

# Connections

*The legal magazine for the Northern Ireland business community*

ISSUE 2 Spring 2011

## **THE NEW BRIBERY ACT**

*What does it mean for business in  
Northern Ireland?*

## **DRIVING INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT**

*Can asset backed vehicles  
plug the spending gap?*

## **BRANCHING OUT**

*McGrigors opens in Qatar*



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Outstanding Service  
to Business



## Hello

Three months have flown by since our inaugural edition of *Connections*, which I am pleased to say has received a very positive response. Thank you for all your feedback.

In this edition we take an in-depth look at the new Bribery Act and its implications for Northern Ireland businesses. The Act is arguably more discussed than understood. Although much of the debate and media interest seems to have focused on corporate hospitality, the legislation is far more wide-reaching than that, creating one of the most comprehensive regimes for tackling corruption anywhere in the world.

Having attended two McGrigors seminars at which Richard Alderman, Director of the Serious Fraud Office, has spoken to our clients about the new regime, I have little doubt that the enforcement agency will be looking beyond the City of London in seeking to use its new powers, so there can be no room for complacency in Northern Ireland.

We also follow up our focus on infrastructure in the last edition to go into greater detail on 'ABVs'. This new financing tool for infrastructure development seems to be gaining traction in GB, and we think it could also create opportunities for the public and private sector alike here.

Finally, we have a timely article on ways in which businesses can combat protests if the potential 'summer of discontent' materialises, plus some exciting news about our new office in Qatar.

As always, if there are topics covered which you would like to know more about, or if you think there are additional areas we should be covering in relation to the Northern Ireland business community, please don't hesitate to contact us.

All the best and happy reading.

**Paul McBride**, Partner and board member of McGrigors

# Connections

## ISSUE 2

- 03 In Brief**  
A round-up of news and comment
- 07 Smart Exit**  
The legal considerations when floating a business
- 08 The new Bribery Act**  
What does it mean for you?
- 10 Driving Innovation**  
Can ABVs work in Northern Ireland?
- 12 Protest Power**  
Legal options to mitigate against public unrest
- 14 In Person**  
With Professor Peter Gregson of Queen's University Belfast
- 15 Strength in depth, strength in breadth**  
McGrigors expands into Qatar



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# in brief

## McGrigors scoops BelTel award

**M**cGrigors has won the 'Outstanding Service to Business' award at the Belfast Telegraph Northern Ireland Business Awards.

Joanne Stuart, Chair of the Institute of Directors in Northern Ireland and a member of the judging panel, said "There is no doubt that through its unique market insight McGrigors is providing outstanding service to its impressive client list. The Firm is helping Northern Ireland businesses expand into GB and vice versa and [this] has meant that deals of a size and scale usually handled by London City

law firms are being carried out in Belfast, which is great news."

Commenting on the award win **Paul McBride**, a Belfast-based McGrigors Partner and board member, said the Firm was "Absolutely delighted." He continued, "We are thrilled that the judging panel saw fit to give such a clear endorsement of our proposition to clients. We strongly believe that, through our focus on core industry sectors and our unrivalled access to legal expertise in all three UK legal jurisdictions, we have a genuinely unique place in the Belfast market. We hope that,



through this, we can play our part in servicing those local, national and multinational clients who will help Northern Ireland prosper."

The gong was presented at a ceremony at the Ramada Hotel in Belfast in April.



## Northern Irish workers 'fittest in the UK'

**N**orthern Ireland has the lowest sickness absence of any UK region, according to figures published by the Office for National Statistics.

The data, which reflects the number and percentage of employees absent from work due to sickness or injury throughout 2010, shows that Northern Ireland had the lowest rate of sickness absence at 1.2%. It has held this position consistently over the last decade. The North East,

North West and the East of England had the highest absence rate, all at 2.6%.

**Adam Brett**, a McGrigors Partner and Employment law specialist, believes that, "Given the widespread perception that employee absence in Northern Ireland is a serious problem, these figures will doubtless raise a few eyebrows."

Adam goes on, "Sickness leave can be a serious issue, particularly for smaller businesses that might find it hard to cover long-term absences. It can affect output, damage morale, cause conflict between management and the shop floor, and even generate simmering resentment among workers themselves. Where those disagreements boil over into legal disputes, unless sensitively managed, resolution of the issues can be disruptive, time-consuming and lead to adverse publicity."

He sees the figures as very positive news. "Access to a skilled and motivated workforce is a genuine selling point at a time when Northern Ireland is fighting hard to win investment from the GB mainland for the purposes of job creation."

