

MARCH / APRIL 2024

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The state of Black businesses in the North East of England

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editorial

Greetings ! I trust you are all doing well in your respective circles and that you remain committed to making an impact within our Black community.

In this edition, we focus on highlighting the state of Black businesses in the North East of England. We have been made aware that the majority of our people are facing challenges in accessing the support that is required for their businesses to flourish. This needs addressing and we are calling on Black-owned businesses in the region to reach out to us, so we can take on this fight together.

As a Black community our umbilical cord is firmly attached to the continent of Africa. In this edition we also join Rwanda in commemorating the tragic events of 30 years ago, when an avoidable genocide ripped through the nation's heart. It already demands a lot of courage to talk to the ones who killed your children and forgive them. But it is one thing to forgive; and another to forget. You have to remember what happened, because people who do not keep the memory are condemned to repeat the same mistakes. The Kigali Genocide Memorial, which I visited last year, serves that objective. It is the final resting place for more than 250.000 victims. Even today new bodies are being found and buried in this place. The memorial serves to inform and educate about how the genocide took shape. As difficult as this must be, one needs to forgive and move forward again. Based on reconciliation and forgiving, Rwanda has undergone a remarkable post-genocide trajectory in many ways.

We also commemorate South Africa's thirty years since the end of apartheid. Sadly, for the Black majority population, this journey has been a frustrating one. South Africa remains one of the most imbalanced nation in the entire world with numerous inequalities still visible in many sectors, including housing and education. The story of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) needs no introduction as the conflict in the Great Lakes region of Africa is well documented. The world continues to turn a blind eye. And yet thousands of innocent victims are dying and others are being displaced into neighbouring countries. We work with a number of charities doing amazing work in the DRC. And you can help too. Kindly get in touch with us for more details.

And as always we bring you inspirational stories of Black individuals making great strides in our region and beyond.

Till the next one.

Kudakwashe Makudo

EDITOR

March / April 2024



Partners



Middlesbrough



Teesside
Archives

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The state of Black businesses in the North East of England

Black businesses continue to face significant barriers that can hinder their success. To truly understand the challenges faced by Black entrepreneurs today, we must first examine the historical context in which our businesses operate. For centuries, Black individuals and communities have been subjected to systemic racism and discrimination, which has had a profound impact on their ability to thrive economically. Since slavery Black entrepreneurs have faced numerous obstacles that have limited their access to resources and opportunities whether they are descendants of slavery or not. Having access to capital is the biggest challenge in the North East of England.

One of the most significant challenges that Black entrepreneurs face is the pervasive stereotypes, bias, and discrimination that exists in our society.

Black entrepreneurs are denied loans at nearly twice the rate of white business owners. Traditional financial institutions have created systems and underwriting criteria that don't meet the needs of Black small business owners looking to start, sustain and grow their business. One of the most significant challenges that Black entrepreneurs face is the pervasive stereotypes, bias, and discrimination that exists in our society. These negative perceptions can hinder their ability to secure funding, attract customers, have access to markets, and build professional relationships. Black entrepreneurs often must work twice as hard to prove themselves and overcome the preconceived notions that others may have about their abilities and qualifications. The journey of diverse Black individuals to becoming business owners is a unique and inspiring one. These individuals navigate the complexities of their racial identity while also facing the challenges and opportunities that come with entrepreneurship. Their experiences are shaped by both their Blackness and cultural identity, which adds a layer of complexity to their entrepreneurial endeavours.

One aspect of the journey for diverse Black individuals is the exploration and understanding of their racial identity. They often grapple with questions of belonging, as they may not fully identify with or be accepted in the fullness of their racial and ethnic identities. In many ways the journey of Black individuals of all backgrounds and to becoming business owners is a testament to their strength, resilience, and ability to thrive in the face of adversity. Their experiences shape not only their personal growth but also contribute to a more diverse and inclusive business landscape.

Access to capital is a critical factor in the success of any business, and Black entrepreneurs, regardless of origin often face significant barriers when it comes to securing funding. Studies have shown that Black-owned businesses receive a disproportionately small amount of venture capital and bank loans compared to their white counterparts. This lack of access to capital can make it challenging to start or expand a business, limiting their ability to compete in the marketplace.

What can Black businesses owners do?

Networking and mentorship are essential components of any entrepreneur's journey, but Black entrepreneurs often face additional challenges in this area. Building a strong support system can be difficult when there is a lack of diverse role models and mentors who can provide guidance and support. It is crucial for Black entrepreneurs to actively seek out networking opportunities and connect with others who have faced similar challenges. Education and skill development are vital for the success of any entrepreneur, and Black entrepreneurs in all their diversity need access to quality education and training programs that can equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in today's business world. Unfortunately, disparities in educational opportunities and resources can limit their ability to acquire the tools they need to succeed. It is essential for policymakers and business leaders to invest in programs that provide Black entrepreneurs with the education and training necessary to overcome these barriers.



Representation matters

Seeing successful Black entrepreneurs can inspire and motivate aspiring entrepreneurs and challenge the stereotypes and biases that exist in our society. It is crucial for Black entrepreneurs to be visible and actively share their stories and experiences. By doing so, they can help break down barriers and inspire the next generation of Black entrepreneurs to pursue their dreams and overcome the cultural obstacles they may face. This can be particularly challenging when the national narrative presents a monolithic representation of Blackness in the UK, and many of the diverse groups mentioned in this piece do not see themselves in the dominant cultural narratives around business or Blackness.

Supporting Black-owned businesses is not just about economic empowerment; it is about community empowerment. When we support Black-owned businesses, we are investing in the success and prosperity of our communities. By consciously choosing to patronize Black-owned businesses, we can help create a more equitable and inclusive economy that benefits everyone.

A Question Of Trust - Why Britain's Banks Are Failing To Attract Black Entrepreneurs

Are Britain's Black entrepreneurs being underserved by banks? According to a new report from Lloyds Banking Group, that appears to be the case.

The study - Black. British. In Business and Proud - suggests that just 30 percent of Black business owners approach banks to inquire about finance, with only 20 percent going on to take out loans. As the report sees it, the consequent reliance on other forms of funding - such as family and friends - acts as a drag on the growth potential of many ventures. Two years ago, Lloyds Banking Group took the initiative to improve things.

As a result of this reflection, it made a commitment to implement improvements. The first step was to drive changes internally - for instance by increasing the number of Black employees within the organization and nurturing their careers. The second step was to take the internal and make it external. In practice, that meant being more attuned to the needs of Black business people. And in addition to partnering with organizations such as the Black Business Network and the Black Business Advisory Committee, the bank recognised the need for data that could drive action.

So to return to the original question, are Black business owners being well served by the banking system? Well, the report suggests there is a trust gap between Black business owners and formal institutions such as banks. Only 40 percent of respondents said they trusted banks (down from 43 percent last year) and in practical terms that means a significant number are seeking advice and also financial support from elsewhere. For instance, while 31 percent said they sought help from family and friends and 26 percent cited community groups as a source of support, only 12 percent saw banks as their first port of call.

Shari Leigh of the Black Business Network says there is a need for systemic change. She said many Black business owners have faced discrimination both in terms of their personal finance and the funding of their companies, while also - in statistical terms - often finding themselves at the wrong end of Britain's growing wealth gap. "There is a feeling that there will be discrimination," says Leigh. "So there is a lack of trust."



“ In this report, our focus was to assess the impact of barriers Black entrepreneurs said they were facing, such as discrimination, racism and concern about equal access to opportunities. We also wanted to measure the positive impact of the recommendations and actions we started to implement following last year's findings. Part of our responsibility as community-centred support is to investigate and communicate the barriers that continue to prevent the financial growth and stability of Black businesses. We are aware that no singular action or organisation will solve these problems, but we continue to commit to collaboration and taking action.



Shari Leigh, **Black Business Network**

New on-campus business incubator developed to support local businesses

Teesside Launchpad is looking for people with big ideas – and the drive to create a new business which will positively affect the lives of its customers within three to five years. If you can show that your idea has that kind of potential and that you have the determination to make it happen, we would like to hear from you. Teesside Launchpad members benefit from a stimulating working environment, real creative spaces and the ability to meet, share and collaborate with like-minded startup founders and gain access to some of the UK's most successful entrepreneurs and investors.

Get Started

At Launchpad we believe in learning through doing. Our free Get Started workshops will give you the tools to explore and experience entrepreneurship in a fun and engaging interactive workshop. Check back for dates and details of the next workshops.

Freelance Fridays

Freelance Fridays offers support through live events, blended learning, and real-life work opportunities. Freelance Fridays modules give you confidence to launch your own freelancing business, alongside your studies. We do this through interactive activities and providing content from a range of different platforms in one easy-to-access place. Freelance Fridays in person workshops are a great opportunity for you to hear from experts in a range of different specialisms. The workshops are about an hour and you also benefit from networking time with other freelancing students. You can take advantage of working in our freelance hub in the Student Life. Spaces are limited so best get in touch to book a desk for the day. Contact us to find out more about Freelance Fridays or to get involved.

Microbiz

Microbiz enables you to explore, start and launch side hustle projects that enhance your employability skills and develop income through your activity. If you've already started or just have a business idea, you can apply to receive fully-funded support for your journey. You might have an amazing business idea, be able to offer a better service or simply have the desire to do things better in your industry. We'll show you how to make your vision a reality.

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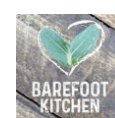
Teesside University works in partnership with a range of organisations harnessing a collaborative approach to tackling social problems.

Barefoot Kitchen CIC is a social enterprise that works at grassroots level to create revolutionary, regenerative and resilient communities in the Tees Valley through food growing, cooking and sharing initiatives - from plot to plate. Launchpad has teamed up with Barefoot Kitchen to develop innovative solutions that help tackle food poverty in the local area.

The Hope Foundation is a local charity that has supported people in Middlesbrough since 1995 with the aim of reducing disadvantage, loneliness and isolation while helping people recognise their potential. furbdit is a partnership solution developed to help bridge the digital divide. It is an online platform designed to connect businesses and organisations who have digital equipment they no longer need with organisations that can distribute them to people with no access to digital devices.

Enactus is an international organisation that connects student, academic and business leaders through entrepreneurial based projects that empower people to transform opportunities into real, sustainable progress for themselves and communities.

Teesside University and **Thirteen Group** have a shared vision to improve opportunities for people across the Tees Valley. We have an innovative partnership which aims to grow social enterprise across the Tees Valley delivering sustainable solutions that tackle local issues.



Venture firm **Black Seed** raises £5M inaugural fund to invest in Black founders

British early-stage venture firm Black Seed has raised £5 million (\$6.2 million) as part of its inaugural fund to solely support Black founders in the country. The round was led by asset manager M&G Investments, with additional support from Atomico and Molten Ventures.

Black Seed was launched to address the lack of funding Black founders receive in the UK, according to its founders: Karl Lokko, Cyril Lutterodt and founding member Yvonne Nagawa. Black founders in the country received only 0.24% of all VC funds between 2009 and 2019, and only 10 Black British women were able even to raise at all, according to a report by Extend Ventures. That's worse in some ways than in the United States.

The dismal lack of funding has historically led to Black British talent leaving the country for the USA seeking funding opportunities. Lokko and Lutterodt said the firm also wants to address the fact that 88% of Black businesses in the UK are self-funded, and they want to decrease that number to at least 50%. "We exist as a tech fund and a community," Lokko said. "We exist to bridge that gap and give Black founders inclusion."

Lutterodt said that many Black founders in the UK are overmentored yet underfunded. "We have built a pipeline of Black entrepreneurs, primed and ready," he said, adding that the firm expects to make at least 10 investments over the next three years and has a reserve fund for follow-on investments. The firm will focus on early-stage investing, serving as a kind of "family and friends" round for those who lack access to angel investors — or, as they say in the UK, the "Bank of Mum and Dad." It is one of a handful of funds that exist in the UK that focus solely on Black founders. Black Seed is industry agnostic, though Lutterodt says it's particularly interested in deep tech, health care and AI. Black Seed also hosts events at its office in Brixton, the south London neighborhood known for its Afro-Caribbean population. The firm organizes the Brixton Startup Weekend as well as the pitch competition Lyan's Den. Launched in 2021, the firm was initially supposed to announce the £5 million raise in 2022, but it ran into delays concerning regulatory compliance.



photo // blackseedventures

Born and bred in south London, Karl, Cyril and Yvonne are the founders of Black Seed, which claims to be the first venture capital firm in Europe that only invests in and supports black-owned businesses.

"We actually overestimated how long it would take to get £5 million worth of commitments," Nagawa, who also serves as Black Seed's chief of staff, told TechCrunch+. "It only took us six months to hit that figure. What we underestimated was the length of time it would then take to complete the legal side of things and the paperwork. It was a reminder of the complicated factors you face when raising a fund."

