

Investing in Employee Ownership

New opportunities for finance in the UK's fastest growing business sector

Speaker biographies



Deb Oxley OBE, Chief Executive, Employee Ownership Association

Deb is Chief Executive of the Employee Ownership Association (EOA), the UK's leading voice on employee ownership, representing a sector that contributes between £30-40bn a year to UK GDP. It is also a membership organisation for UK businesses of private or public sector origin, that are wholly or partially owned by their employees.

Deb has over 30 years' business experience across private and public sectors and latterly after founding and running her own small business for 10 years, joined the EOA in 2012, becoming Chief Executive in 2015. Having recently led a national inquiry into the economic and social effects of employee ownership, Deb is now leading a programme of work to realise the recommendations of the inquiry findings, the Ownership Dividend.

She is a member of the Government Mutuals Advisory Group, is a Champion for the Inclusive Economy Partnership – a group which is convened by DCMS and the Cabinet Office and a member of the Managing Partners Forum.

In 2019 Deb was awarded an OBE for services to employee ownership and social enterprises.

David Petrie, Head of Corporate Finance Faculty, ICAEW



David leads the ICAEW's public policy engagement, including most recently on the UK government's Industrial Strategy and the Patient Capital Review.

He initiated and led a task force of 22 of the UK's leading business organisations, including the British Business Bank, to devise the Business Finance Guide. David also led a high-profile initiative with HM Government together with London Stock Exchange, the Takeover Panel, AFME and other organisations, on Cyber Security in Corporate Finance.

David is an experienced corporate financier. Formerly with PwC, he has advised on numerous corporate finance transactions, from smaller buyouts to large capital markets transactions, as well as infrastructure projects and complex outsourcing contracts.

Under David's leadership the Corporate Finance Faculty has grown to include more than 7,000 professionals in more than 80 member organisations.

David holds a BSc (Jt Hons.) from the University of Durham, an MBA with distinction from the University of Bath, and the ICAEW's Diploma in Corporate Finance.

Martin Coward, Chief Risk Officer, Unity Trust Bank



Martin joined Unity Trust Bank in 2018 with over 20 years' experience in banking. He specialises in overseeing the Bank's risk functions, which includes identifying, managing and responding to traditional uncertainties, such as credit and operational risk, alongside evolving risks, including digital banking, data integrity and financial crime.

Martin takes a collaborative approach to leadership and works closely with experienced department heads and internal teams to ensure that outcomes for customers and shareholders are at the forefront of everyone's thinking.

As well as having primary responsibility for cyber risk and credit risk, Martin maintains a particular focus on operational resilience and financial conduct risk at Unity, to enable the Bank to continue to provide the best possible service to its customers and expand its services and lending capabilities.

Martin spent 24 years working at HSBC as a commercial lender to a wide range of businesses, across different sectors. Over that time, Martin experienced several recessions and gained valuable insights from the response of the financial market and commercial customers in both growing and contracting economies. As a result, Martin has a deep understanding of the economic challenges facing many types of businesses.

Ewan Hall, Director, Baxi Partnership



The Baxi Partnership group, which is itself employee-owned, has helped over 100 businesses to become employee owned.

Ewan advises on and designs commercial and corporate projects, specialising in transition, governance, ownership and financial structures for employee-owned organisations, and in supporting employee-owned organisations post-transition. He has been advising on employee ownership since 2003 and has worked with dozens of employee-owned organisations.

Ewan began as a corporate solicitor with the firm Wright Johnston & Mackenzie LLP, where he ultimately became a partner and head of the corporate group.

He holds a number of trustee / trustee director posts with employee owned organisations and is regularly asked to speak at employee ownership events across the UK.

Peter Matthews, Partner, Advisory, Capital for Colleagues



Peter has over three decades worth of experience of working with consulting and advisory businesses, investment management businesses, professional services and blue-chip clients.

He has particular expertise in the field of employee ownership and has worked with employee owned businesses in the UK, Ireland and the United States for the past 20 years. In his current role of Partner, Advisory with Capital for Colleagues, he advises companies that want to become employee owned, providing structural, cultural or financial advice.

He also works with several of the companies currently in the C4C investment portfolio, helping them to develop as successful employee owned businesses.

Peter has the additional responsibility of acting as a Trustee for a number of Employee Ownership Trusts (EOTs).

Eric Leenders, Managing Director - Personal Finance, UK FINANCE



In his role as Managing Director, Personal Finance, Eric is responsible for all personal finance matters, including; credit cards, complaints handling, conduct regulation, consumer credit, mortgages, payments, savings and supporting vulnerable customers across retail and private banking portfolios.

