

# CONNECT



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# Mind the (skills) gap

New organisation set up to help secure Guernsey's economy

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CAREY OLSEN

INVESTORS



# Working 9-5? Not for much longer...

Skills shortages, a shrinking population, the impact of AI and an ageing workforce are all problems we've been warned about, and shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone.

Realising that the government can't solve them all, Susie Crowder pinned her dreams on the third sector, and within eight months 'Bright Futures' has become a reality.

They've now launched, they've got a fundraising aim of £100,000 which they are already on their way to meeting, and they've already had some enquiries about grants.

Bright Futures aims to bridge the skills gap by working closely with both the private and public sectors, and equipping people to work longer, and have more varied professional lives; Connect's Laura Clayton found out more about their plans.





## SPECIAL REPORT



Chris George

By Laura Clayton

**Buzzwords, and phrases like upskilling, artificial intelligence and longer working lives have all been kicked about for years as ways of addressing those problems – but it’s becoming more apparent that efforts to ensure we have a fit and capable workforce for the economy of the future have not got off to the best start; and now Guernsey is lagging behind other competing jurisdictions, like Singapore, which have been planning for the demographic changes many countries are now facing.**

Having noticed the growing gaps between the workforce we need and the workforce we are likely to have in the coming years, Susie Crowder wanted to do something about it.

As Chief Executive of Bright Futures, Susie acknowledges things are moving quickly, but she said there is no time to

waste so they had to get things off the ground while they had the momentum.

“There was lots of thinking time, and plenty of research and analysis before we really did anything, and as we went on that journey it became apparent that there are lots of gaps in the market that we could try and fill or assist in filling. Recognising that some of them are very big, it’s going to be quite an ambitious group that tries to take on this challenge. We’ve watched bodies like Skills Guernsey and we thought actually there’s a huge amount that we can do here, with not an unreasonable amount of money, bricks and mortar and a team, and we thought, ‘actually, we can do this’.

“What we’re trying to do is provide a good level of well informed, professional careers advice, mapping and mentoring. Then, when people have got a view of where they’re trying to get to, or where organisations or even government are

trying to get to, then they can apply to Bright Futures for some of the funding to enable some of that vision to become a reality.

“But the most important thing is we’re raising peoples’ awareness of the world around us as it’s changing, through things like Brexit, the introduction of artificial intelligence or the ageing population. I think over the next three to five years we’re going to anticipate a level of change that we’re just not used to, and we want to try to make sure we’re in the best possible place to make the most of that change.”

Bright Futures has a plan, and Susie is clearly passionate about upskilling the workforce for the future. Just eight months after the first idea was formed, the launch event at the end of June was well attended by professionals and politicians who can help steer the island’s economy for future generations. ▶



## SPECIAL REPORT



“One of our ambassadors is Professor Andrew Scott who produced ‘The 100-year Life’, and in that book he is very clear in saying we are not going to be able to live the type of lives we have previously, and we should celebrate but prepare for that extra life we’re going to have.

“But it is going to have an impact socially and it is going to have an impact economically, and we need to prepare for that as individuals, as governments, as businesses. On the one hand it’s great that we’ve got these medical advances that have enabled this longevity of life, but on the other hand it feels like we’ve been a bit slow off the blocks in making the necessary provision.

“What Bright Futures is trying to do is prepare individuals for the fact that they are going to be working longer. The skills that they’re going to need to fulfil those job requirements are going to have to be understood and embraced and this whole concept of genuine life time learning is going to become the norm I think rather than; ‘oh I went to school or

university and now I’m set up for life.’

“The other interesting development I think we’re going to see is people are going to start to have two or three or four different careers in their lives, whereas previously we perhaps just had one or maybe two. Then we’ve got things like the ‘gig economy’ coming, so lots of youngsters who are leaving the education system now are very much prepared to do their own consulting work or be sort of a floating contractor across many different organisations rather than go and join one of the big four and get a career for life.”

With such lofty aims, Susie has set up a team around her which includes some high-profile business people in the island including her husband Richard Crowder as Chairman, Paul Meader as Deputy Chairman, and Susie’s colleague at the GTA Professor Richard Conder. They are joined on the board by Dominic Wheatley, with Guy Hands agreeing to be Patron.

Justin Sykes and Justin Bellinger are acting as Special Advisors and Kay Leslie,

Sasha Jones and Kira Gorman are the support team.

Susie said she wanted to build a team of commercially minded people around her as she launches the charity.

“Business minded people, who recognise a challenge but were able and agile to work quite quickly in filling some of the gaps that we’ve highlighted, whether that be through expertise, through collaboration and research, or outward global reach on some of the global mega trends that are happening in this space.