Lokko said raising the fund was hard in the face of racial and socioeconomic barriers. They were Black first-time fund managers who didn't attend Oxford or Cambridge. Similar to the USA, most of the capital in the UK is allocated to those who've graduated from elite institutions like Oxford or Cambridge. They all also initially lacked a venture network they could tap to raise a fund of this size. Lutterodt says he spent the past few years building up connections, which then led to warm introductions, which then led to investor support for Black Seed.



Take off from Teesside, with KLM to Africa.

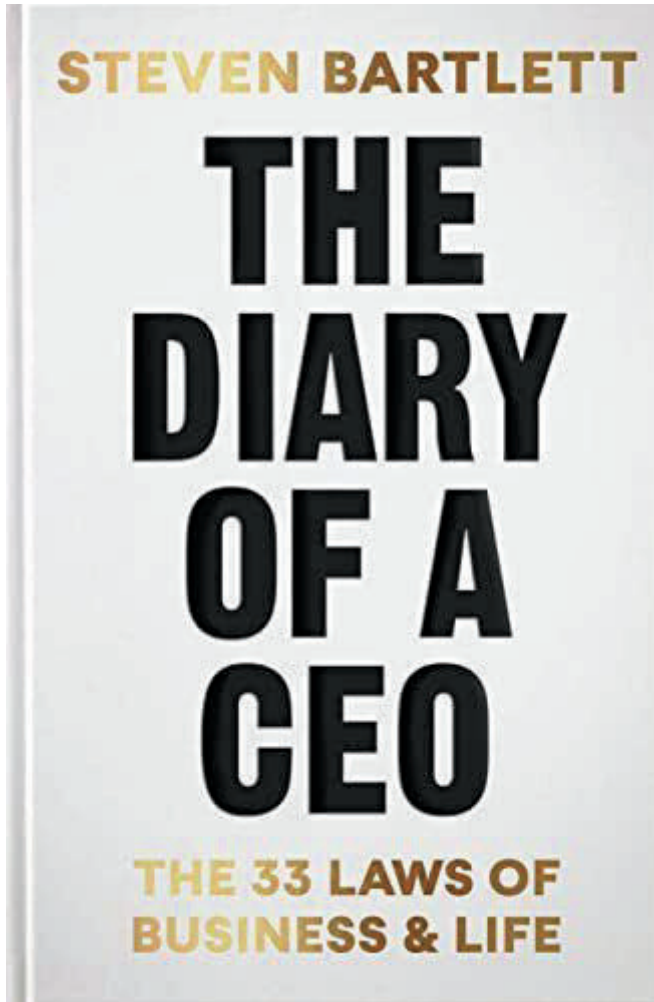
Departing from your local airport makes it so much easier to travel. You can live new experiences and relax with your loved ones in 9 destinations across Africa including Lagos and Accra, via Amsterdam - [klm.co.uk](https://www.klm.co.uk)

Royal Dutch Airlines



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The Diary of a CEO (Hardback)
Steven Bartlett

This is not a book about business strategy. Strategy changes like the seasons. This is a book about something much more permanent. At the very heart of all the success and failure I've been exposed to - both my own entrepreneurial journey and through the thousands of interviews I've conducted on my podcast - are a set of principles that can stand the test of time, apply to any industry, and be used by anyone who is search of building something great or becoming someone great.

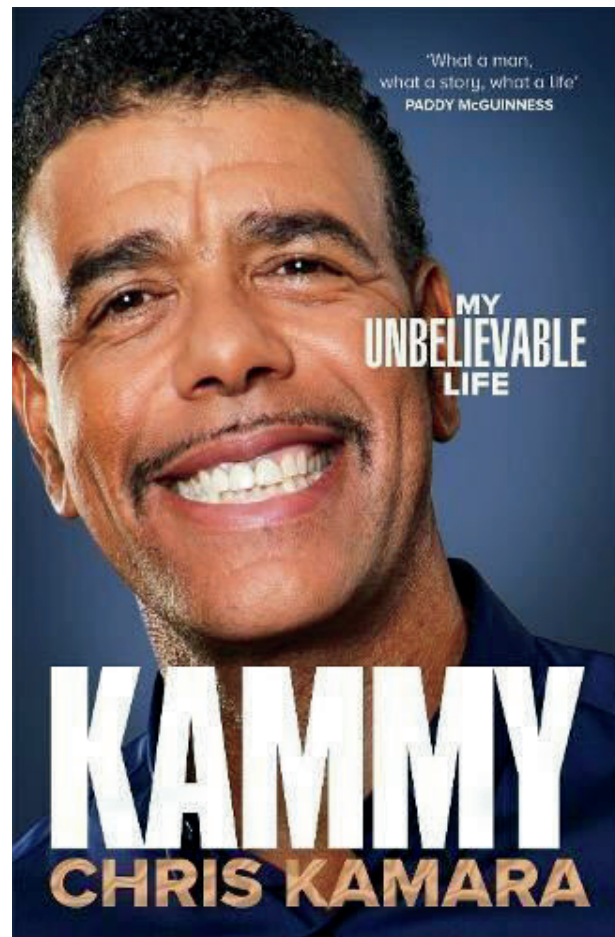
These are the fundamental laws that will ensure excellence. They are rooted in psychology and behavioral science, are based on the wisdom of tens of thousands of people I've surveyed across every continent and age group, and of course, drawn from the conversations I've had on my chart-topping podcast with the world's most successful people. These laws will work now or in 100 years from now. Are you ready to get started?

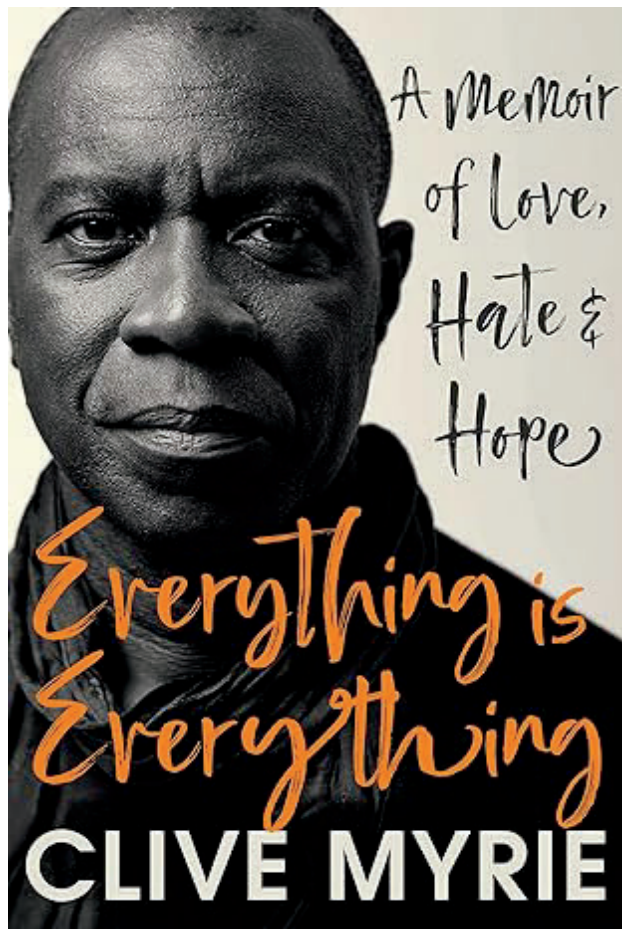
Kammy: Signed Edition (Hardback)
Chris Kamara

With his trademark banter and unflinching honesty, Kammy sees Chris 'Kammy' Kamara tell the unbelievable stories of his life, revealing how he went from hard-tackling footballer to broadcasting national treasure.

Presenter, commentator, (sometimes masked) singer, footballer, manager and campaigner, Kammy's action-packed career has made him a bona fide British hero. But it hasn't always been plain sailing. Kammy had a tough upbringing, faced racism on the terraces during his playing career and has, in recent years, dealt with a rare brain condition - apraxia - that has affected his speech and seen him say goodbye to Sky Sports. Despite this, Kammy's star has only risen as he's met every challenge with courage, determination and his infectious smile.

With entertaining stories of his playing career from Pompey to Leeds and beyond; his management at Bradford City and Stoke; his crazy travels around the world; of Soccer Saturday banter; presenting Ninja Warrior; and the incredible friendships he's made along the way, Kammy is an unforgettable ride from one of Britain's best-loved broadcasters.





Everything is Everything (Hardback)

Clive Myrie

As a Bolton teenager with a paper round, Clive Myrie read all the newspapers he delivered from cover to cover and dreamed of becoming a journalist. In this deeply personal memoir, he tells how his family history has influenced his view of the world, introducing us to his Windrush generation parents, a great grandfather who helped build the Panama Canal, and a great uncle who fought in the First World War, later to become a prominent police detective in Jamaica.

He reflects on how being black has affected his perspective on issues he's encountered in thirty years reporting some of the biggest stories of our time (most recently from Ukraine), showing us how those experiences gave him a better idea of what it means to be an outsider. He tells of his pride in his roots, but his determination not to be defined by his background in dealing with the challenges of race and class to succeed at the highest level.

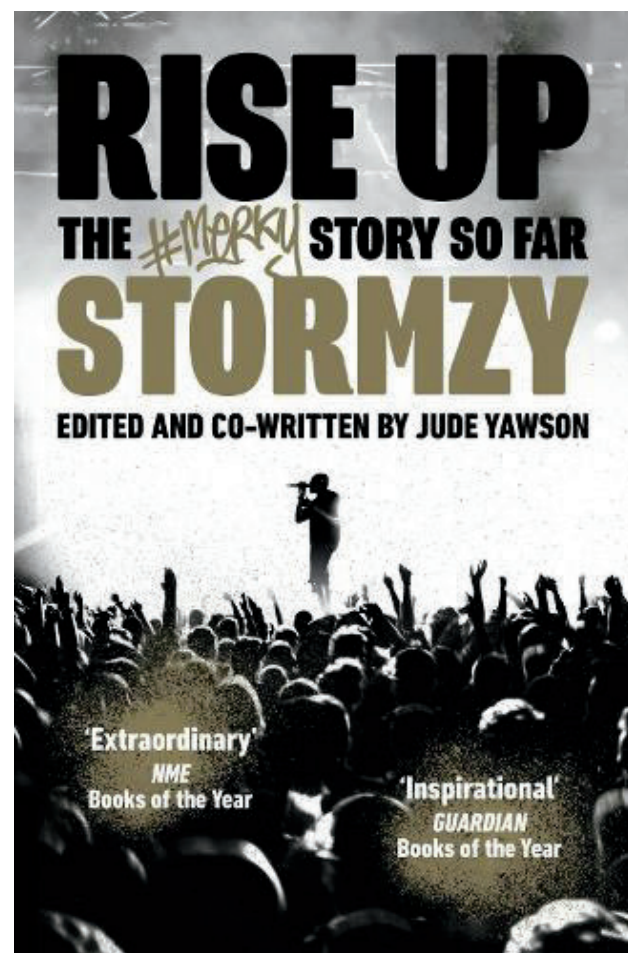
Moving, engaging, revealing, Everything is Everything is a story of love and hate - but also hope.

Rise Up: The #Merky Story So Far (Paperback)

Stormzy

In three years Stormzy has risen from one of the most promising musicians of his generation to a spokesperson for a generation. Rise Up is the story of how he got there. It's a story about faith and the ideas worth fighting for. It's about knowing where you're from, and where you're going. It's about following your dreams without compromising who you are.

Featuring hundreds of never-before-seen photographs, annotated lyrics and contributions from those closest to him, Rise Up is Stormzy's story, in his words, and the record of a journey unlike any other.



Zimbabwean author longlisted for 2024 Republic of Consciousness prize

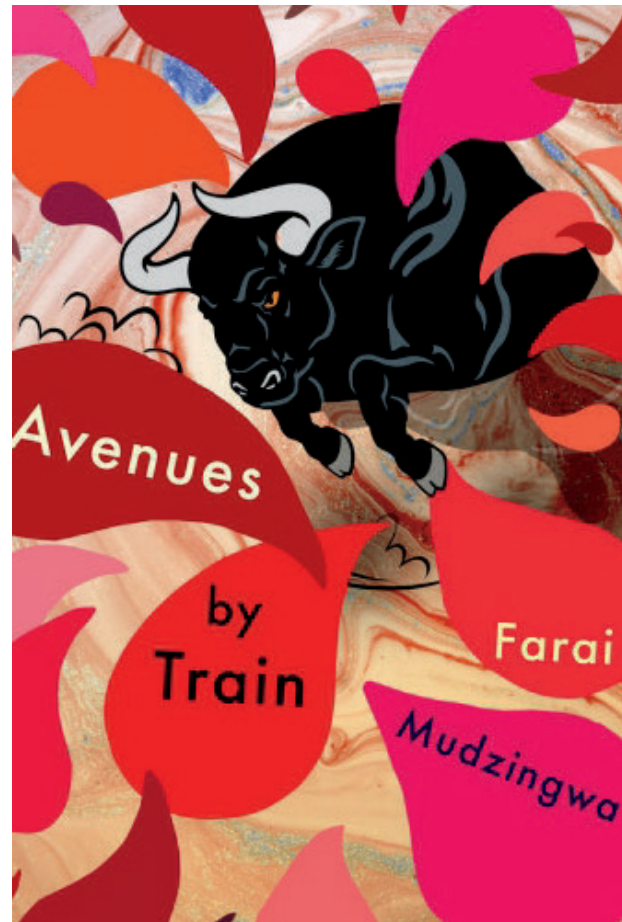
The Republic of Consciousness Prize, which rewards fiction published by UK and Irish small presses, has announced this year's longlist, and Zimbabwean author Farai Mudzingwa's novel *Avenues by Train* made the cut. In praising the book, Mudzingwa's work was described by the prize's judges as "an assured debut" which "addresses the objective truth of these lives but also deftly conveys the character's subjective understanding of the forces that influence their fate."