## in brief



Richard Alderman (centre) with McGrigors Business Crime experts William Park (left) and Tom Stocker (right).

### SFO chief tells leaders: 'Bribery Act is good for business'

**T**he Director of the Serious Fraud Office, Richard Alderman, believes that a zero tolerance approach to facilitation payments is proving good for business.

Speaking about the Bribery Act at a breakfast seminar hosted by McGrigors, Mr Alderman briefed delegates on how it would impact on their business, and how to avoid falling foul of the new laws.

Mr Alderman said: "I find it fascinating that corporates which have achieved zero tolerance [on bribery] tell me it is good for

business. They find in practice their employees are not bothered for demands for payments because it is known ... that the corporate approach is not to pay them.

"Staff are therefore not delayed or hassled by people demanding these payments. These ethical corporates genuinely believe that by stamping out facilitation payments their business has benefited and I very much welcome this."

Mr Alderman also said it was wrong to believe the Act

makes illegal any hospitality or promotional expenditure and that proportionate entertaining was perfectly lawful.

He said: "If you fly a group of prospective clients to see your facilities in Aberdeen or in the North Sea that is not a problem and is sensible business. However, if you add onto this visit a month-long, all-expenses-paid holiday at your private Caribbean island, then you will not be surprised if the SFO takes an interest."

**Page 8 – What does the Bribery Act mean for you?**

## Investors warned to remain vigilant

**L**aura Gillespie, a McGrigors solicitor who advised the FSA on its recent enforcement action against Francois de Dietrich, has warned investors in Northern Ireland to remain vigilant and come forward to the authorities if they suspect any unusual activity in their financial dealings.

Laura, who helped to secure an 18-month prison sentence for Mr de Dietrich for his failure to comply with a Court Order to co-operate with an FSA investigation, says that allegations of fraud are “not uncommon during tough economic times,” and that “more could come to light.”

“When the money is rolling in people tend not to ask questions,” she says, “but lean economic times certainly tend to reveal problems and can expose sharp practice. Investors need to keep their wits about them.”

“There are a few simple tell-tale signs that people need

to look out for if they have concerns. First, consistently steady returns: if your investment yields say, 3%, consistently over a period of years, there is so little variation that it might cause suspicion. Second, if the investment always outperforms funds of a similar nature, something may be awry. Like any fraud, the rule of thumb is simple: if it seems too good to be true, it may well be.”

And it's not just investors who are vigilant, says Laura. “The FSA has shown through the de Dietrich case that Northern Ireland is on its radar. People shouldn't think that by perpetrating financial crime here that they can escape the long arm of the regulator. Regulated businesses need to ensure that their house is in order.”

The appointment of professional liquidators in the de Dietrich case was ordered in March and proceedings continue.



## Infrastructure investment on the up

**F**igures published in March indicate that major infrastructure projects are once again getting underway as access to finance eases. However, according to McGrigors' Head of UK Infrastructure Projects **Adrian Eakin**, the outlook for major projects in Northern Ireland remains challenging.

Data compiled by industry bible *Infrastructure Journal* has shown a 38% increase in the value of project financings across the world to

\$243billion in 2010. Financing for major infrastructure works in the UK was in excess of \$36.56billion during the same period.

The same report ranked McGrigors as one of the top 20 most active legal advisors in UK project finance in the last twelve months.

Adrian says: “It's encouraging to see that, on a global scale, there does seem to be appetite among the banks and other major funders

to club together and do deals to fund infrastructure investment. The challenge for the UK – and Northern Ireland in particular – is to attract that money here instead of letting it go elsewhere. We are competing against emerging and established economies across the globe for a finite pot of funding, not to mention other UK regions. We need to ensure that we're making the case for investment in NI in the strongest possible terms.”

## in brief



### 10% of NI energy from renewable sources

**A**lmost 10% of energy consumed in Northern Ireland is from renewable sources, a report has revealed.

The amount of power generated has increased to 755,000 megawatt hours in the last 10 years, according to a study for the Department of the Environment.

**Richard Murphy**, a lawyer in McGrigors' Belfast office and an expert in renewable energy, says further action is needed if the Northern Ireland government is to meet its target to produce 12% of all electricity consumed from indigenous renewable sources by 2012.

"The report is welcome evidence that use of sustainable energy is on the increase. We're clearly headed in the right direction. However, there is cause for concern," he says. "The Government has a target to get the use of green energy up to 40% by 2020, and unless changes are made to make the planning process more straightforward, that looks unlikely to happen."

