

# LEADING THE WAY IN THE PEOPLE GAME



George Osborne, Mervyn King and the usual grim-faced suspects might be warning us all about years in the recessionary deep freeze... but it's not like that for every Northern Ireland business.

Here's a sign which can't be bad. One of our leading higher-end recruitment specialists is doing very nicely, thank you. In fact, Clarendon Executive has been gearing up for growth over the past last.

"We've got the right team in place to grow this business, and that's what we're doing," says Clarendon's founder and CEO, Ciaran Sheehan, a familiar face around the Northern Ireland business community and a man who knows the value of networking to his business.

"Getting the right people at the top of a business is critical, and having been through a few years of cost cutting and rightsizing, we are seeing many businesses focusing on getting the right team around the top table."

"The success of Clarendon Executive's campaigns to build its market intelligence and networks of people seeking to return to Northern Ireland over the last five years has populated our knowledge base with many more really talented people. So the calibre of people on the shortlists we present is so strong, appointments are almost inevitable. And that helps our reputation and clients come back for more."

"We've been working on a series of key appointments for leading businesses here in Northern Ireland, we're definitely seeing things grow and we're also seeing a very different marketplace develop here."

"Not only have more good people been coming back to Northern Ireland - from London, the rest of GB and further afield - but what we're now seeing is top candidates, some of whom have never even been here before, showing an interesting in opportunities to be part of what is happening in Northern Ireland."

"With political stability, Northern Ireland, really has a lot to offer. The quality of life is excellent and although there are challenging times, there are plenty of amazing companies and success stories here, many of whom offer great career potential. We deal with clients every week who are leading their markets, are competing on a world stage, are just getting on with things. I guess we just need a lot more of them if we are really going to address the issue of rebalancing the economy."

Alongside experienced operators Claire McKee and Joanne McAuley, Sheehan

completes the three-strong team and a support team that drives Clarendon Executive forward. It's a company which is clearly hungry for new business opportunities, as well as one which is well regarded by its customers.

Consider the words of one 'outsider' who has arrived in Belfast to take up a key post - Nigel Robbins, ex-MTV senior executive and the new Commercial Director at UTV Media Plc.

"From the outset, my interaction with Clarendon Executive helped convince me that not only was this the right assignment for me, but that Northern Ireland was the place to be."

"Both Ciaran Sheehan and Joanne McAuley had a very clear understanding of the UTV Media culture, deep knowledge of the priorities demanded of the role, and the calibre of candidate required for the task."

"The people of Northern Ireland are rich in spirit and humour, and you never have to travel far for fresh air and beautiful scenery. It's a remarkable part of the world. As a former MTV exec, I felt very proud seeing how the entire city of Belfast embraced the recent EMAs and made it such a success."

"On the business front I consider myself fortunate, as I'm working with a forward-thinking media organisation that has strong foundations on which to build. Doing business here, and in the Republic, is a bit like doing business in Australia, for me at least. People don't take themselves too seriously, but they certainly take their business seriously and there's a lot to be said for that approach."

The Clarendon Executive team has picked up a few awards for what it does. Just a couple of months ago, Clarendon Executive was named Business Consultancy of the Year at the UTV Business Eye Awards...a major accolade in that the firm was up against accountancy groups, property firms, environmental consultancies and others.

It has also been named Recruitment Innovator of the Year for two years running at the Irish News Workplace & Employment Awards, and was Highly Commended at the recent CIM Marketing Awards.

"Apart from a really strong team of professional recruiters, we've one of the most comprehensive databases of



top-tier executives in existence around these parts, and we've got some great connections into the ex-pat network... something we've worked hard to develop over the years," adds Sheehan.

"There's no doubt that companies here, like anywhere else, are prepared to pay for the right people...and to work to find those people," he adds. "It's an attitude which has grown here over recent times and continues to grow."

"The salary gap used to be a big issue here, but that's not really the case any more."

Ciaran Sheehan, along with his colleagues, is one of those who (thankfully) takes a glass half full approach to Northern Ireland and its economic development.

"We've a lot to be optimistic about," he says. "The MTV Awards, as Nigel Robbins says, were amazing, and we're looking forward to the opening of the Titanic Project, and impact of the Derry City of Culture bid. But we've also got some first-class outward looking businesses in bio science, technology and software to name but a few sectors."

"It's hard not to be really impressed by what's going on down at the NI Science Park for example... home to some wonderful small companies with huge potential."

Clarendon has built a reputation as the leading, or one of the leading, recruiters of higher end management talent. In fact, Sheehan and McAuley, in particular, rank as two of the highest profile head-hunters in the local space.

Get a call from one of them, the rationale goes, and you're likely to be in the frame for a top-end opportunity elsewhere.

But the company - based as its name suggests at Belfast's Clarendon Dock development - doesn't just deal with locally-based companies. It has also

recruited key people for the public sector and government agencies with Claire McKee offering real expertise. And it has looked after recruitment programmes for some leading FDI projects setting up shop here.

Clarendon Executive has embraced the social media revolution, and puts LinkedIn in particular to very good use. Ciaran Sheehan, as mentioned earlier, is no slouch when it comes to making and maintaining contacts in the business community here. And the team have built a strong online platform - the Clarendon Executive Knowledge Network - a leading online business discussion forum that has contributors from across the business spectrum.

Just this month, Clarendon Executive partnered with the Chief Executive's Club at Queen's University to stage a 'Going for Growth...Time For Radical Change' debate chaired by BBC NI's Business & Economics Editor, Jim Fitzpatrick.

Claire McKee stated "This was the third debate we have organised in partnership with the Chief Executive's Club, and we are proud to support debates on economic issues. These lively debates have shown us that there is no shortage of ideas and an understanding of what this region needs to do to grow, putting those into action is the challenge".

She adds "All of us want to see a strong economy - an efficient and cost effective public sector with good front line services and a bureaucratic environment that allows businesses to grow and flourish. Having worked with many great businesses over the years it is clear that there is no shortage of entrepreneurial spirit out there. Growing businesses need a steady supply of good people, particularly at senior level and we have shown that we are well up for the challenge of finding them!