Mudzingwa, who lives in Harare, writes fiction, long-form journalism and TV/film screenplays. He was shortlisted for the 2019 edition of the Miles Morland Foundation Writing Scholarship. His short fiction has been published by Weaver Press, Kwani?, Writivism, Short Story Day Africa: ID and Mbonga Press. He has been listed for the Short Story Day Africa (2019), Yvonne Vera Award (2013) and Writivism (2016) short story competitions.

Released by Nigerian publisher Cassava Republic Press in 2023, *Avenues by Train* follows Jedza, an electrician in newly independent Zimbabwe who is haunted by a childhood train accident and believes in spiritual forces controlling his life. Leaving Miner's Drift for Harare, he discovers escaping his past is more challenging than anticipated. Mudzingwa weaves an account of personal strife and finding relief against the backdrop of Zimbabwe's political and social history, shining a light on the effects of colonialism on individual lives.

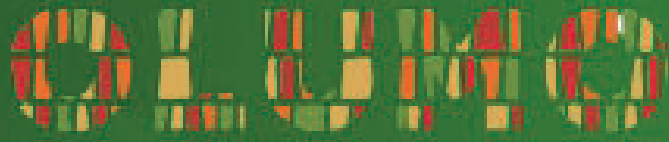
Established in 2017, the Republic of Consciousness Prize for Small Presses is an annual British literary prize founded by British novelist Neil Griffiths. It rewards fiction published by UK and Irish small presses, defined as "those with fewer than five full-time employees." The Prize aims to support a range of publishers for their ongoing commitment to work of high literary merit. Besides the prize, the Republic of Consciousness also runs a range of events and initiatives including a Book of the Month club (which promotes small presses and high-quality literary fiction), lectures for Creative Writing students, readings in bookshops around the country, and panel discussions at literary festivals. Previous African nominees include Elnathan John, Yewande Omotoso, Vanessa Onwuemezi, Scholastica and Simon Okotie.

Since its inception, the Republic of Consciousness Prize has awarded over £100,000 to publishers and authors. This year's prize celebrates fiction in translation, and the judges are Declan O'Driscoll, Sana Goyal and Rebecca Adams. The winner of this year's Republic of Consciousness Prize will be announced at the award ceremony held at Foyles, Charing Cross Road on April 17.



Farai Mudzingwa's literary contributions extend beyond fiction. His work has been featured in various publications, including Kwani?, Writivism, Weaver Press, Enkare Review, and Short Story Day Africa. Additionally, his non-fiction pieces have appeared in esteemed platforms such as Contemporary&, The New Humanitarian, and The Johannesburg Review of Books.

source // [thebritishblacklist](#)



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Sola Idowu

From Lagos to the North East

Biotech company Hexis Lab has secured nearly £500,000 to “revolutionise” the cosmetic, personal care and pharmaceutical sectors’ green credentials across the globe. With the backing, from Innovate UK, the Newcastle Helix-based firm is developing and scaling manufacturing processes to replace traditional synthetic and animal-derived product ingredients with environmentally-friendlier alternatives. And with a number of exciting collaborations in advanced stages, including work alongside Teesside University and BiBerChem, Hexis Lab is ready to help meet ever-growing consumer demand in an international market expected to be worth more than \$600 billion by 2025. As he gets ready to launch new products in India, founder Sola Idowu talks about his incredible journey from Lagos to the labs of the North East.

After nearly a decade of research, experimentation and studying the data science, and thanks to nearly £500,000 from Innovate UK, Sola is ready to see what the influencers and celebrities make of the green cosmetic, personal care and hair products specifically catering for black, Indian and South East Asian women who, as he knows only too well, have been neglected for far too long. Sola has studied in the universities of Lagos, Cambridge and Newcastle, is a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford and counts a fascinating stint working for NASA, in California, on his CV too. He has always been most at home in the lab.

He came to Newcastle to study 26 years ago and, by his own admission, has only just reached the stage where he is ready to venture out of his comfort zone and into the commercial world. “I came to Newcastle University and never really left,” he says. After gaining a first-class mathematics degree in his home town of Lagos, in Nigeria, Sola was working in accounts for Shell when he met Stewart Brown, a Newcastle University graduate. He says: “The only thing I knew about Newcastle as a child, was they had a football team,” says the man who is now friends with former Newcastle United striker Shola Ameobi and his family. (Their Christian Yoruba names are pronounced the same). He adds: “In primary school, we had football betting newspapers, which were used to serve fried fish in, and one of the teams I remember was Newcastle United. After my degree, I started working for Shell during the Ogoni crisis; Stewart was the kindest boss ever and he talked a lot about Newcastle. “I worked in cost accounting in deep sea exploration, and that was a major motivation to get out of the country and get the same degrees as the expats. I could see no reason why I shouldn’t get the same opportunities and the same – or better – wages.”

After doing exceptionally well in his undergraduate degree, Sola undertook a scholarship at Cambridge, in the department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics, headed by Professor Stephen Hawking. “One day, I was walking down the corridor and I saw an advertisement for a PhD in Newcastle in theoretical physics; it was very, very complex stuff, and right up my street. “I came up for the interview, got the job and that was it.” Sola had found his home – Newcastle and its labs. He would also meet his future wife Elizabeth – the couple now have four teenage children – and, after a sojourn into space research in the States, he returned to the city to embark on a project which is set to revolutionise hair care for more than 70 per cent of the female population.

It was eldest daughter Grace, 19, who proved the inspiration behind Hexis Lab’s serious expansion into the hair care market, and women in India and Africa who, Sola says, have been ignored and neglected by the same big companies who are now watching developments and studying papers from the Newcastle labs with interest. An accomplished swimmer, who has represented England and is currently studying and training in the US, Grace has been in the pool on an almost daily basis since she was eight. Sola can’t forget the early wake-ups, the journeys to every baths in Newcastle, and the pounds wasted on finding the best hair products for his daughter. He says: “One of our key unique distinctions that we’ve done, which we’re really passionate about, is to make sure we have a way of testing ingredients and formulations in different skin and hair types. “Because, until now, the majority of products that are developed globally have been tested on Caucasian skin and



photo // mikesreenan

Article first published by **North East Times**

European hair, which has a lot of different issues. My daughter started talking about it as she got older, because having good hair means something, and we were buying all these products. We tried everything.”

“My wife has blonde straight hair, and I have tight curly black hair, so Grace’s hair is a mixture. It’s recommended black women shouldn’t wash their hair every day to protect it, but because she is swimming every day, she has a high need and we had to find a solution. We created something, which was the best product she had ever used, and she said, “Are you going to do this?”

“That was a moment of germination. And now we are on the journey.”

Following years of research and with exciting collaborations in advanced stages, including work with Teesside University and BiBerChem Research, Hexis Lab is ready to bring a number of products to market. This includes a brand new sulphate free shampoo and conditioner called **Layla & Kays**, initially inspired by Sola’s daughter, that promises to be a game-changer in the hair care industry.

LAYLA & KAYS



Independent Oversight Group launches recommendations to Church Commissioners to address legacy of African chattel enslavement

Following its appointment last year by the Church Commissioners of England, an independent Oversight Group released its report and recommendations into how the body should implement a new impact investment fund. The Fund and grant-funding programme are being set up as part of the Church Commissioners' journey to heal and repair the damage caused by the legacy of African chattel enslavement.

The recommendations include:

1. Recognition that £100m initially earmarked by the Church Commissioners is not enough, relative to the scale of the Church Commissioners' endowment or of the moral sin and crime of African chattel enslavement, and that the organisation, in partnership with others, should target an initiative of £1bn and above.
2. That the timeline for the delivery of the fund should be accelerated and delivered faster than the nine years originally envisaged.
3. A call for the Church of England to fully acknowledge and apologise for the harms caused by its historic denial that Black Africans are created in the image of God, for its deliberate actions to destroy diverse African religious belief systems and to facilitate work that builds the spiritual connection of Africa and the African diaspora with the Gospel and the diverse spiritual practices of African forebears.

The Oversight Group is recommending that the new impact investment fund be called the Fund for Healing, Repair and Justice. Following consultation with members of the global African diaspora, the recommendations call on the Church Commissioners to use this Fund to invest in Black-led businesses focusing on education, economic empowerment, health outcomes and improving access to land and food as well as provide grants to address these and other issues brought up for communities impacted by the legacies of African chattel enslavement. The report says: "Crimes against humanity rooted in African chattel enslavement have caused damage so vast it will require patient effort spanning generations to address. But we can start today, in small and large ways."

The report and recommendations were drafted by a Black-led Oversight Group, which had a majority of members from the impacted communities, using consultation and research conducted with the global African diaspora, to ensure the voices of those affected by African chattel enslavement were central to the process and the final recommendations. The



photo // nznews

Right Reverend Dr Rosemarie Mallett (pictured above), Bishop of Croydon, Chair of the Oversight Group said: "No amount of money can fully atone for or fully redress the centuries long impact of African chattel enslavement, the effects of which are still felt around the world today. But implementing the recommendations will show the commitment of the Church Commissioners to supporting the process of healing, repair and justice for all of those across society impacted by the legacy of African chattel enslavement."

The Oversight Group has also recommended that the programme should be ultimately owned and run by Black communities. The aspiration is for the impact investment and spending programme to start operating later in 2024.

Bishop Rosemarie continued: "This work and the Fund matter because the legacy of African enslavement continues to have a significant impact on communities today and inequalities persist till this day. The impact is measurable and apparent in everything from pregnancy and childbirth outcomes to life chances at birth, physical and mental health, education, employment, income, property, and the criminal justice system. We hope this initiative is just the start and is a catalyst to encourage other institutions to investigate their past and make a better future for impacted communities."

Another recommendation calls on the Church Commissioners and Church of England to conduct further research into how else they were enriched by their involvement in African chattel enslavement.

The full report and recommendations can be viewed at hrjfund.org

North East economy set to lag London and South despite growth in Newcastle and Sunderland

Newcastle and Sunderland are being forecast to see elements of growth above the national average over the next three years but the North East as a whole is set to fall further behind London and the South East, a new report suggests.

Figures from the latest Ernst & Young (EY) Regional Economic Forecast suggest that Newcastle is expected to see average annual employment growth of 1.4% from 2024-2027, outstripping the national average rate of 1.1%. The city's annual Gross Value Added (GVA) growth rate is expected to be 1.9% over the same period, the same as the national rate. Meanwhile, Sunderland is being forecast to record annual GVA growth of 1.7%, though its expected annual employment growth of 0.7% is expected to trail both the national and regional rates. Nationally, EY said that while all areas of the UK are set to see moderate economic growth over the next three years, London and the South of England were likely to outpace the rest of the country due to issues in the regional labour market and higher numbers of high growth companies in the capital.

EY's report highlights long-standing issues in the North East economy and forecasts that Durham, Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Darlington will also see growth below national averages. It said that high levels of inactivity - which it pegs at 20.7% in the North East - are partly to blame for the lagging regional economy. EY said that the UK remains the only major world economy the labour market participation rate has not yet returned to the level it was at pre-pandemic.



The UK will "miss out" on economic growth unless it finally comes up with an industrial strategy to green the economy, the leading business group has warned. As the UK economy has stagnated in recent years, the value of green industries like renewables, eco-friendly heating and energy storage is growing and will help unlock further cash for the UK, according to economists at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

They found that while Britain's GDP growth was stuck at around 0.1% last year, its net zero economy grew by 9%, and attracted billions of pounds in private investment. It argues private investment is key to unlocking growth. The UK has committed to reaching net zero by 2050, but the report comes after Labour rowed back on its £28bn green investment pledge, and the Conservatives waged a rhetorical attack on climate policies. Net zero means almost eliminating greenhouse gas emissions and requires changes to almost every sector, from food to housing, transport to construction. The businesses implementing these changes - including solar panel installers and green finance advisers - added £74bn in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2022-23, which is larger than the economy of Wales (£66 billion), according to the CBI Economics report.

