is [available to listen](#) to below, and on other podcast platforms.

[View embedded content here](#)

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Footnotes

Embed code to add the podcast to a webpage:

<iframe src="<https://omny.fm/shows/newcastle-business-school/live-special-the-arrow-innovation-support-project/embed>" allow="autoplay; clipboard-write" width="100%" height="180" frameborder="0" title="Live Special: The Arrow Innovation Support Project"></iframe>

Arrow funding

The [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) is a central pillar of the UK government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.

This project was part-funded through the North of Tyne Combined Authority and is now administered by the new North East Combined Authority.

Help to Grow Management

Help to Grow Management is a government-funded, 12-week management course, providing critical skills and networks to help small business leaders innovate and thrive in a post-Covid era.

Delivered by leading small business and enterprise experts at Northumbria University, with the support of leading figures from industry and experienced entrepreneurs, the programme supports owners and senior managers of small and medium sized businesses to boost their business performance, resilience and long-term growth. The programme, designed to be completed alongside full-time work, is 90% funded and requires a one-time payment of £750.

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Northumbria is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Two thirds of Northumbria's undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate,

demonstrating Northumbria's significant contribution to social mobility and levelling up in the North East of England.

Find out more about us at www.northumbria.ac.uk

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