



Ann Paton of Hexhamshire Organics with Jonathan Dineen, Niamh Whelan, Matthew Lynn and Andrew Fleming (Business students and 'Contigo Consultancy Group') and Bob Paton, Hexhamshire Organics.

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BUSINESS STUDENTS HELP SMALL HOLDER SOW THE SEEDS OF SUCCESS

A business might be all about growing things, but that doesn't mean a little help and advice on growing the business itself isn't welcome - especially when it's provided by future stars of the corporate world.

Hexhamshire Organics, a family-run fruit and vegetable producer, recently teamed up with students at Newcastle Business School to explore their options as they looked to diversify their product portfolio.

Having gone to great lengths to earn and ensure the organic legitimacy of their farm and produce, husband and wife team Bob and Ann Paton were determined to make this status a priority in any future direction the business might take.

“We spent a number of years setting up Hexhamshire Organics and, although we had been successful before, once I retired after 38 years in the technology industry and joined the business full-time, we really had to make this work for us as our main source of income” says Bob.

“The Business Clinic service was a great opportunity to get consultancy input from a local university with a great reputation which could help us with our plans for growth.”

The Business Clinic, which is part of the Business School at Northumbria University, is an education scheme whereby a group of business students form a ‘consultancy firm’ to provide free advice for clients.

The service is available to all types of businesses from SMEs and multinationals to charities and third sector organisations. Students are asked to analyse the problem they are presented, consider possible solutions and provide a detailed report and full presentation of their recommendations to their client.

Since the Business Clinic started four years ago, the total value of the students’ pro bono consultancy advice and reports has been estimated by 145 client organisations to exceed £700,000.

Undergraduate team Matthew Lynn, Niamh Whelan, Jonathan Dineen and Andrew Fleming, acting as ‘Contigo Consultancy Group’ took up the challenge of exploring potential areas of growth which would fit with Hexhamshire Organics’ very specific company values. Using a range of research methods they examined possible options for the business, impressing Bob and Ann with their dedication and hard work.

Bob says: “Working with the students was great, they were very nice, very enthusiastic, and wanted to learn all about us and what we wanted to achieve. They visited us several times on our small holding outside Hexham and attended the markets, talking to our clients and potential clients.

“I was really surprised by the standard of work completed and particularly by the final document we received. It was very thorough with excellent, well-researched recommendations... I honestly didn't expect to receive something so professional.”

Bob has already begun to put the students' advice into practice and is very positive about the whole experience.

“One of the main issues they identified was our lack of presence on Facebook. We have the website and other social media channels but research showed that Facebook pages were important to our target market, and we're working on ours now. The students are kindly helping us to get these off the ground.

“I would 100% encourage other businesses to work with the Business Clinic. The students' insight has been a great help to us and will continue to be a great help going forward.”

Nigel Coates, Director of the Business Clinic, says this has proved a particularly rewarding interaction for the team.

“It's been a pleasure for our students to work with such a passionate client and to be championing organic farming. The whole experience has been fantastic and we're all wishing Bob and Ann every success in the future.

“Since 2013 our Business Clinic students have assisted a range of organisations with consultancy advice. Our client organisations include local and national, from the smallest to the largest, from the newest to some of the longest established companies in the UK. We're hoping to help many more in the years to come and would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in working with us.”

Bob and Ann Paton launched Hexhamshire Organics in 2013 soon after purchasing their dream home. They now farm six acres of land and in addition to cultivating a variety of fruit and vegetables they raise rare breed Tamworth pigs. The couple are monthly regulars at Morpeth and Jesmond food markets and also sell boxes of organic vegetables which can be ordered through their website at www.hexhamshireorganics.co.uk.

The Business Clinic is part of Northumbria University's award-winning Business School; recognised as Business School of the Year in 2015 and more recently, the first North East Business School to win the Small Business Charter for services to SMEs.

The University recently invested over £800,000 to move the Business Clinic into its own dedicated premises on New Bridge Street. The building includes client briefing rooms, boardroom and a reception area with conferencing and event space.

The Business Clinic's consultancy services are available to all types of businesses. To find out more or to work with the Clinic get in touch by email: nb.consultancy-projects@northumbria.ac.uk.

Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University is globally recognised for delivering some of the best business management education in the UK. It holds the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB international) double accreditation in business and accounting, making Newcastle Business School part of an elite group of less than 1% of business schools worldwide.

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

If you have a media enquiry please contact our Media and Communications team at media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk or call [0191 227 4571](tel:01912274571).

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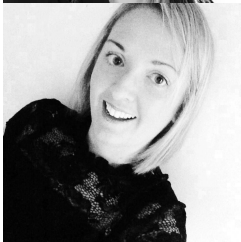


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