'Real danger' UK will miss out on economic growth without green plan

CBI

Report says the North's communities are "ambitious for a better future", but face "systemic and pronounced inequalities".

The Institute for Public Policy Research, which put together the report, is calling for "German-style levels" of investment in England's regions to the tune of £7.6bn a year over 15 years to help tackle the problem.

The North faces more than five decades of lower healthy life expectancy compared with the South East, according to a study.

The Institute for Public Policy Research North (IPPR) found it will be 2080 before the gap in healthy life expectancy - defined as the average number of years a person can expect to live in good health - really changes. The IPPR is calling for "German-style levels" of investment in England's regions to the tune of £7.6bn a year over 15 years to help tackle the problem. This could be funded by raising up to £13bn a year through a targeted wealth tax, the institute said. Other measures include reforming local government finance according to need and in a way that allows councils to plan longer term. The IPPR report found the number of years a person can "expect to live in good health" in the North and the Midlands will be two and a half years shorter than the South and three years and a half years shorter than in London by 2030. It adds: "The worst-performing region, the North East, is also on course for a decline across both male and female groups.

"Extending these overall trajectories, the gap in healthy life expectancy between the North and the all-England average would not close until 2056/57 while the gap between the North and South East would endure until 2079/80, and the gap between the North and London would grow."

The report said the North's communities are "ambitious for a better future", but face "systemic and pronounced inequalities".

It added: "Gaps in power, wealth, opportunity, and health result in shorter, sicker, less fulfilling lives." Researchers found that gaps in regional wealth inequality will continue to grow, arguing that reforming capital gains tax - tax on the profit when an asset is sold - could fund local investment.

"Wealth inequalities are growing rapidly across England," the study said. Wealth encompasses property, financial, material, and pension assets. While England's average wealth per person grew from around £226,300 in 2010 to £290,800 by 2020, regional



inequalities in wealth have widened. For instance, the gap per head between the average wealth per person in England overall and the North stood at £71,000 in 2020, almost double the gap in 2010, at around £37,300."

Based on current trends, this gap will reach £228,800 per head between the South East and the North by the end of the decade, the IPPR said. Also based on current trends, by 2030 London's employment rate will be 66%, while the North East's will "barely reach" 56%.

Parents face higher fines for taking children out of school without permission

Parents are being warned they will face higher fines for taking their children out of class without permission.

The Department for Education (DfE) has said a fine must be considered if a child misses five days of school for unauthorised absence. Fines currently start at £60, rising to £120 if they are not paid within 21 days. But the DfE has said fines will now start at £80, rising to £160. It comes after nearly 400,000 penalty notices were issued to parents in England in 2022-23 for unauthorised school absences - which was much higher than pre-pandemic levels. Nearly nine in ten (89.3%) of the fines were for unauthorised holidays as families looked to book cheaper vacations outside school term times, according to DfE figures released in December.

Government guidance is expected to clarify when financial penalties for school absences should be used to ensure councils issue fines appropriately. The DfE has said school absence fines will be brought under a national framework to help tackle inconsistencies in their use across England. Under the new measures, which have been announced as part of the Government's efforts to try to cut down on the number of children who are regularly missing school, every state school in England will share their daily attendance registers with the DfE, councils and academy trusts. It is understood the higher fines for absences will come into effect from September.

The DfE hopes the data set will help schools spot and support children at risk of persistent absence, or in danger of becoming missing from education. Rob Tarn, chief executive of Northern Education Trust and founder of England's first attendance hub, has also been appointed by the DfE as the new national attendance ambassador. Guidance, setting out how schools and local authorities must take a "support-first" approach to help pupils and their families to tackle barriers to attendance, will be made statutory from August, the DfE has said. Education Secretary Gillian Keegan added: "Our fantastic schools and teachers unlock children's imagination, potential and social skills which is why improving attendance is my number one priority.

"Today we are taking that next step to further boost attendance and I want to thank those who are working with us including teachers and heads. Education standards have risen sharply across the country, with Ofsted ratings up from 68% to nearly 90% since 2010 - and pupils' performance is ranked as some of the best globally - so it has never been more valuable to be in school."

Nearly nine in ten of the fines were for unauthorised holidays as families looked to book cheaper vacations outside school term times.



Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said: "A consistent national framework for fines makes sense. Currently there is significant variation between how and when local authorities issue fines to parents. However, parents will likely be surprised that at a time when schools are struggling to find enough teachers to teach classes, when buildings are crumbling, and when we are in the middle of a crisis in special needs provision, that the Government is choosing to focus on increasing fines for parents.

"Good attendance is obviously critically important, but fines have long proven to be too blunt a tool and largely ineffective at improving persistent absence." He added: "What is really needed to tackle poor attendance is more targeted resources to find out the reasons behind absence, including support for vulnerable families and for children and young people's mental health. Without that work, higher fines could just be further punishing already struggling families and children."

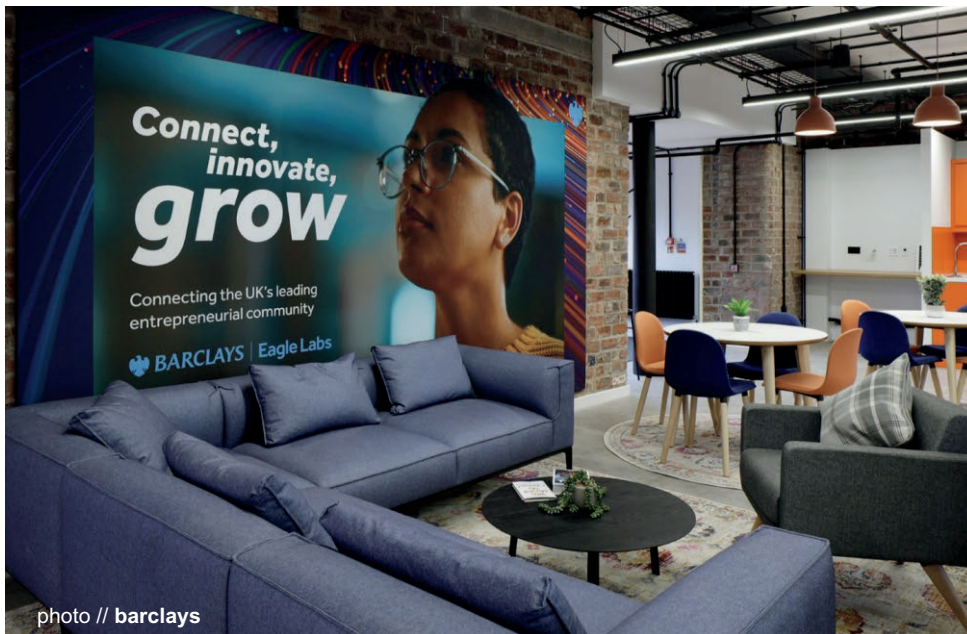


photo // barclays

Barclays Eagle Labs have launched an online digital skills platform to inspire the leaders of the next generation of UK tech giants. The platform is funded by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's Digital Growth Grant and will offer interactive modules to help teach the skillset needed when thinking of starting a digital business. The new Eagle Labs Academy, funded by the Department for Science Innovation and Technology, will provide curated learning experiences, where users can access self-paced, on-demand and interactive content; covering key challenges faced when starting and scaling a technology focused business. The platform will help the next generation of tech entrepreneurs from things like how to raise finance to creating their first business plan. Amanda Allan, Director of Barclays Eagle Labs said: "This is another fantastic addition to the range of programmes and support that Barclays Eagle Labs offer tech startups and their founders. The Eagle Labs Academy is an exciting platform which we hope will encourage the next wave of tech entrepreneurs to start and grow their ideas into a lucrative business. "The digital economy continues to experience huge growth and this platform is a great starting point for anyone who is thinking of entering this space and becoming a tech entrepreneur."

Saqib Bhatti, Minister for Tech and the Digital Economy said: "The UK's startup ecosystem stands unrivalled, home to more tech unicorns than France and Germany combined. That achievement is no coincidence; it's a result of our ongoing

Digital skills platform to inspire the next generation

commitment to support and grow our tech sector. "The Eagle Labs Academy, supported by our £12 million Digital Growth Grant, will help to nurture and develop the skills of the next wave of tech entrepreneurs which will in turn drive economic growth and help to create new jobs." Barclays launched Eagle Labs in 2015 to provide tech startup support, mentoring, networking and upskilling. According to figures provided by Eagle Labs, it has supported over 9,600 businesses. Working with startups in tech hubs based across the UK regions is a key focus for Eagle Labs. It has an internal target of ensuring approximately 80% of the businesses it supports are based outside of London. To help meet this target, Eagle Labs is "ringfencing £1.1m" of the grant for each of the two years for regional partnership programmes. Funds will be allocated to universities, innovation bodies, local authorities or, to "any body that's invested in the ecosystem, understands the ecosystem and has a track record of supporting that respective ecosystem".said David Hamilton, head of implementation at Barclays Eagle Labs.



Net Zero
Teesside



Northern
Endurance
Partnership

Net Zero Teesside Power (NZN Power) and the Northern Endurance Partnership (NEP) have selected contractors for engineering, procurement, and construction contracts with a combined value of around £4bn.

Net Zero Teesside Power (NZN Power) and the Northern Endurance Partnership (NEP) have selected contractors for engineering, procurement, and construction contracts with a combined value of around £4bn. The selection of nine leading specialist contractors across eight contract packages is a major milestone for the Teesside-based projects, which would contribute to the UK's journey towards net zero emissions by 2050. The final award of contracts is subject to the receipt of relevant regulatory clearances and positive Final Investment Decisions (FID) by the projects and UK government, planned for September 2024 or earlier. Following FID, the projects would be aiming for first commercial operations from 2027.

The projects represent a significant opportunity for the UK supply chain. The selected contractors will continue working with the local and regional supply chain, with further engagement taking place over the coming weeks and months.

NZN Power, a joint venture between bp and Equinor, could generate up to 860 megawatts of flexible, dispatchable low-carbon power equivalent to the average electricity requirements of around 1.3 million UK homes[1]. Up to 2 million tonnes of CO₂ per year would be captured at the plant, and then transported and securely stored by the NEP in subsea storage sites beneath the North Sea. NZN Power could create and support more than 3,000 construction jobs and then require around 1,000 jobs annually during operations until 2050.



image credit // **northeastplace**

Building works on a new NHS centre offering quick access to health checks, tests and scans have reached a key milestone as it moves closer to its opening date.

Since the first spade went into the ground at a special event last September, construction of the Tees Valley Community Diagnostic Centre in Stockton has progressed at pace.

Over the last few weeks, works to fix the steel structure of the building into position – totalling around 1,200 pieces of steel fit over a five week period – have been completed by Kier Group. The next stage of works will involve the construction of concrete floor slabs and the completion of drainage works for the site.

It is anticipated the centre, which will be jointly run by North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust and South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, will open in late summer. It will provide rapid tests for a range of health issues including cancer, heart and lung disease.

Phil Woolfall, clinical director for radiology at North Tees and Hartlepool, said: "It is fantastic to see the progress being made in just a matter of weeks – I want to thank Kier and everyone involved in this. Very soon, our community will have rapid access to scans, tests and health checks in a new facility outside of hospital."

The site will provide a number of diagnostic functions including MRI scans, CT scans, ultrasound scans, cardiology, x-rays, blood tests and respiratory checks.

New health centre building works reach next milestone

Simon Milburn, clinical director for radiology at South Tees Hospitals, said: "This centre gives us the chance to carry out more tests and checks to people who need it, giving them the answers they need to health issues.

"All of this will happen off the busy acute hospital sites we run, in the Stockton town centre where so many people live and can transport into."

Dan Doherty, regional director for Kier Construction North and Scotland, said: "It's great to see such rapid progress at the site of the new Tees Valley health centre. We have a strong track record of delivering modern, purpose-built healthcare facilities to a high standard and the completion of the steel frame brings us one step closer to providing the local community with access to a care hub that will offer scans, tests and health checks."

The centre sits on the southern end of a wider transformation of the waterfront led by Stockton Borough Council, which will include an urban park for community events.

Kwibuka 30: Rwanda remembers

April 7th 2024 marks the start of Kwibuka 30, the 30th commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi, which began on April 7th 1994. The Kigali Genocide Memorial will be a focal point as the Flame of Remembrance is lit and dignitaries place wreaths at the mass graves.

The Memorial is normally closed to the public for part of the day on April 7th, with attendance at the lighting of the flame by invitation only, but this page will be updated in due course with further information for those planning to visit during memorial week, April 7th-14th. In and around Kigali during this time, multiple commemorations will be taking place to mark the genocide and different events which took place during its first week in particular. Bars, clubs and public leisure facilities are normally closed for the week.



"30 years is such a milestone and those who are 30 years of age have a special way they have been raised and nurtured. They have been raised by a nation and in families."