Eric is accountable to retail, private and mid-tier bank CEOs for development and delivery of sector specific strategies, maintaining active senior-level engagement with politicians, regulators, consumer advocates and policy makers on a range of issues to support the economy, serve customers better and earn trust in the sector.

Eric is a Chartered Banker with an MSc in Banking, he is a non-executive Director at the Buckinghamshire Building Society (chair of risk committee) and Registry Trust Limited and also holds a non-executive role on the Government's Regional Growth Fund.

Baroness Bowles of Birkenhead



Sharon is a Liberal Democrat peer and a member of the Economic Affairs Committee. Her main areas of expertise are financial services, corporate governance and intellectual property.

She was a member of the European Parliament, chaired its Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee and was influential on its legal affairs committee. She was internationally listed as one of the most influential people in financial services regulation.

Sharon chaired the Ownership Effect Inquiry, an independent business-led Inquiry led by the EOA, in partnership with the eaga Trust and the UK's largest employee-owned business the John Lewis Partnership – supported by Cass and Manchester Business Schools.

Sharon has an academic background in science and mathematics and a professional qualification as a European Patent Attorney. She is a non-executive director of the London Stock Exchange Plc and a member of the international Systemic Risk Council.

David Chick, Head of Credit Underwriting, Unity Trust Bank



David has been with Unity for two years, heading up the Underwriting Team which assesses all lending proposals and manages risk within the loan portfolio.

Previously, David had spent 9 years with the Royal Bank of Scotland as Head of the Asset Based Lending Team in the Midlands region and 27 years with HSBC in a variety of roles, including Corporate Banking, Credit & Risk and Leveraged Finance.

Nigel Mason, Senior Associate, The RM2 Partnership Ltd



Nigel is a Senior Associate of RM2, a leading adviser on EOTs and employee share schemes, having transferred RM2 to employee ownership in 2019. Since its foundation 26 years ago, RM2 has implemented over 1,300 employee share schemes for private companies and arranged EOTs with an aggregate value of £400 million, many involving third party finance.

A mathematician and banker by training, Nigel became interested in employee ownership after a study tour of ESOPs in the US. He combines technical knowledge of the subject with practical, commercial and financial insights.

He advised HMRC on the design of the EMI and SIP schemes in 2000, led Equiniti's employee share plans business for many years, and has advised the Employee Ownership Association and the John Lewis Partnership on policy, including the EOT legislation. He is the author of several papers for think tanks.

David Robinson, Chairman, Richer Sounds



David is Chairman of specialist retailer Richer Sounds, having arrived at the company in 1983 and becoming Managing Director in 1991.

Richer Sounds is recognised by the Guinness Book of Records for the 'highest sales per square foot' of any retailer in the world, and for two consecutive years was placed third and second respectively in the Sunday Times '100 Best Companies to Work For'. Richer Sounds has been awarded the prestigious 'Best Retailer' award from Which? five times, the most recent being in 2019. The company was also honoured to be granted a Royal Warrant by HRH The Prince of Wales in 2011.

David is also Managing Director of JR Properties, a private property investment company in both the commercial and residential markets. He is a Trustee of the Persula Foundation, which offers practical help and support to charities.

In 2013, he joined the Board of Great Places Housing Group, one of the largest, most successful and innovative social housing associations, with over 19,000 homes in the

North of England. In 2018, David also became Chair of Cube Homes, Great Places commercial home building subsidiary.

In 2019, David led the transition of Richer Sounds becoming employee owned, when Julian Richer passed 60% of shares into an employee ownership trust for all employees.

Mike Swinburne, Finance Director, Cambridge Weight Plan



Mike trained as a Chartered Accountant with Deloitte Haskins & Sells in the 1980s. After a period working in Deloitte's Milan office he moved into industry.

He joined the medical devices group Smith + Nephew in 1992 and worked there for many years in a variety of Financial Controller and Finance Director roles across its UK and European businesses. He helped deliver a number of systems implementation and logistics projects as well as guiding their Italian subsidiary through the introduction of the Euro.

He joined Cambridge Weight Plan in 2008, and worked closely with external advisors, lenders and the owners to help steer the company through a debt-funded sale of the business into employee ownership. This was a £46m transaction carried out in two stages in 2010 and 2014, with the company becoming debt free in 2018. Cambridge Weight Plan was awarded the EOA "Employee Owned Business of the Year" award in 2019.
