

# Partnership helps leaders promote the common good

Oct 24 2007 by Iain Laing, [The Journal](#) Evening Gazette

*NORTH-East-born Common Purpose has restructured in the region. Iain Laing takes a look at an organisation which brings business leaders and their communities together, to the benefit of both.*

BEGINNING in 1989 with a programme in Durham, leadership organisation Common Purpose now provides programmes for leaders in the UK, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, South Africa and Hungary.

The not-for-profit organisation aims to improve the way society works by expanding the vision, decision-making ability and networks of all kinds of leaders.

To do this, it runs a variety of educational programmes to help people in leadership positions be more effective and, at the same time, to go out into their communities and see problems and issues at first hand. This involves visiting prisons, housing developments, businesses, hospitals and factories and meeting the people responsible for tackling issues in those environments.

Programme director Fiona O'Connor explains: "Participants get to meet and spend time with key figures in the region, people such as chief executives of major companies, senior politicians and people running voluntary sector projects to discuss their experiences of leading in the North-East.

"Leaders meet people they normally never would, and get a chance to step outside their usual comfort zone and make connections and forge networks with other leaders. It develops them as managers and, at the same time, it benefits society."

Here in the North-East, where some 4,000 people from businesses and other organisations have been on these programmes, Common Purpose has consolidated, merging its Tyneside and Wearside offices, now known as Common Purpose Tyne and Wear, and offering new management development programmes.

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## **The Lawyer**

*Kevin Maloney, 33, Associate in the Property Finance team, with*

*commercial law firm Muckle LLP.*

"I completed the Common Purpose programme in 10 days, which were spread over six months ending in February this year. I had been thinking about it for some time and was very keen when the firm selected me to go on it for my own personal development. Muckle LLP has sent somebody on the programme every year for the past six years, so colleagues gave me an idea of what to expect. It was still a real eye-opener though – as I'm sure it was for most of the 30 or so other people on my programme.

"We began with a couple of days away at Kielder to get to know each other and to discuss what we would be covering in the programme. We looked at what the issues are in the region and the organisations with power to influence them. A key theme of the programme was diversity, and we were a diverse group of people, from the private, public and voluntary sectors.

"This was useful for me because, as a finance lawyer, my client work doesn't necessarily bring me into regular contact with people like this – all on a similar level to me – and so the sharing of ideas and skills was really useful.

"There was great diversity within the programme. On one day we looked at leadership and were addressed by Sir Ian Wrigglesworth and Barbara Gubbins of the Children's Foundation, who told us how they empowered people within their organisations.

"On another occasion, when we looked at the justice system, we visited a prison and spoke to the governor and to some of the prisoners. That affected a lot of people on the programme quite deeply and several found it quite uncomfortable to look at the issues and challenges facing what were very young people.

"I feel Common Purpose has helped me a lot in my personal development. I made a lot of useful contacts, I have a much deeper knowledge of the region and it took me out of my comfort zone and broadened my personal horizon. All of that can clearly be of long-term benefit to Muckle LLP. As a firm we are firmly embedded in the region and proud to be closely involved with the community, so participation in Common Purpose is very much part of our philosophy.

"Now, for me the challenge is to find ways I can continue to put something back into the region. I have given a lot of thought to that, which is why I'm going to be helping out on a Common Purpose

programme for school children.”

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### **The Public Relations Manager**

*Huw Lewis, 36, is Head of Corporate Communications for Nexus*

"It's easy to see Common Purpose as a networking club, because it works pretty effectively as one.

I've found myself on the phone to people I shared the course with half a dozen times already, and I'm sure these contacts will continue to work for me and my business.

But looking back at the six months of Common Purpose, I took more from it than that. The course encourages vocal participation, but the key benefit for me was learning to listen.

"I arrived for my first day a cynic – a former associate editor at The Journal who presumed to know most things about the North-East, with a journalist's jaundiced eye for damp management training exercises at Kielder.

"But in a room full of successful managers from different backgrounds uniting in focus, you quickly realise there's a lot you can learn from observing how your peers approach their task.

"After all, the challenge days involve real problems for real organisations in the region.

"But the format includes time for delegates to pose each other problems from their own workplace, alongside the 'big picture' stuff you're getting from the 12 days exploring our economic and social fabric.

"This teamworking across boundaries and sectors was the most rewarding element.

Having the opportunity to go inside a prison was thought-provoking, as was quizzing the boss of a large multi-national's local manufacturing base.

"But it was the debates within our group that stick in the mind – staged in otherwise drab corporate seminar rooms, the back of cars and buses whizzing between visits, or over a drink at the day's end.

"That meant we took something even from the odd challenge day where the organised programme proved less successful. It was up to us to shape and make the course work, and that's the clever thing about Common Purpose.

"If I felt there was one shortcoming, it would be the relatively small

number of delegates from the private sector.

"While some companies – Muckle LLP among them – have seized on the potential for their people, they remain in a minority compared to the public sector.

"Common Purpose itself sponsors voluntary sector delegates, so perhaps there's a role for business support agencies to do the same to increase participation from smaller private firms.

"It's easy to see why Nexus, with its strategic role in planning public transport, should want its managers to take part in Common Purpose. Private enterprise should take the chance to see that, for the right people, this is money and time well spent."

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### **What are the benefits of being in Common Purpose?**

THE organisation says that its graduates say they:

- :: Work more effectively with people from diverse backgrounds or disciplines and with different ways of thinking
- :: Can handle complex, multi-disciplinary tasks more successfully
- :: Develop their management skills and ability to lead beyond authority
- :: Make better decisions because they are more aware of the context in which the decisions are made and of their wider impact throughout the cities or towns in which they work
- :: Understand how to make something happen in their areas, with a better grasp of levers of power.
- :: Read how Common Purpose has inspired leaders and the benefits they've gained.

The Common Purpose effect:

75% said the Common Purpose network is important or very important to their success

95% said Common Purpose was definitely a good investment of time

90% said they had already recommended Common Purpose to a friend.

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