



L-r Vincent Onyeabor and Mark Renney

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Businesses encouraged to tap into Northumbria's talent pool of overseas graduates

Recruiting international graduates is not always easy for small businesses - but they can plug crucial skills' gaps and support the regional economy, according to Northumbria alumni and entrepreneur Mark Renney.

As founder and Managing Director of tech and software company [Wubbleyou](#), Mark has been building his business since 2009. The Newcastle-based company specialises in building scalable software for clients, helping

businesses develop more quickly through leveraging technology. Accelerated growth in the past five years has created recruitment opportunities for Wubbleyou, and recently Mark has hired two international graduates from Northumbria to add to the company's skills base. Nigerian Vincent Onyeabor has joined as an Associate IT Analyst, and Divya Behera from India is an Associate Project Manager. Both Vincent and Divya are being sponsored by Wubbleyou through the Skilled Worker Visa programme.

On the standard Graduate Visa programme, international graduates can currently work in the UK for up to two years after graduation. Businesses can extend this period of employment up to five years by sponsoring foreign nationals through the Skilled Worker Visa programme, once they have been granted a licence by the Home Office. Mark says obtaining the licence can be challenging and costly, but he insists the payback for Wubbleyou has been significant and he believes many other small businesses and SME's in the North East could benefit in the same way by opening new recruitment potential.

Mark explained: "Demand for top IT talent can be extremely high, especially given the growing ambitions and growing number of innovative and scaling tech businesses in the area. As a small but growing business we wanted to have the ability to invest in this top talent and be able offer employment to skilled international graduates beyond the standard short-term Graduate Work Visa. So we took the plunge and went through the process required to sponsor foreign nationals on the longer term Skilled Worker Visa Sponsorship."

Wubbleyou is one of only an estimated 300 small businesses in the region to have completed this process, a small number Mark believes is due largely to the cost and administrative time it puts on employers. He added: "There are barriers and blockers, and I can understand why small businesses are reluctant. It can be burdensome and frankly quite scary, with very little help available without paying for third party assistance. Information on the Government website can also seem opaque. However, once you have gone through the process it becomes a lot less daunting, and I would say to other small businesses that the benefits can be considerable. For us, it was a win-win to bring in great people who want to live and work in the UK. International graduates are smart and motivated, they offer diversity and new ways of thinking and in my view, they have already demonstrated a high level of initiative and commitment by travelling halfway around the world to study,

“We have also worked with the Graduates Futures team at Northumbria for a number of years, and they have been extremely supportive again in helping us find the right people in Vincent and Divya.”

Vincent Onyeabor graduated from Northumbria this year with an MSc in Information Science (Data Analytics). As well as being a highly qualified graduate, he also has considerable work experience in sales and client management in his home country of Nigeria. Vincent began working for Wubbleyou in 2022 as business analyst while still studying. He said: “I didn’t want to wait until I graduated to start looking for work so I applied through Northumbria’s Graduate Futures team who really helped me with my CV and in finding the right employment opportunities. Using the Graduate Futures team really does give you access to companies who are looking to recruit people with your skill sets.

“Working for Wubbleyou has been a profound learning experience for me. They are a great team and Mark has so much knowledge which I continue to benefit from through his coaching. At the same time, completing my master’s while simultaneously working allowed me to bring fresh insights to the team, which not only deepened my expertise but also bolstered my capacity to contribute to projects. Looking ahead, I’m excited about the many opportunities that the future holds, as Wubbleyou continues its growth trajectory - and in providing innovative solutions to our current and future clients.”

Divya Behera, from Hyderabad in India, Graduated in 2022 with a Masters degree in Business Management and Advanced Practice. She said: “Through the Graduate Futures team at Northumbria I started applying for roles and with their help began working with Wubbleyou as an Associate project Manager in January this year. As part of the team my role is strengthen project management, helping resolve any issues in areas such as time tracking and budgets and maintaining good client relationships. It is a challenging role but a fantastic experience and the team at Wubbleyou are fantastic to work with.”

Wubbleyou currently has 13 people, annual turnover of around £500,000 and projected growth of up to 20% per year.

Graham Baty, Head of Enterprise Development at Northumbria, said: “We provide a range of enterprise support at Northumbria, including business

advice, mentoring, incubator hub facilities and other services and have worked with Wubbleyou since its inception as a start-up in 2009, when Mark was still a student here. So it is incredibly rewarding to see the company's continuing success, and the job opportunities being created for our high-quality graduates like Vincent and Divya. Northumbria is known for its entrepreneurial students and graduates generating wealth and employment for the region, and Wubbleyou is a perfect example of this."

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