Rwanda President Paul Kagame

South Africa marks 30 years of democracy amidst growing socio-economic challenges

Thirty years of democracy have brought little to the majority of South Africans. However, President Cyril Ramaphosa in his 2024 State of the Nation Address tonight promised that his government is working hard to address the problems that the country faces. Remember, it's election year in South Africa and many will doubt that these promises will bring any tangible progress. We highlight some of the key takeaways from his speech.

State capture

He said the administration's biggest challenge was undoubtedly state capture and added that crime networks had to be dismantled to 'rebuild our economy'. Ramaphosa mentioned 200 accused being prosecuted in relation to state capture and said stolen funds are being recovered.

Load-shedding and climate change

The president said the 'end of load-shedding is finally in reach'. He explained that plans are in place to prevent the country from facing a similar crisis by 'reforming our energy system to make it more competitive, sustainable and reliable into the future'. A climate change response fund will be established to respond to 'persistent calamities', such as the yearly floods in KZN and wildfires in the Western Cape. "This will bring together all spheres of

government and the private sector in a collaborative effort to build our resilience and respond to the impacts of climate change."

Land reform

Farmland is now owned by around 25% of black South Africans, with an agricultural economist predicting that the target of 30% by 2030 will be exceeded because several initiatives are underway to secure ownership.

Education

Ramaphosa explained: "One of the worst injustices of apartheid was the manner in which education was used as a tool to perpetuate inequality. Over the last 30 years, we have sought to use education as a tool to create equality."

He said this issue has steadily improved and referred to the 2023 matric results as being the highest ever, adding that learners from no-fee paying schools are accounting for more bachelor passes. He referred to this as the 'silent revolution that is underway' and said this is 'progress we have been longing to see'.



Poverty

The president highlighted that the country faced a significant poverty challenge in 1993, with 71.1% of the population living in poverty. "Under the democratic government, there has been a consistent decline in these numbers. By 2010, the poverty rate had dropped to 60.9% and it continued to decrease, reaching 55.5% in 2020, as reported by the World Bank."

New humanitarian crisis looms in eastern Congo

Aid organizations fear a new humanitarian crisis in the restive eastern Congo region, where the renowned armed rebel group M23 is in the midst of a new advance that threatens to cut off a major city and leave millions of people struggling for food and medical help.

Eastern Congo has been beset by conflict for years, with M23 among more than 100 armed groups vying for a foothold in the mineral-rich area near the border with Rwanda. Some have been accused of carrying out mass killings. There's been an upsurge in fighting in recent weeks between M23 rebels and Congo army forces, and it comes as the United Nations plans to withdraw peacekeepers from the region by the end of the year. Tensions are also rising between Congo and Rwanda, with them blaming each other for supporting various armed groups. Congo accuses Rwanda of backing M23.

WHO ARE M23?

The March 23 Movement, or M23, is a rebel military group mainly made up of ethnic Tutsis that broke away from the Congolese army just over a decade ago. They staged a large offensive in 2012 and took over the provincial capital of Goma near the border with Rwanda, the same city they are threatening again.

The conflict has regional complications, with neighboring Rwanda also accused by the U.S. and U.N. experts of giving military aid to M23. There are also ties to the Rwandan genocide of 30 years ago, with M23 and Rwanda saying separately that they are fighting a threat from a Congolese rebel group that is connected to the Congo army and partly made up of ethnic Hutus who were perpetrators of the 1994 genocide.

There are concerns a new disaster could largely go unnoticed because of the attention on the war in Gaza and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.



CONGO-RWANDA TENSIONS

Relations between Congo and its eastern neighbor have been fraught for decades. Hundreds of thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees had fled to Congo, then Zaire, in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Among them were soldiers and militiamen responsible for the slaughter of 800,000 minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Two years after the genocide, Rwanda and Uganda invaded eastern Congo to try and root out what remained of those genocide perpetrators, which led to the toppling of then Congo President Mobutu Sese Seko. Tensions between Congo and Rwanda escalated in 2021 with the resurgence of M23 attacks on Congolese soldiers after nearly a decade of relative inactivity due to a 2013 peace deal. The presence of so many armed groups is believed to be connected to illegal mining, with eastern Congo rich in gold and other

minerals. M23 launched new attacks late last year and has ramped them up in recent weeks. The group is now threatening to take the key town of Sake, about 27 kilometers (16 miles) west of Goma. That could cause food and aid supplies to be cut off from Goma, which had a population of around 600,000 a few years ago, but now holds more than 2 million people, according to aid agencies, as people flee violence in surrounding towns and villages.

The violence has also sparked protests from the capital, Kinshasa, to Goma, with angry demonstrators saying the international community is not doing enough to push back against M23 and not taking a hard enough stance against Rwanda.

source//AP

Help us make a difference

Sticks and Stones supports **Revive Congo**, one of the many charities trying hard to help the people in Congo. Kindly visit their website to donate and check other ways you can get involved.



Revive Congo is a Non-profit organisation founded by Pamela Abiola and Lakeisha Kayoka in 2012.

The DRC youth make up more than 30% of the population; however, more than seven million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are denied access to education. This unfathomable number is due to factors such as lack of education institutes around the country, poorly trained teachers, and poverty is the most critical factor. Since parents cannot afford to send their children to school, this has a significant impact on the country as it means that the DRC children. These children are indeed the future, have no qualifications and are ill-equipped, thus denying them the chances of having a better future and breaking out of the poverty cycle.

We believe that lack of funds should not stop young people within the DRC from fulfilling their dreams. Thus, we are committed to creating opportunities for young people to learn the necessary skills and a chance to fulfil their future ambitions.

Revive Congo has been set up to ensure the advancement of education for young people in the UK and Democratic Republic of Congo. Though providing informal educational measures to develop the capability and capacities of their skill to independently and responsibly participate in society and to increase their employment prospects.

Our programmes intend to provide informal education on the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition to this, our summer youth programme provides an opportunity for young people to develop their project management skills, communication skills and financial management, as well as receive advice on careers, volunteering and academic opportunities. This programme has contributed to developing the skills and capabilities of young people to independently participate in society in the longer term.

We also promote the advancement of education for young people in the Democratic Republic of Congo through producing e-learning material to provide informal education on leadership and entrepreneurship skills. This learning resource seeks to develop the capability and capacities of their skill to independently and responsibly participate in society and to increase their employment prospects.

Our work has shown us that this approach is effective and transformational. We are seeking to ensure that our programme is accessible to children in the UK and in the DRC. Currently, we are aware of initiatives proposed which support the development of young people, however there are few services run by those of similar demographics to that of Revive Congo.

revivecongo.org

OUR PROJECTS

Summer Youth Programme

We organise annual summer Youth programmes, dedicated to all young people. Our free Programme covers various topics including: the History of Congo, the culture of Congo, project management and business, mental health awareness and career advice to help young people flourish in their community.

Charity Football Tournament

Revive Congo organises a football tournament once every year to encourage unity among young people, for our supporters to have fun and to also raise some money towards educating young people in the DRC.

Primary Education Project

Our goal is to provide access to primary education for children in the DRC by paying for school fees, as well as supporting our partner Mission Marie orphanage based in Kinshasa with developing an adequate learning environment for children living in poverty, particularly those in orphanages through providing equipment necessary to aid their learning or basic needs.



Haiti crisis deepens

Haiti was plunged deeper into chaos over the weekend after a deadly gang assault on the capital's main prison allowed thousands of inmates to escape. Dozens were killed in the 'massacre' and only around 100 of Port-au-Prince's National Penitentiary's estimated 3,800 inmates were still inside the facility after the assault, Pierre Esperance of the National Network for Defense of Human Rights said.

The Caribbean country's government declared a state of emergency - as well as a night-time curfew - in a bid to regain control amid a surge in violence. But there was no sign of the violence abating. Powerful gang leader Jimmy Chersier, known by the nickname Barbecue, said in a video posted on social media that armed groups in Haiti were acting in concert 'to get Prime Minister Ariel Henry to step down.'

This was after a visit by the country's controversial Prime Minister to Kenya to sign a deal that will see police from the East African country deployed to Haiti to lead a UN-backed law and order mission to the gang-plagued nation.

For years now, many have been calling for an international peacekeeping operation to enter Haiti to help the government crack down on systemic gang violence. Haiti's government is notoriously weak - kidnapping and other violent crime is rampant and gangs are described as much better armed than the police themselves.

Haiti's National Police has roughly 9,000 officers to provide security for more than 11 million people, according to the UN. They are routinely overwhelmed and outgunned by gangs, which are estimated to control up to 80 percent of Port-au-Prince. The UN Security Council in October approved the international police support mission to Haiti that Nairobi had agreed to lead. However, a Kenyan court ruling has thrown its future into doubt. Henry signed an accord in Nairobi with Kenyan President William Ruto on deploying the force. Ruto said he and Henry had 'discussed the next steps to enable the fast-tracking of the deployment,' but it was not immediately clear whether the agreement would counter a court ruling in January that branded the deployment 'illegal.'

Kenya gets involved in bid to try and restore order



Haiti, the Western hemisphere's poorest nation, has been in turmoil for years, and the 2021 presidential assassination plunged the country further into chaos. No elections have taken place since 2016 and the presidency remains vacant. Protesters have demanded Henry's resignation in line with a political deal that required Haiti to hold polls and for him to cede power to newly elected officials by February 7 of this year.

Around 1,000 Kenyan police officers are set to be deployed to Haiti in a bid to combat raging gang violence. Last year, Kenya volunteered to lead a multinational security force in the troubled Caribbean nation. Yet in January the High Court blocked the plan, ruling the government did not have the authority to deploy police to other countries without an agreement. It also ruled that the National Security Council lacks the legal authority to send police outside Kenya. However, many Kenyans are opposed to the deployment, arguing that security challenges need to first be tackled at home.

Ziggy Marley was key to bringing the authenticity in Bob Marley's movie



People had been coming to Ziggy Marley and his family for years with ideas about how to turn reggae icon Bob Marley's life into a movie. But it never felt quite right, until a few years ago when they decided to be the instigators.

"It was just a feeling," Ziggy Marley said of getting his father's life on screen in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "We explored it without knowing that we definitely wanted to do it because we needed to make sure that the people we did it with was the right people. People who respected what we wanted to do, the culture, the authenticity that we wanted."

This time, he said, they found the right partners. But it was a gamble for everyone: For Paramount Pictures and the other producers, wanting to do right by Bob Marley's story, his music and his message and worried what would happen if they didn't; For Kingsley Ben-Adir stepping into the shoes of an icon; For the family and friends who mined their memories for the more intimate story; And for a director, Reinaldo Marcus Green, who had to bring it all together and make it sing. Early signs suggest that for moviegoing audiences, it worked. "Bob Marley: One Love" has only been in theaters for a few days, but it is already making waves at the box office. On its first day alone, it made \$14 million in North America, a record for a midweek Valentine's Day debut.

Though critics have been mixed, ticket buyers responded with enthusiasm giving the \$70 million film the highest marks in exit polls. "It's such a rewarding validation of the thing that we set out to do," said Mike Ireland, the co-president of Paramount Motion Picture Group. "The audience is the ultimate arbiter of every movie and everything you put into the world. And to have them respond in that way? It's just fantastic."

The film focuses in on a specific period in Bob Marley's life, from 1976 to 1978. During that time of political turmoil in Jamaica, the reggae legend survived an assassination attempt, produced his seminal album "Exodus" in an 18-month exile in London, was diagnosed with cancer and returned to Jamaica to reunite with his family and stage the famous "One Love" concert. "I'm a movie guy," multi-Grammy winner Ziggy Marley said. "My selfish goal was to have a movie that had entertainment and action. I said to them, 'I don't want a boring movie.' And this period of time was the most active and entertaining."

The story and script were derived from stories from Ziggy Marley and the legend's widow, Rita Marley, played in the film by Lashana Lynch, and others who knew him well. They shot on location in the U.K. and Jamaica, where they worked with locals in front of and behind the camera, where many had personal or at least second-hand ties to Bob Marley.

Nigerian actor 'Mr Ibu' dies

Such was the comic genius of Nigerian actor **John Okafor**, popularly known as Mr Ibu, that he often didn't even need to open his mouth to make people laugh.

"I was chosen to play a doctor in a film one time and when I came to the set dressed as one, even without saying anything, all the crew just burst out laughing," he recalled. His death at the age of 62 has left family, friends and fans of Nigeria's film industry Nollywood across Africa in mourning. He burst onto the scene in 2004 with the movie Mr Ibu, which tells the story of the eponymous single father and his son as they journey through life, getting into a series of tricky, and hilarious, predicaments. "His facial expressions and his body were his biggest selling points," film director Babangida Bangis told the BBC, contrasting him to most comic actors who use words to make people laugh. "Mr Ibu was different as he doesn't even have to talk to elicit laughter, as his face just like Mr Bean [Rowan Atkinson] will do the trick," he said. Indeed, one of Mr Ibu's most iconic scenes and the one which introduced him to African audiences, was one in which he hardly said a word. In the film Mr Ibu, he and his son were returning home from a farm where they worked and they had a single bicycle. At first, the father let his son ride the bicycle while he walked.