### McGrigors in transatlantic link up

**M**cGrigors has agreed a 'Principal Partner' relationship with US law firm Husch Blackwell, under which both organisations will have preferred supplier status on transatlantic work. The initiative will have a particular focus on infrastructure, financial services, energy and government affairs. As part of the link up, from 16 May Husch Blackwell will relocate its offices in the United Kingdom to 5 Old Bailey. The space is contiguous to

McGrigors' long-established London office and the move is intended to help foster a closer working relationship between the two firms.

Managing Partner **Richard Masters**, says: "We are extremely pleased to be able to offer our clients in Northern Ireland access to a high-quality partner in the United States. It's clear that, in our key sectors, our clients work in an increasingly globalised marketplace. As a leading

provider of legal services we pride ourselves on being able to respond to and assist our clients wherever they may be, and this relationship will help us do that. We have been highly impressed by Husch Blackwell, which shares our client-focused ethos and also many of the areas of specialism for which we are particularly well-known."



# A smart EXIT

*With a little more certainty in the economic outlook, some Northern Ireland businesses may once again be dusting off plans for a flotation. Proper preparation is the key to maximising value, say **Richard Gray** and **David MacDonald**.*

If you're trying to sell your house, you don't open it for viewing with the back door broken and clutter all over the floors. It's just the same with a business. Owners who want to sell shares need to take the time to groom their businesses to make them an attractive proposition to potential investors.

Of course, that means developing sound fundamentals, such as a strong balance sheet and healthy profitability. Getting the business into good shape legally is equally important, and one effective way to do this is to start running it broadly as though it were already listed, thereby creating a more healthy and attractive organisation.

## **Five key points may help get you started.**

### **1 Get the structure right**

Privately held groups are often structured in very different ways to listed groups (often to facilitate tax planning for individual or family shareholders or in a reflection of past acquisitions). Consideration should be given as to whether the existing structure makes sense for a listed group,

and a detailed reorganisation plan developed in the event of a listing or sale.

### **2 Invest in people**

Up-to-date employment contracts should be put in place, especially with senior or key staff and directors. It is also worth reviewing HR policies covering disciplinary processes, maternity and paternity, and equal opportunities. Finally, existing options and other employee incentive plans should be established (or clarified) to help ensure employees remain incentivised throughout the flotation process.

### **3 Govern well**

A modern listed company board will include a mix of executive and non-executive directors and is likely to have appointed appropriately independent committees to deal with matters such as remuneration and audit. There is no reason to avoid putting principles of good corporate governance into practice – it helps maintain effective leadership and protect value.

### **4 Protect your IP and IT**

Investors and brokers will need to know that rights are properly protected and owned by the correct group companies. Consideration should also be given to IP, which is licensed in from outside the group, or out to third parties.

Brokers and investors will also look for a robust IT strategy. Adequate back-up and disaster recovery arrangements are a must in modern business.

### **5 Heal any running sores**

Ongoing liabilities could be a potential deterrent. If any significant litigation is ongoing it will need to be made public at the time of the float. Where appropriate, attempts should be made to bring ongoing litigation to a close. The group's tax affairs should also be checked over; any issues from PAYE or VAT audits are particularly unattractive and should be resolved.

**During the float or sale process the company's executive board will be very busy, so our advice to owners is to give thought to this at the earliest stages possible for the smoothest possible exit.**



**Richard Gray** is a Partner in our Corporate team. His main areas of practice are in corporate, banking and projects work. He also advises a number of clients in relation to competition matters.



**David MacDonald** is a Senior Associate in our Corporate team in Edinburgh. He is experienced in a wide variety of corporate work, particularly in the Energy sector.

To paraphrase billionaire investor Warren Buffet, when the tide goes out, you find out who has been swimming naked. In times of economic downturn this is often manifested through an increase in the level of high-value frauds or corporate crimes uncovered. At present, however, the multitude of agencies fighting fraud in the UK and the piecemeal development of anti-fraud legislation means that there is no coherent strategy for tackling wrongdoing.

Partially as a response to this, and in a move reminiscent of the US introduction of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act or FCPA, the British Government is readying itself to implement the UK Bribery Act 2010. What are the implications for Northern Ireland's businesses?

