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North East
Local Enterprise Partnership



Nigel Wright is a leading specialist recruitment agency based in the North East of England, serving Newcastle upon Tyne, Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Durham, Darlington and London.

Mark Simpson, Group Executive Director, Nigel Wright

Can you tell me how many recent graduates from North East universities work at Nigel Wright and what their roles are?

We currently employ five graduates from North East universities. Three have returned to the region having studied elsewhere and two, who are not originally from the North East, have chosen to stay and work here. We have one graduate working in our marketing team and the rest are in the recruitment side of the business.

How would you describe Nigel Wright in a nutshell?

Nigel Wright is the largest and most specialised professional recruitment company in the North East of England and the number one consumer sector recruitment specialist in Europe.

What are the benefits to a company like Nigel Wright to retaining graduate talent?

We strongly believe in training and developing talent in our own organisation rather than recruiting it from elsewhere. Most of the people we develop, we develop ourselves. As a global brand, we expect high quality and we invest in our staff to make them the very best.

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And what are some of the benefits for graduates of staying in the North East for their careers?

The standard of living in the North East is significantly better and it provides good opportunities for career development if you apply yourself. You definitely get a good quality of life. London can be a tough place to live, especially for new graduates just starting in their careers.

What can businesses do to encourage graduates to stay in the region?

I think organisations need to take ownership of the development of their staff and not be frustrated at a lack of skilled people knocking on their door. It's important to invest in training and build staff internally.

We like to show people how they can build their careers and benefit from training at Nigel Wright, it's not just about encouraging graduates to stay immediately after leaving university - but for the long term. As an organisation we have adapted and changed to make ourselves a more attractive employer to current graduates. We provide more flexible working and recently introduced an initiative that gives staff a four-week paid sabbatical for every five years of service.

What kinds of career paths can graduates follow at Nigel Wright?

Our initial goal is to ensure our staff are experts in recruitment and their chosen markets. From there, people can develop into managerial and leadership roles.

We offer training and development opportunities to make that happen. I currently have 12 managers and directors working under me, all but one have developed into those roles through the organisation. That's not to say everyone needs to follow that route. We have lots of people that are happy to be experts in their chosen area and stay at that level. We also support people that want to move to different part of the business and expand their skill set.

What are the benefits to Nigel Wright of being located in the North East?

We have established ourselves as the go to recruitment brand in the region. If you work hard you can really stand out from the crowd in the North East. We have access to a good quality workforce here too. I don't see any differentiation in talent between here and London for example, particularly amongst

graduates. Our IT/digital, manufacturing and finance sectors are all booming in the North East. There is no shortage of opportunities for the right people. Firms would benefit from investing more in recruitment and staff development to ensure graduates and other potential employees are aware of the opportunities.

Fern Couchman works as Managing Consultant - Finance North East, Nigel Wright

Which University did you graduate from and what did you study?

I went to Newcastle University and did a four-year course in International Business Management with Mandarin Chinese. I spent the third year of my course studying Mandarin in Shanghai, which was a fantastic experience. I started working at Nigel Wright one week after my final exams and I've been here four years now.

Are you originally from the North East?

I'm originally from Greater Manchester. I was born in a place called Shaw; the nearest major towns are Oldham and Rochdale. When I left for University I was looking for a place to start a new life.

Why did you decide to stay in the North East after graduating?

In my first year at University I lived in Newcastle city centre. Whilst it's a small city, it has everything you could ask for, great food, entertainment and nightlife. For my second year I moved out of town and started to build relationships outside of university. I started working and created a really nice life for myself. I found I was really settled in the North East and I didn't want to leave.

Do you think the North East offers graduates and young people good career opportunities?

I do think the North East offers graduates a lot of good career opportunities. I think where we let ourselves down is that we don't advertise them well enough. The North East is home to some big companies and we're very strong in sectors like oil and gas, manufacturing, and sales and marketing. There's a lot of investment going, which is creating some great opportunities. I just think we could be better at advertising them and making new graduates know about the strong career paths in the North East.

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Outside of work, what do you enjoy most about living in the North East of England?

The biggest thing I love is being so close to everything; the city, coast and countryside are all on the doorstep. I love hiking in the countryside with my partner and the Cheviot Hills, Holy Island and lots of National Trust properties are very close by. I'm a big foodie and there are great places to eat out too, like The Broad Chare and Peace and Loaf in Newcastle. There's a real homely vibe to the city. I'm never bored because there's always something to do.

Would you say the North East offers a good work/life balance?

I would say most organisations in the North East offer a good work life balance. Through my job I work with a lot of businesses in the region and they offer great flexibility. In my own role if I work early or late over time, I then have the option to be flexible with my hours and take time out where I need. Nigel Wright also introduced a four-week paid sabbatical for staff that have worked at the organisation for five years, in recognition of people's commitment and hard work. This is alongside our annual holiday allowance and bank holidays.

The other thing to keep in mind is the transport network in the North East and the ability to travel easily between places. Commuting is far less painful here. Working in a vibrant city centre also means I can meet friends straight after work too.

What has staying in the North East meant for your career?

It's the best decision I've ever made. I started working for Nigel Wright one week after my final exams and I've been able to grow and progress quickly as part of a supportive and structured agency environment. I've had three different steps up in a three-four year period. I now manage a team and have a clear path for progression. Staying in the North East has allowed me to work for a small to medium sized enterprise that has supported me to stay engaged and continue to learn.

What are the benefits to employers if more graduates stay in the region?

Graduates are keen to succeed and bring with them fresh ideas and talent. They can also help organisations to be more progressive. It's important to retain talent in the North East and with lots

of buildings and offices being created for young professionals, we're seeing more of that happen.

Graduates are like sponges; they are keen to learn and can be molded to meet the needs of a company. They can prove to be a key asset. There are lots of jobs in the North East and the need is there for more graduates. Companies can see the benefits of recruiting a graduate in a short space of time.

Would you encourage other graduates to live, work and stay in the North East?

Definitely. Every young person that has done further education is looking to enhance his or her lives. The North East offers the chance to secure a long-term career and enjoy a good work/life balance. It's important to want to want to achieve and progress but life is too short to spend it all focused on work.

Nigel Wright has seen a huge change in recent years. We've introduced dress down Fridays and we do a lot of socialising as a company. It's really helped graduates feel like they're being listened to and shows the company cares a lot about its employees.

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