“So, we built a team very carefully with people who got it and are passionate about it but also wanted to contribute to making sure Guernsey has a long term sustainable future.”

Looking to the future Susie acknowledges there are already organisations making similar efforts locally, but she wants to build bridges between existing provision and the gaps she’s identified. She said Guernsey should be looking to places like Singapore which has made great strides



## SPECIAL REPORT



in upskilling its work force.

“Guernsey has a great story to tell and we want to do our little bit to make sure that continues to be the case. There are some fantastic case studies out there whether it be Singapore, the stuff they’re doing in New York and San Francisco, or even closer to home in London, where they’ve really embraced and recognised the challenges on the horizon and what we’re trying to do is take the best bits of those and contextualise it to Guernsey so we can also continue to have that very privileged space on the global stage and continue to be a jurisdiction of choice for businesses to come and succeed here.”

To meet these aims, the fundraising target has been set at £100,000 and £25,000 has already been reached.

“We’re off to a good start, and we’ve got a lot of hands in lots of pies trying to get some more, but we’re realistically going to push hard, because the more we’ve got the more people we can help.

“We’ve been fairly successful so far in

getting a number of different donations in from corporates, or from high net worth individuals and that’s going to be a massive area of focus for the next 12 months.

“As for the careers bit, we’ve got an office at the Chamber of Commerce new business development enterprise centre which is fantastic but we’re also looking at different properties around the island to see where we could form the sort of careers hub where people can come - whether you’re a school leaver, a professional or a retired person and you walk into an environment where you think ‘gosh, this is exactly what I need’, so it’s got to be of a standard, and the right location, so that’s all in the mix at the moment.”

The team is already considering enquiries for grants to help pay for university and further education, from the tens of thousands of pounds which have already been donated but Susie was keen to point out that just because a lot of the support, and money donated, is coming

from the finance sector, the organisation is not just for that sector.

“We generally tend to talk about the financial services sector as being important on our list of priorities because it is the biggest contributor from a GDP perspective but we’re absolutely open to people who are working in horticulture or hospitality or in retail who might fancy a different career or need some funding to do something totally different. So, our doors are open to everyone.”

Of the two early enquiries for funding, a student has asked for assistance to accept an Oxbridge place, while a local teacher is interested in studying for a Masters.

“Working with existing training providers in the island, whether it’s the Guernsey College of Further Education, the GTA or other private organisations, we’re trying to position ourselves as being a collaborative hub if you like that pulls the needs of industry together through a single channel that then communicates and influences government to do what



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they need to do but carrying everyone with us. So, we're not competing with anyone, we're not standing on anybody's toes, we're a charity, we're doing generally for the greater good of Guernsey because we care about the sustainability of the island and we want William (the Crowders' young son) to come back here and have a career and a family of his own and enjoy Guernsey as we have.

"But Guernsey has a few fairly significant challenges on the horizon that need to be dealt with.

"I think AI is going to be something that affects each and every one of us, to different extents in different industries and the more prepared we are for that and the more we can play a part in directing that level of change or the degree of change the better.

"So, I think it's important that we start to see more relevant curriculum being taught both at elementary levels, secondary levels and across tertiary education because technology does play and will continue to play a massive role

in what we do and how we do it. I said at the launch that I think it's great that William was there at the launch - my little boy who is four - and it's great he'll go to school and he'll be taught Pythagoras's theorem, but it'll be fantastic if he also came out having a greater understanding of what compound interest was, and how it worked and how it's going to affect his life.

"So, one of the initiatives we're working with the States on is how we can create bridging programmes to prepare people for the world of work in a very practical way because a lot of the older institutions are so focused on the academic grades that young people get, or even adults get, but don't really focus so much on what the world of work actually needs and so again I think there's a bit of a gap that Bright Futures can help locally in bridging. The way we've tried to describe it to others when we've talked about it, to say 'we're going to offer bridges and ladders, and maybe some snakes for people who want to take a back step, so people can move around their careers as and when

they want to'."

As a busy working mum, running her home and maintaining a balance between work and family life, Susie said she has always wanted to solve problems.

"I've always been a really busy, driven person and I've got a 'can do' attitude, but I recognise to do something like this you need an amazing team.

"In 12 months' time we'll look back and publish our first annual report. We're going to be totally transparent in talking about how much money we've raised, how many people we've helped, where have they gone, what have they done.

"In that, we'll produce a research report on what's going on in the world in this space right now, to raise peoples' awareness, and then also attach a copy of the skills analysis in there so people can take it away and use it as they wish because it's just about trying to help."

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