### Consequences

The possible consequences of bribery are numerous and far reaching: criminal investigation and prosecution, fines and jail sentences, disgorgement of profits, debarment from EU Public contracts, adverse impact on share price, damage to reputation, extradition for individuals, remediation costs and costly civil penalties. Perhaps even more worryingly, the Act carries a maximum jail sentence of 10 years for individuals and unlimited fines for companies.

### Adequate procedures

From July, a company will have to show that it has adequate procedures in place to prevent bribery, and will be able to defend its position on that basis. The defence will not apply, however, if it can be shown that a senior company officer consented to



# The Bribery Act:

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR BUSINESSES IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

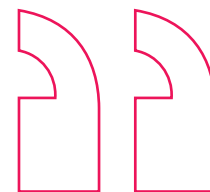
**David Kirkpatrick** and **Deirdre Cormican** look at the implications of the much-discussed Bribery Act 2010.

the committal of the offence. Then, both the individual and the company will be guilty of the offence.

The Ministry of Justice has stated that its guidance on what comprises an adequate framework for compliance will need to be viewed as “flexible” and “indicative”, setting out relevant principles backed by

good practice examples rather than prescriptive rules.

In determining if a company has such procedures in place, the Courts are likely to consider the training provided to relevant employees, the rigour of due diligence undertaken before entering into arrangements with third parties, and the quality of checks applied when



COMPANIES WILL BE EXPECTED TO HAVE IN PLACE ANTI-CORRUPTION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, TO CARRY OUT ANTI-CORRUPTION VETTING ON THEIR SERVICE PROVIDERS, AND TO HAVE IN PLACE ANTI-CORRUPTION CONTRACTUAL CONTROLS.

## What's in a name?

As the name suggests, the new legislation is concerned mainly with bribery. A key question, then, is what constitutes a bribe. It is essentially any payment (or favouring of another) made in the knowledge it is likely to encourage a person to misuse their position. Examples are 'commissions', 'consulting fees' or 'marketing fees' paid to employees or contractors of the company's customer; employing a public official's family member; facilitation, 'grease' or 'dash' payments (such as paying £50 to get through Customs); and lavish corporate hospitality and travel. On this point, the UK has taken a more aggressive stance than the U.S. by banning 'facilitation payments'.

processing payments. Companies will be expected to have in place anti-corruption policies and procedures, to carry out anti-corruption vetting on their service providers, and to have in place anti-corruption contractual controls. In commercial transactions including sales and purchases, joint venture agreements, commercial agency contracts, distribution contracts and consultancy contracts, the company should conduct anti-corruption due diligence and seek anti-corruption warranties and indemnities.

Since July 2009, the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) has promoted its Leniency Policy to tackle overseas corruption. The SFO in Northern Ireland has issued guidelines for reporting corruption and, in return for full co-operation with any investigation, the SFO will generally agree a civil settlement with the company which can wipe the slate clean and limit damage to business reputation.

Crucially, the absence of a criminal conviction means the company avoids EU Public Procurement debarment – although the company should be aware that an external monitor may be required as part of the

settlement. Such monitors are quite common in the US, and companies there have learned that they can be extremely costly. In addition, the company may be required to announce its contrition publicly.

The Act has led many interest groups to examine what activity might amount to "corruption." The future of corporate hospitality, in particular, has been under the spotlight although this appears to be only a minor risk.

The delay in introducing the Bribery Act and the pragmatic stance of the Ministry of Justice on corporate hospitality may allay fears that UK businesses will be rendered uncompetitive. It may also reassure those who worry that the failure to have adequate procedures in place to prevent bribery will lead to fatal exclusion from public works contracts. If so, then all of this delay may just have been worthwhile.

Companies and their advisers now have a short window to familiarise themselves with the new legislation and its provisions. However, the message to Northern Irish companies has to be that they are not exempt, and should act sooner rather than later to implement best practice.



**David Kirkpatrick** is a Partner in our Litigation and Dispute Resolution team. He specialises in commercial litigation, and was named as a 'leader in the field' for dispute resolution in Chambers UK Guide to the Legal Profession 2009.



**Deirdre Cormican** is a Senior Associate in the Belfast office's Litigation and Dispute Resolution team. She deals with all aspects of commercial litigation, with a particular emphasis on property and land disputes.