But passers-by stopped them to ask why the son didn't show respect to his aged father by letting him ride. So they switched places. Then another passer-by said the father was wicked for allowing his young son to walk while he was taking it easy. So they both decided to walk. Then people called them senseless for walking while they had a bicycle. The film was so successful that there have been four sequels and Okafor has simply been known as Mr Ibu ever since. He will also be fondly remembered in northern Nigeria, as he was one of the few Nollywood actors to cross over into the film industry based in the northern city of Kano, known as Kannywood, which is generally looked down on by those from the south. His best known Kannywood film was the Hausa language comedy Hajiya Babba about two lost sons from southern Nigeria who traced their father in the north and began a new life with him.

Born on 17 October 1961, the actor hailed from the south-eastern Enugu state, which has produced a long list of Nollywood stars. Okafor didn't have an easy childhood, moving to another town early on in his life to live with his brother, and doing menial jobs to survive and support his family.

Reports say he suffered a cardiac arrest after battling diabetes for several years.



photo // nairaland



Like any profession, writing consists of its fair share of pitfalls. As an aspiring author you are privileged to avoid committing the mistakes of seasoned writers and authors who have come before you. In this edition let's delve into some of the common mistakes to avoid. While I wish I could turn back time and reverse these missteps, I can only offer advice based on my own experiences.

Poor Quality Work

Imagine ordering a birthday cake for a special loved one, it is deformed and unexplained mess upon delivery. Upon tasting it, you're met with sourness from baking powder mishaps and an overload of ingredients that ruin the experience. This scenario mirrors the disappointment of poor-quality work. I can't emphasise enough how costly this is. Back in 2014, when I became obsessed with releasing a book, I made the grave error of self-publishing a poor-quality manuscript. The internet is brutal; once your work is published, there is no way to retrieve it. The negative feedback I received nearly derailed my intention to carry on writing. I gained knowledge a lot and received a critical critique from a lady who urged that I republish the book I wrote as a second edition. So, readers, if you wish to embark upon this journey, prepare yourself to produce well-articulated, polished work. A lot of agencies and publishers perceive the onus is on you, the writer, to shape your manuscript and deliver a polished piece to avoid wasting their time. Submit an impressive, polished work to any of the publisher, whether traditional, vanity, or self-publishing. You owe it to your readers.

Reality vs Capacity!

My goodness, many authors have unrealistic expectations and hopes. They strive to write a 100,000-word manuscript. Their capacity is fantastic, but the time commitment is not anything they are prepared to put in. With my publishing experience spanning from 2014 to the present, I have been presented several manuscripts and even synopses by in-laws,

Common mistakes committed by aspiring authors

strangers, acquaintances, neighbours, and so on, all without compensation for my time spent reviewing them. Bless their hearts, but numerous people have unrealistic expectations about writing and publishing books. The advice I offer to you is to be realistic and specific about the genre you choose, characters, and writing schedule.

Reading culture

It's surprising how many aspiring writers neglect the importance of cultivating a reading culture. According to Dr Johnson, a man will turn over half of a library to make a book. Be prepared to put on your gloves and visit historical archives, best-seller lists, and read as much as possible. My father, a PHD holder, constantly advised me to read anything and anywhere. Whether it's a newspaper or a pamphlet, a novella, or a thriller, the key objective is to read widely and across genres. This craft requires the ownership of a home library. Since 2021, the non-profit organisation I manage, House of Mercy Middlesbrough, and the National Literacy Trust are working together to provide as many communities as could be reached with age-appropriate, easily accessible reading materials in their homes so that children may become proficient readers.

Kudzai is the author of numerous titles including the popular children's book series "Mischievous Ralphie in Action" with the best-selling title "Ralphie & the Lost Milk Bottle." The work led to the nomination of the 2016 ZIM Achievers Award Writer of the Year. Kudzai also won the Teesside Enterprise Award in 2015.



Not having a writer's tribe

Iron sharpens iron. It is a well-known biblical proverb. Forming a writer's tribe is something to aim for in this writing journey that is fundamental. You need a peripheral circle that are going to understand your intent of writing. It will be essential for you to study alongside published authors, take note of their mistakes, and listen to their suggestions. You might have to go to networking events held by local libraries or join writer's societies. I'm indebted to Kirsten Luckins, a local poet, who introduced me to a writers' club Tees Women Poet where I honed my craft and discovered my poetic voice. Through her, I've been able to take part in paid poetry engagements and obtained a lot of knowledge. The women gave me invaluable advice including performance delivery. Surround yourself with like-minded individuals who understand the writing journey. Seek. Remember, iron sharpens iron—having a supportive writer's tribe can significantly impact your growth as an author

When we inspire others to understand and value women's inclusion, we forge a better world. And when women themselves are inspired to be included, there's a sense of belonging, relevance, and empowerment.

"The story of women's struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist nor to any one organization but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights."

What does it mean to truly inspire inclusion?

To inspire inclusion means to celebrate diversity and empowerment on International Women's Day 2024 and beyond. International Women's Day (IWD) is a global celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. Each year, this day serves as a powerful reminder of the progress made towards gender equality and highlights the work that still needs to be done. In 2024, the campaign theme Inspire Inclusion emphasizes the importance of diversity and empowerment in all aspects of society. This year's campaign theme underscores the crucial role of inclusion in achieving gender equality. It calls for action to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and create environments where all women are valued and respected. Inspire Inclusion encourages everyone to recognize the unique perspectives and contributions of women from all walks of life, including those from marginalized communities. One of the key pillars of Inspire Inclusion is the promotion of diversity in leadership and decision-making positions. Women, especially those belonging to underrepresented groups, continue to face barriers when seeking leadership roles. By championing inclusion, organizations and communities can harness the full potential of diverse perspectives, leading to better decision-making and innovation.

Education and awareness play vital roles in fostering inclusion and empowering women. Through initiatives such as mentorship programs, educational workshops, and advocacy campaigns, individuals and organizations can create opportunities for women to thrive. By providing support and resources, women can be empowered to overcome obstacles and achieve their full potential.

IWD 2024 campaign theme this year is 'Inspire Inclusion'



Some of women in our region spoke about what IWD 2024 means to them

"IWD means nothing to me unless we talk about the women in Gaz, the women in the Congo, the women in Myanmar and all the other women impacted by genocide and ethnic cleansing"

Shahda Khan, Director at Borderlands Creative People and Places

"For me it's about moving from talk to action. The time is now to fully empower women to achieve their full potential."

Ngozi Lyn Cole, Coach, Leadership Catalyst

"It's about honouring and embracing women from all walks of life. Those before us, those present and those to come."

Moyondizvo Ella, Holistic Consultant

"I would like to see how we can change the language of 'inclusion' and create instead a sense of belonging and equity."

Janett Walker, CEO and Co-founder, Anti Racist Cumbria

"The international aspect of the day to me pulls together in Unity, all the aspects of womanhood experienced by women of different ages, cultures and races."

Sandra, CEO, Reuel Skincare

"For me, International Women's Day symbolises a global celebration of women's achievements, progress, and a call for gender equality."

Salha Kaitesi, Founder, Artistic Director and Executive Editor at Teakisi

"To me it means the world recognise us and our voices are being heard which gives us more confidence and a sense of worthy."

Pastor Sarah Masamba, VCMI UK

Africa Day, 25 May 2024

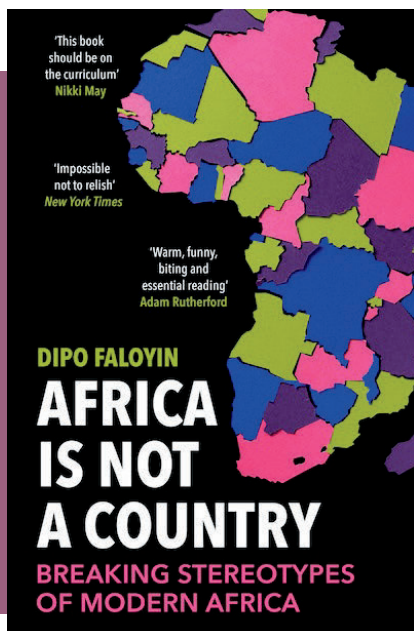
The annual commemoration of the creation of the Organisation of African Unity, formerly known as African Freedom Day and African Liberation Day, is held on May 25 every year. It is a day for Africans and those who love Africa to show the world that the continent is a force to be reckoned with and that the moment has come for African youngsters to define the Africa they want, on their terms, following centuries of being referred to in a negative and degrading manner.

HISTORY OF GLOBAL AFRICA DAY

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on May 25, 1963, the leaders of 30 of Africa's 32 sovereign republics signed a founding charter. The O.A.U. was established to assist numerous African countries in achieving transformation, freedom, and independence. The African Economic Community was founded by the O.A.U. in 1991, and the African Union was established by the O.A.U. in 2002. A total of 21 countries have joined the O.A.U. since its inception.

On May 23, 1994, South Africa joined as the 53rd member. African Liberation Day or African Freedom Day was observed in Ethiopia, South Africa, and Ghana on April 15, 1958, following the first Conference of Independent African States. In Ghana, African Unity Day replaced this holiday in 1963. Despite being renamed the African Union, the name and date of Africa Day have been preserved, and Africa Day serves as an opportunity to honor Africa's people and governments. Africa has a wide range of languages. Except for Ethiopia, every African country has one of the following official languages — English, Portuguese, French, or Arabic.

Apart from Ethiopia and Liberia, Europe colonized every country in Africa. After the colonized obtained independence, one of their official languages remained the colonizers. Liberia had previously adopted English as its official language after being founded by African-American settlers in 1847. Ethiopia was never colonized, despite being briefly occupied by Italy before WWII.



We recommend you read this book

Definitive proof that Africa is *not* a country. A lively, entertaining and informative portrait of modern Africa that pushes back against harmful stereotypes to tell a more comprehensive, personal story. A bright portrait of modern Africa that pushes back against harmful stereotypes to tell a more comprehensive story. You already know these stereotypes. So often Africa is depicted simplistically as an arid red landscape of famines and safaris, uniquely plagued by poverty and strife. In this funny and insightful book, **Dipo Faloyin** offers a much-needed corrective. He examines each country's colonial heritage, and explores a wide range of subjects, from chronicling urban life in Lagos and the lively West African rivalry over who makes the best Jollof rice, to the story of democracy in seven dictatorships and the dangers of stereotypes in popular culture.

In their own words



<https://reuelnature.com/>

REUEL

Driven by nature

REUEL is the home of gentle natural bodycare solutions. Our products deliver nature to you in the most luscious forms. Enjoy exploring our gentle and effective solutions. We formulate our products with natural plant-based ingredients and use organic formulas as much as we can to ensure you get nature in its most unadulterated form. Let us care for you the way nature intended.

My name is Sandra a.k.a Dr Reu and I am the maker of all products in the REUEL skincare range. I have a strong passion to deliver the benefits of natural ingredients to anyone and everyone I can convince. I make all products as small batches in my home. When it comes to ingredients, it is a high priority for me to source materials from ethical sources and I also put a lot of effort in adding a large amount of organic ingredients in my products. I started REUEL during my maternity leave as a simple desire to use natural ingredients because I wanted to give my toddler and baby's skin the best. I was also attempting to use natural shea butter on my hair. I bought a jar of organic shea butter and I was not keen on the smell so I bought a few essential oils to mask the natural smell. I tried many different scent combinations and from there started studying formulation of cosmetic products. I already have a PhD in material science so studying was not something new to me. I became obsessed with formulating and next thing I was making hundreds of experimental bars of soap in an attempt to formulate a good product.

Fast forward to today, I have a range of handcrafted soaps in the REUEL range I absolutely love and hope you will try and enjoy too. I love the soapmaking process and use it to 'relax'. My favourite ingredients are natural organic shea butter for its skin moisture benefits, apricot oil for its 'kindness' to all skin types, tamanu oil for its efficient and effective skin healing properties and sea buckthorn because it is just the king of oils.

I make these products with you in mind, with your skin in mind. I just have a strong empathetic side to me and that drives me to do good and I firmly believe that making these products for you is a form of doing good because they will do a whole world of good to your skin and to your well-being. I hope you enjoy using our products

With love,

Dr Reu



REUEL was born from a strong desire to deliver nature in everyday personal care products. The idea of harnessing nature and transforming it into tangible products that can help and benefit people is the vision of REUEL in its entirety.

Nature Demystified is a tagline we selected to sum up our purpose, which is to collect natural products in their rawest form and 'Demystify' them for you into easy-to-use and effective products that deliver gentle and effective results!

At REUEL we are passionate about bringing nature into your home and incorporating it in your personal care routine. There is a lot of power in nature and we have been gifted with so many enriched plants and extracts that can benefit us in a gentle and effective way. From oils and butters, to fruit extracts and plant powders, the list of natural ingredients that can heal and transform our skin and hair is endless!