## The Bribery Act: key points

- The Act creates offences of giving or receiving an improper advantage, and of giving an advantage (whether improper or not) to a foreign official.
- Perhaps most significantly, the legislation renders directors and senior management criminally liable if they consent to or connive in bribery.
- For the first time, it creates the corporate offence of failing to prevent bribery by third party service providers including employees, contractors, agents, subsidiaries or joint venture partners.
- It applies overseas and to foreign companies. UK-incorporated companies, UK subsidiaries or branches of non-UK companies, and non-UK companies operating (in whole or in part) in the UK will be caught by the Act.
- UK Nationals and Non-UK Nationals resident in the UK will be liable wherever in the world they might be. The Serious Fraud Office has indicated that mere listing of a foreign company's shares on a UK Stock Exchange would be sufficient for the activities of that company to fall within the ambit of the legislation. Finally, overseas companies would be caught if any part of the bribery offence takes place in the UK.

**McGrigors has developed an anti-bribery compliance tool, which includes template risk assessment, policies and contractual clauses, and an e-learning training tool, to help businesses meet the requirements of the new Act. For more information please contact David Kirkpatrick.**



*In March this year McGrigors reached completion on an innovative deal which is expected to see around £265m spent on regenerating the Scotswood area of Newcastle Upon Tyne. The project used the new 'Asset Backed Vehicle' structure (ABV). **Nick Ogden and Adrian Eakin** look at this increasingly popular way to deliver big public projects without over-stretching the public purse.*

# IS **ABV** THE PERFECT

**T**he Scotswood Urban Regeneration Vehicle is a groundbreaking partnership between Newcastle City Council and the 'BKY' consortium of developers (comprised of Keepmoat Homes, Barratt / David Wilson Homes, and Yuill Homes). It aims to deliver 1,800 homes and a new 6,000 sq metre neighborhood centre over the next fifteen years.

Scotswood is the latest in a string of projects to use Asset Backed Vehicles, or ABVs, as a way to meet public need while working within spending constraints.

In an ABV structure, land assets are put into a joint venture with private financiers, who in turn match the value with equity. This enables public sector bodies

to deliver developments that can provide economic benefits, while utilising public assets efficiently. By tapping into long-term partnerships with private sector partners, they can release investment in infrastructure, kick-start schemes and deliver much-needed initiatives and employment.

Since Croydon launched an ABV with John Laing in 2008 to regenerate and redevelop the town centre, we have seen a growing number of similarly structured public-private joint ventures concluded. The Scotswood deal is particularly significant because it is the first of the HCA Local Housing Company pilot schemes.

We have more recently seen other public sector bodies

seeking to use ABVs to utilise their assets and estates more efficiently. This may often be a means to lever in private sector investment so as to cross-subsidise other initiatives.

Over the last year, NHS Foundation Trusts have also been looking to utilise surplus assets to fund the delivery of health. (After all, the NHS is reported to have more empty space in the UK than Tesco has space in its stores.)

The extra care and Higher Education sectors are also beginning to look at ABV-based models to fund future requirements.

## **The Benefits**

It is easy to see why public sector bodies are attracted to ABVs. They have an urgent need



**Nick Ogden** is a Partner in our Manchester Infrastructure Projects team. He specialises in structuring and negotiating all forms of corporate and contractual joint ventures.



## ABVs: the lessons learnt so far

- > It isn't possible to slavishly adhere to a model or to a prescribed legal structure. An ABV is intended to be flexible, and should be carefully designed to be so.
- > Procurement processes need to become more efficient and facilitative. One of the weaknesses of PFI was the protracted nature of the procurement processes and the increased costs of participating in the competition. ABVs are joint venture-based solutions, with a risk and reward sharing (as opposed to 'transfer') philosophy, and need to be inherently flexible.
- > There needs to be a large dose of realism on all sides from early on – schemes must be affordable and realistic, and influenced by the economic strength and sustainability of the particular region.
- > Although buy-in at the highest political level is essential, politics should be taken out of the equation as far as possible. These are long-term initiatives, and the private sector will want as much certainty over deliverability as is possible.

# SOLUTION?



**Adrian Eakin** heads our UK Infrastructure Projects team, working from the London and Belfast offices. Chambers UK says that he is "unanimously considered to be a market leader with unrivalled experience."

to improve old infrastructure or deliver new projects, but face falling capital receipts, falling land values, and cuts in grants and budgets. Add in the fact that a partnership with a private sector partner will often allow access to its corporate banking facilities, and a joint venture is clearly an attractive proposition.

From the private sector partner's standpoint, a long-term partnership with a public sector body can have significant benefits and provide a secure pipe-line of work.

No surprise, then, that a steady stream of ever more ambitious ABV-structured schemes has come to market over the last few years. Acceptance of the essential premises of the model seems to be growing, and it is a natural



A STEADY STREAM OF EVER MORE AMBITIOUS ABV-STRUCTURED SCHEMES HAS COME TO MARKET OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS.

development from the rigidity of the risk transfer-based PFI model.