Science has blessed us with the knowledge to extract magical benefits from nature, which we at REUEL appreciate and respect. We also, however, believe that the perfect balance to any bodycare regimen is being as close to nature as possible. This is why we passionately endeavour to use ingredients that are natural or extracted from natural sources. We source all ingredients from ethical sources with a high percentage of organic ingredients in our products.



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The summit is set to offer insightful discussions and unparalleled networking opportunities, attracting senior-level attendees from across the industry's spectrum. Its carefully curated content ensures it attracts a broad audience, from prospective clients to industry veterans.

VIV AFRICA 2024

VIV Africa 2024 will continue to focus on Poultry, alongside the introduction of Agriculture and Dairy. By providing high-quality content on these topics via dedicated conferences and seminars, we offer our attendees the tools to address the current challenges and solutions for agricultural and dairy businesses in Africa.

Agriculture

The potential in Africa is very high for agriculture, with 52% of the visitors of Poultry Africa 2022 mentioned in the survey that they are interested in horticulture and 50% is interested in crops. The agricultural sector accounts for 33% of the national GDP. In general, Rwanda's GDP has been growing at the rate of 7% since 2014. Tea and coffee are the major exports while plantains, cassava, potatoes, sweet potatoes, maize and beans are the most productive crops. Rwanda exports dry beans, potatoes, maize, rice, cassava flour, maize flour, poultry and live animals within Eastern Africa. About 61% of Rwandan soil is suitable for agriculture as the soils are fertile. Agribusinesses and agro-industries have been the drivers of economic growth. In sub-Saharan Africa, they account for 30%-45% of GDP.

Dairy

Dairy farms have a huge potential to grow on the African continent. There is a lot of focus from African governments on these sectors with the ambition to grow and develop. 48% of the visitors of Poultry Africa 2022 mentioned in the survey that they are also interested in Dairy. Following the last 3 editions it has become clear that Dairy plays an important role of the agriculture sector in Africa, and we look forward to welcoming both new sectors to the event.



KIGALI CONVENTION CENTRE (KCC)
 KG 2 Roundabout
Kigali, Rwanda



Education charity to shut down due to lack of funding, but you can still help

Success4All is an education charity established in 2006 with the founding principle of preparing children for a brighter future. Success4All's vision is for a future where a child's ambition is never limited by their social economic circumstances. In short, we don't want children to be excluded because of a lack of money. We work towards this vision through our mission which is to engage, equip and empower children and young people for a brighter future by providing opportunities that fuel their curiosity and encourage a growth mindset for learning beyond the classroom. We have 6 main services, all geared towards providing meaningful growth opportunities; our Learning Hubs, Volunteering, Clubs, School Holiday Clubs, STEM Engagement and Modern Foreign Languages exams.

As one of the few Black-led charities in the North East we are at the frontline responding to the unique challenges faced by our Black and Global Majority communities, because we understand and live the challenges they face. For Success4All Black and Global Majority communities make up a majority of service users. Each community's needs vary significantly as do the inequalities they face. Thus the approach we take to tackle educational inequality also varies. In an era where social consciousness is increasingly valued, supporting local black charities is not just an act of benevolence, but a fundamental commitment to justice, equity, and community empowerment. As a local Black-led charity we play a pivotal role in addressing systemic inequalities, fostering community cohesion, and uplifting marginalised voices.



How we got here

No one will be surprised to know that the biggest obstacle is the persistent lack of funding and resources. Black and local charities often operate within communities that have been historically marginalised and disenfranchised, resulting in limited access to financial support and philanthropic investment. This funding gap limits our ability to scale our service, hire qualified staff, and maintain sustainable operations, ultimately impeding our capacity to address the complex needs of our communities effectively. Success4All has been fighting for many years to get core investment to help strengthen our core in order to stop management staff needing to carry out delivery alongside strategic planning and grant writing etc. But that core financial investment unfortunately never came. And because this core investment never came, like many other small community charities we ended up juggling 3 to 4 grant funds in order to run one project. Since June last year we have been knocked back by a number of major funding applications and were then forced to juggle funding projects with sometimes 4 to 5 different funding sources, and when only 50% of these fund our true costs, we were having to squeeze an already limited financial resource.

Therefore at the end of Jan we hit the financial point where we were forced to call redundancies. At the end of May a few key staff within Success4All will be working in a voluntary capacity and for the first time in 18 years, we will not be running our summer holiday clubs. We have and remain deeply committed and embedded to serving our community and providing opportunities for the children and young people that no other charity can provide, we understand the profound impact these changes will have on our team and our wider community. We have always ensured that our services are a safe and nurturing environment, and like every garden over the tough winter season, we need to prune back and allow for new growth. Therefore, after May, Success4All will pause over the summer, allowing us to take a moment of reflection. During this time we are planning to arrange a number of consultation meetings where we are inviting our community and invested stakeholders to provide input on our future direction, as we haven't given up the fight. Despite these challenging circumstances, I remain committed to celebrating the successes and achievements we have made together over the past 18 years, even against all the odds.

What can be done?

Saving Success4All as it is now is no longer possible. The bell has been rung and we have started the process of winding back our services, ready for maintenance over the summer months. BUT, before we pause to reflect over the summer; we need help to keep running our Learning Hubs, online tutoring, and our young volunteer programme until the end of May.



SUCCESS4ALL

<https://www.s4a.org.uk/>



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Sheet: 35

Raye makes history at the Brits

The singer-songwriter, 26, who once described herself as a “little girl from Croydon with a dream”, grew up on a South London council estate. She is still paying off a mortgage for a rundown house in nearby Streatham which she shares with two of her three sisters.

Raye triumphed at the Brits in London’s O2 Arena by winning Album of the Year, for debut *My 21st Century Blues*, and Song of the Year, for *Escapism* featuring rapper 070 Shake. She also bagged Best New Artist, Songwriter of the Year, Best R&B Act and Artist of the Year.

It was the biggest haul by a single act the event has ever seen, as she smashed the previous best of four awards, recorded by Harry Styles in 2023, Adele in 2016 and Blur in 1995. Movingly, Raye called her grandma Agatha Dawson to the stage and broke down in tears, saying: “I want to thank my grandma for her prayers. My grandma is still awake until 3am praying for me and my beautiful sisters. I love you so much.”

But Raye is not your typical pop star. She is candid about her strong Christian faith and Bible study, and how these helped her deal with drug addiction and anxiety issues.

She has said: “There’s a world in which if I didn’t find faith again, I might not even be here. There’s a lot of demons trying to claw at you and drag you to somewhere you don’t belong, so I’m really grateful I have this faith. It’s honestly pulled me out of a really dark place.”

That moment with her gran on the Brits stage showed how close Raye is to her Christian family. They encouraged her talent in a pentecostal church, where her dad was a musical director and her mum a chorister.

Her mum, also an NHS mental health worker, and dad, an insurance firm manager, quit their jobs to help Raye after she split from Polydor in 2021. She said: “Their previous jobs make them ideal. My mum’s seen it all in 30 years in mental health. My dad would go into companies, learn about them and set them goals.”

Raye, real name Rachel Agatha Keen, was born in Tooting to a Ghanaian-Swiss mum and Yorkshire dad and has three younger sisters, two of whom are also chasing fame. Singer-songwriter Abby, who collaborated with Little Mix’s Leigh-Anne Pinnock on her latest solo album, and songwriter Lauren, both live with Raye.

SHE made Brits history by bagging a record six gongs – but 18 months ago Raye was battling to sell 100 tickets for church gigs.



photo // thebrits

Raye called her grandmother Agatha Dawson to the stage with her as she collected Album Of The Year at the Brits. ‘My middle name is Agatha and this is Agatha Dawson, ladies and gentlemen.’ She stood back and allowed Agatha, who looked beautiful in traditional Ghanaian kente cloth, to bask in the rapturous applause that filled all corners of the O2’.

'A' is for advertising



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In their own words

My route into coaching was unintentional as I enjoyed my playing days as a semi-professional footballer and was happy to be a spectator supporting my son. But after my 10 year old son Sean joined a local team which disappointed us by not joining a league as promised that season – with a couple of other parents we formed Darlington Young Bulls FC one cold night, in my friends kitchen in 2013.

The rest is history for Young Bulls as a club, however the journey had only just started for us. I was the Club's Welfare Officer for a few years, and soon completed my coaching badges. Starting at U11s in the TJFA Division 7, the team moved up year on year, winning a few trophies and promotions along the way and propelled up to Division 1 – albeit a few hammerings taken along the way by my team!

But winning trophies was not the motivation for me, it was building a footballing philosophy and developing players that motivated me! As a striker myself, I was conflicted with my team scoring perfect goals whilst being tactically balanced. The UEFA coaching badges helped to refine this playing philosophy, with a possession based approach which soon became a philosophy that defined my approach. My teams were however not always blessed with attracting "star players" at first, but the playing style soon paid off with higher division players choosing to join the team. At U15s we signed two girls who played for us for two seasons with one of them going on to play for the lionesses at U18 level!

Having coached my team from U11s to U23s and now as Darlington Young Bulls first team, I reflect on the many learning opportunities I got along the way. I feel there is never a bad coach out there, a good coach always has an eye to pick up good habits from other coaches. But I have witnessed many coaching colleagues though being driven by silverware! My exposure to coach and train at a high level including northern league, has not changed my coaching philosophy, but rather moulded me as a critical thinker tactically. My advice to any aspiring coaches is to know what your football identity is, your key short sharp points to make when aiming to improve players, the importance of discipline and that more than 50% of a players ability is not talent, it's determination and desire to do the simple things on the pitch better each time. This mindset is best moulded by coaches paying attention to developmental needs of each player, but also being honest and their feedback to players.

My football passion though is steeped deeply in fairness, equality and respect. Football is a sport for all, with no one inferior. Teaching children at a very young age about equality and fairness is just as important for them to become not just a great player – but also great human beings.



Joe Chidanyika

Darlington Young Bulls has given me that platform to both be an advocate for diversity as well as a role model to aspiring coaches and players.



photo // darlingtonyoungbulls

Darlington Young Bulls has given me that platform to both be an advocate for diversity as well as a role model to aspiring coaches and players. A good coach is not epitomised by how many trophies or games they have won, but how many players leave that training pitch happier each time they come to train or play matches.

I owe my development as a coach to none other than my club, fellow coaches, supportive parents, committee members and most importantly the kids who week in week out have trust in my sometimes outlandish tactics to improve them.



Pogba said the verdict was "incorrect" and he would "never knowingly or deliberately" dope.



Is this the end for Pogba's career?

Paul Pogba's career could be over after his four-year ban for doping, with the feeling that the 30-year-old Juventus midfielder never fulfilled his potential.

The former Manchester United player, who won the World Cup with France, was supremely talented and in bursts looked an absolute world-beater - but he never really showed it on a consistent basis. He has already said he will appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas), but if that fails, by the time he will be eligible to play again - August 2027 - he will be 34 and without a club.

So it will be a big ask for a player who has not managed the equivalent of 22 full league games in a season since 2018-19 to stay fit and motivated for such a long period of time. French football journalist Julien Laurens said on BBC Radio 5 Live's Euro Leagues show: "I remember seeing him as a 15-year-old and he was the best thing I've ever seen. He was so good, a generational talent, an absolute genius. He had a good career, he won four Serie A titles and the World Cup. It's a really good career. But he was so good that I thought there was no limit. I thought he'll get to the top, he'll win Ballons d'Or, he'll win more trophies and be the best player in the world. In the end we will always look back at his career and him probably the same way thinking what should have been."

Pogba was provisionally suspended in September after a drugs test taken after the opening game of the season found elevated levels of testosterone in his system. Last month, Italy's national anti-doping tribunal (Nado) confirmed the four-year suspension, which backdates to 20 August 2023 when he failed the test. Pogba said the verdict was "incorrect" and he would "never knowingly or deliberately" dope. He confirmed he will appeal and added "when I am free of legal restrictions, the full story will become clear". Laurens said: "The story being told is he's got a friend who is a doctor in Miami that gave him some food supplements which he took not knowing what's in them and that's what caused all of this. He could have easily said 'I was naive, I didn't pay attention and I should have mentioned it to Juventus' medical staff' and maybe the sentence would have been reduced.

Laurens said: "I think four years does [end his career]. He's almost 31. You add four years to that. For 18 months he has barely played because of injury. So it's not just four years without football, it's almost six years. I'm not sure he would want at 35 to be ready to go again. I think this is how it will end if this ban is upheld. If it's two years there's a chance at 33 someone gives him one last contract."

Juventus are thought to have cut his salary down to about £2,000 a month - as part of a collective agreement between clubs and the players' union. Pogba was earning £6.9m a year. Juve have the option to cancel his contract, which runs until June 2026 - more than a year before the four-year ban would be over. Italian football writer James Horncastle said: "Juventus have not put out a statement. Their sporting director, when he was last asked, said they'd await the final outcome of the process.

"There's still an appeal to go to CAS. Until that is exhausted we'll not have an official statement from Juventus on what actions they can take."



With just months to go before the 2024 Olympic Games, will Paris be ready?

Olympics organisers and French authorities have been sending mixed messages about the state of ongoing preparations for the 2024 Summer Olympic Games, sparking doubts and making headlines about whether Paris will successfully pull off hosting the Games. French President Emmanuel Macron admitted in December that authorities were preparing "a plan B [and] a plan C" for the opening ceremony, just in case it can't take place on the River Seine as planned.

Police protest Olympics plans

The Paris region's police force will be boosted from 35,000 to 73,000 officers to ensure security during the Olympics. But France's police unions have already been leading "Black Thursday" protests, denouncing the conditions under which they will be working and the lack of bonus pay. Unions say there is a lack of organisation and information about security measures from the interior ministry.

Construction largely on time

Some €4.4 billion has been earmarked to build new housing, stadiums and other sport venues for the event. The company in charge of all Olympics construction, SOLIDEO, said it had completed 84 percent of the work by December 31. With 59 out of 62 construction sites running as planned, SOLIDEO said "deadlines were met and budgets were kept".

A public transport headache

Some 15 million spectators are expected to attend the Olympics in the City of Light, which will put major pressure on Paris's metro and rail networks. Mayor Anne Hidalgo warned in November that the transport system "will not be ready and there will not be enough trains".

The capital's transport infrastructure is already under huge pressure, with commuters and tourists alike complaining of limited frequency, overcrowding and uncleanliness. "I don't think the metro will really be ready because there are still a lot of problems and a lot of work on the lines," said Philippe, one Paris resident. "I don't plan to take public transport during the Olympic Games because I think there will be too many people."

While only one of the six new metro lines will be ready by July, the Paris region transport authority will provide a navigation app to help visitors find the best routes and manage the increased influx of people on each line.

New UK visa immigration rules coming into effect



The changes, announced by Home Secretary James Cleverly in December, will be gradually introduced from March, the Home Office has confirmed. In a bid to cut the number of people legally arriving in Britain, the government is making it more difficult for overseas care workers and those on family and skilled worker visas to move to the UK.

And those who pay to use the NHS - which includes most visa applicants - will soon have to pay more than double per year to do so. The changes were announced in the wake of revised official estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which showed net migration - the difference between the number of people arriving and leaving the country - peaking at a record high of 745,000 in 2022.

Following pressure from Tory MPs, the home secretary said the rule changes will help give the "biggest ever reduction in net migration", and along with earlier proposals to limit relatives of foreign students, would bring down levels by 300,000 a year.

What are the new family visa rules?

An estimated 70,000 people came to the UK on family visas in the year ending June 2023.

From spring 2024, the government will raise the minimum income level needed to qualify. It was initially set at £38,700 - a sharp rise from the £18,600 currently required. However, after warnings that the new rules risked separating families, the government changed the minimum to £29,000.

It said the amount would increase in the future - first to £34,500 and then £38,700. Rishi Sunak said the full amount would be reached "in early 2025".

The Home Office also confirmed that anyone who wants to renew an existing family visa will be able to, without having to meet the new earnings threshold.

What are the rules for student visas?

In the 12 months to the end of September 2023, the government issued 486,107 study visas. Half of those were granted to Indian and Chinese nationals, with the next most popular countries for student visas being Nigeria, Pakistan and the US.

Those on postgraduate courses could also apply for visas for qualifying dependants: a husband, wife, civil or unmarried partner and children under 18. In the year ending September 2023, 152,980 visas were issued to dependants. But from January 2024, international postgraduate students will no longer be able to bring dependants unless their course is designated as a research programme.

Students who have already completed their degree can stay in the UK for two years - three years for those with a doctoral degree - to work under a graduate visa. In the year to the end of September 2023, 104,501 such visas were issued, excluding dependants.

UK Budget 2024: The highlights

The UK chancellor delivered a budget full of measures aimed at boosting Britain's sluggish growth and reversing his party's electoral fortunes. In doing so, he parked a fair few tanks on the opposition Labour Party's lawn ahead of a nationwide battle for Downing Street later this year.

National insurance cut

Hunt's much-trailed announcement — which virtually every UK newspaper heard about a day before the day, — was a two percentage point cut to national insurance, a payroll tax that pays for certain state benefits. That'll kick in next month. It's cheaper for the government to cut national insurance than income tax as it applies to fewer people. But some Conservatives worry that the public are less likely to notice a national insurance cut than they would a cut to income tax — and that they may have expected more from a chancellor with a very tricky election looming.

Non-doms abolished

The opposition Labour Party has long promised to abolish the non-domiciled tax regime — which allows UK residents whose permanent home is outside the country not to pay tax on earnings they make elsewhere. Hunt stole Labour's clothes by announcing the abolition of the scheme, to take effect from April 2025. Labour assumed a brave face, but it'll have implications for the party's spending plans if they take power.

Child benefit threshold rise

This felt like an actual surprise. Hunt raised a threshold at which high-income families have to start paying back their child benefit. Currently, if either partner in a couple earns over £50,000, they get less benefit; once a partner hits £60,000 it's withdrawn completely. These two thresholds are being moved in April 2024 to £60,000 and £80,000, respectively. Hunt says that will take 170,000 families out of paying the "high income" charge completely. Unlike most of Hunt's announcements, this one was largely kept under wraps until it emerged from the finance minister's mouth.



Windfall tax on energy firms extended

Much to the chagrin of the government's own Energy Minister Andrew Bowie, Hunt said a current windfall tax on the profits of big energy companies will be extended. The levy on oil and gas giants was introduced by the Conservatives in 2022 (though Labour are keen to claim credit for that one), and will now run until at least 2029.

VAT threshold rise

Hunt announced that the VAT threshold — the point at which small firms start paying the tax — is being raised for the first time in seven years. It's not a whopping lift of the threshold, however, but merely from £85,000 to £90,000 — a 5.8 percent increase.

Day-to-day public spending

The chancellor also had a bit of a surprise when it came to spending on Britain's struggling public services. He announced that day-to-day spending on services will continue to rise by 1 percent a year in real terms, despite multiple briefings that it would fall to 0.75 percent to pay for tax cuts. That still might not deliver a big difference. Expect public services to be more central in the debate over the coming days.

What wasn't in the budget

Alongside mooted cuts to income tax, rumors that Hunt could scrap inheritance tax were all the rage in Westminster until a few weeks ago. Neither appeared in the budget. Stamp duty — a tax on the sale of homes — lives to fight another day as well, despite some Conservative pleading for it to be axed.

The chancellor also opted to retain the so-called tourist tax — which saw VAT-free shopping largely removed after Brexit — despite some Tory calls to scrap it.

Conservatives hoping for a rise in defense spending were also left disappointed, with Hunt not mentioning it once. Treasury documents have revealed that capital spending on defense equipment will fall by £300m between this year and next.

source // politico

Sunderland City Council rolls out Digital Hubs to close digital divide

Sunderland City Council is rolling out 22 community Digital Health Hubs to tackle digital challenges such as limited connectivity, lack of access to digital devices and skills, and the cost barriers associated with going online. The project has secured a £581,893 investment from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda.

With one in three Sunderland residents having never been online or lacking basic digital literacy skills, the Digital Hubs aim to address digital exclusion by providing 'doorstep' digital services for people to take their first steps online. Each Hub not only offers free access to Wi-Fi and devices, they provide basic digital skills support and encourage progression in digital learning and skills.

Five of the Hubs are receiving gaming kits to set up Community Esports Hubs. Working alongside the British Esports Federation and believed to be the first of its kind, the project will raise awareness about the gaming industry and encourage people of all ages into educational and employment pathways. Some of the Hubs have also signed up with a local business, Born Good, to support people to donate devices.

Equal access

Councillor Paul Stewart, Cabinet Secretary at Sunderland City Council, said: "Digital inclusion is essential for ensuring equal access to opportunities, services and information in today's interconnected society. "The new Digital Health Hubs will boost confidence and digital skills, empowering residents to access more and better opportunities, actively participate in the economy and engage meaningfully in their communities."

Liz St Louis, Director of Smart Cities at Sunderland City Council, said: "From the very start of our Smart City journey, we envisioned a future where the digital divide is addressed collaboratively, ensuring that no one and nowhere is left behind. Our Digital Inclusion Plan is ensuring that everyone in Sunderland, regardless of their age or situation can reap the opportunities afforded by digital. "The UKSPF investment and our partnership with Boldyn Networks has played a crucial role in providing the necessary infrastructure and digital inclusion services in the heart of Sunderland communities."

The project is a collaborative effort between the Council's Smart City Joint Venture, a partnership with leading neutral host provider Boldyn Networks, British Esports Federation and 22 trusted community partners. It forms part of a wider scheme, Links for Life, which was launched across Sunderland to help communities improve their physical and mental health.



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The Last Word

Embracing the “never too late” philosophy is all about breaking limiting beliefs. How do you do that? The only way is to convince your subconscious that you aren't. The only way to do that is to take action every day. This doesn't necessarily have to be massive amounts of action. If you wanted to run a marathon, for example, you could do 5 minutes of exercise each day for a month and then as you get fitter, slowly increase the amount of time you spend exercising. It could be as simple as spending 10 minutes every day brainstorming ideas for a business. Take small concrete steps toward your goal and you'll find that sooner or later you start to banish limiting beliefs about your age.

Don't compare yourself with others

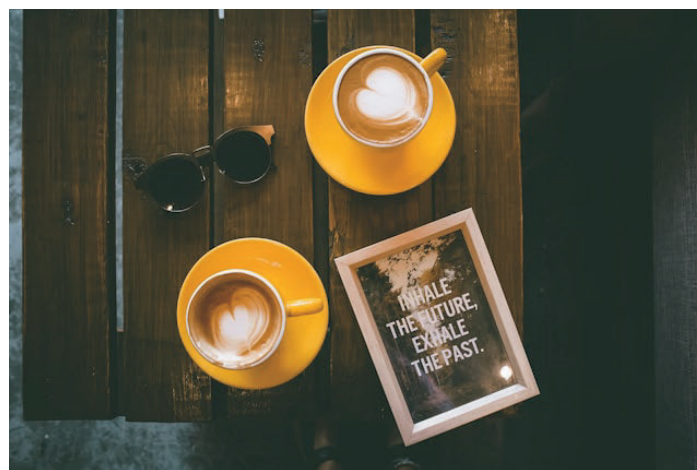
It's important to not compare your progress to other people and instead identify how you are getting better on a day-to-day, week-by-week, month-by-month, or year-by-year basis. Look at any challenges that come up in your path as opportunities for growth, no matter how difficult or how long it takes. Remember to keep in mind that your body is adaptable up until the day you die, which means that whatever challenges you face, you will get stronger in response to them.

Celebrate little progress

No matter how small or how insignificant, acknowledge and celebrate any progress you make. This is direct evidence that it's never too late to start on something and begin working towards it. How you celebrate your progress is entirely up to you, but even the simple acknowledgment that your efforts are paying off can work wonders. Focus on the journey and not the destination, many people choose to spend their older years squandering their potential instead of making use of the capabilities and wisdom that they've developed.

It's never too late to start anything

Sometimes it feels like the world is chock full of successful, beautiful, rich people, and somehow they're all younger than you. They've come out of nowhere. They've launched global clothing brands, they've monetised their YouTube channels, they've published their novels and they've made '30 under 30' lists, all without breaking a sweat. It's easy to compare against these examples and feel like we're behind where we should be. It's easy to feel like it's too late to start something. It's easy to give in and accept our lot in life.



Stop waiting for perfect conditions

Even with the best intentions, there are four words that have stopped so many good ideas in their tracks: 'If I only had...' If I only had more time, more money, more connections, more qualifications... then, maybe - just maybe - I might be able to do this thing. We don't say these words because of what we lack. We say these words because we are imagining the finished product first. We then imagine all the resources and time it will take to build that product, and it feels overwhelming.

To have the best chance of finishing that product, we need everything today. Or do we? Unfortunately, there is no such thing as perfect. If we are always waiting for things to be perfect, it will never arrive. We will never start. Even the world's best athletes know there will never be a day where they wake up truly pain-free. If they waited for perfect conditions, they'd never train. They'd never win. They have to play hurt, no matter what. If things aren't perfect right now, that's fine. Accept it. Lean into it. Just get started and improve what you do as conditions improve along

with it. If we start every day, we add to the momentum. If we sit down to do our work every day, we add to the momentum. If we accept there will be no perfect conditions, we add to the momentum. If we overcome procrastination, we add to the momentum. The act of starting, on its own, adds to the momentum. Not just for the task at hand, but for everything else we do. Buoyed by what we did in project A, we can often apply to project B. And so it continues. The only thing we need to do to keep the momentum going is to keep starting.