We should remember, however, that an ABV is simply a delivery model – a legal and financial construct to achieve a set of objectives. It is not necessarily the best solution or most effective delivery model in all circumstances.

Nor is it a pre-ordained structure with a set of certain and prescribed rules. If we seek to simply replicate 'the model' or roll-out the previous structure

and documents, we won't get better at doing the right thing. In fact, we may simply get better at doing the wrong thing.

ABVs represent an evolution of models used for infrastructure delivery. They can be a useful delivery model for both the public and private sector partners and – if structured appropriately – a fairly low-risk one. However, they are one of a number of potential different solutions for infrastructure funding and should not be considered in isolation.

*With public sector spending cuts beginning to bite, growing discontentment among the general public, and student protests already seen in England, many people fear that this summer could see widespread protests and demonstrations.*

**Laura Gillespie** and **Heidi Archibald** look at how you can protect your business.

# Protest POWER



**Laura Gillespie** is a Senior Associate in our Litigation & Dispute Resolution team in Belfast. She handles a wide range of commercial disputes including land disputes, contentious insolvency and insurance claims.



**Heidi Archibald** is a Senior Associate in Edinburgh's Property Litigation team. She advises on a variety of issues including all aspects of landlord and tenant; enforcement of missives and Lands Tribunal applications.

**M**any businesses are already familiar with the disruption and cost that can be suffered when a property is occupied by members of the travelling community. A demonstration presents a similar risk.

However, few are likely to realise that the rules used to deal with the travelling community could also be used in the context of protests or demonstrations.

If you heard that a protest was imminent, or you arrived to find that protestors have occupied all or part of your premises, what would you do?

Your first instinct might be to pick up the telephone and call the police. That's probably right – but

the police are only empowered to act under certain circumstances, so you need to ensure that these exist before you call.

## **Greater powers**

The police here have greater powers than their counterparts in Great Britain because of the Unauthorised Encampments (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (or UEO). The UEO enables a senior police officer to move on individuals if he or she reasonably believes that two or more people are “trespassing with the common purpose of residing there for any period.” This is only the case, however, if damage has been caused; or threatening behaviour has been



used towards the landowner, his employee or agent; or more than six vehicles have been parked on the land.

The police will only take action if the landowner has taken “reasonable steps” to move the occupiers. What is reasonable will clearly depend on the circumstances but, usually, the landowner will have served notice on the occupiers, indicating that the occupation is without consent, and asked them to move.

Therefore, you should not call the police unless you have asked the occupiers to move and they have failed to do so; and they have caused damage, or acted in a threatening way, or have six or more vehicles or caravans.



YOUR FIRST INSTINCT MIGHT BE TO PICK UP THE TELEPHONE AND CALL THE POLICE. THAT'S PROBABLY RIGHT – BUT THE POLICE ARE ONLY EMPOWERED TO ACT UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES, SO YOU NEED TO ENSURE THAT THESE EXIST BEFORE YOU CALL.

If the police do not or will not act, there is a “self help” remedy available to landowners through the civil courts which can provide a relatively speedy option. One of the benefits of this legal tool is that it is not always 100% necessary to identify the occupiers by name. In some instances, a court order can be obtained within a matter of hours, dependant upon the circumstances involved.

**The legal remedies available throughout Great Britain and Northern Ireland are broadly similar but with a few significant differences. If you would like to know more, please contact us and we will be happy to help.**



## in person

*As the higher education sector awaits final decisions from the Northern Ireland Assembly on future funding, Richard Gray speaks to Professor Peter Gregson, President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, about the institution's future.*

**RG: We have been working together a lot recently on some pretty groundbreaking stuff. What have been the highlights for you?**

**PG:** Looking back, the development of Northern Ireland's Science Park has been a great success story, and we're particularly pleased with the Queen's Centre for Secure Information Technologies. This has brought together world-class researchers to create what we believe is the UK's lead centre in cybersecurity.

In terms of new developments, we are scheduled to open the Northern Ireland Advanced Composites and Engineering Centre this autumn and, later this year, the University will open a £14 million Postgraduate and Executive Education Centre – incorporating Queen's University Management School and a bespoke Leadership Institute. Both initiatives have required a lot of hard work but we are confident that they will be great assets for the University and the business community here and overseas.

**RG: A lot is made in the media about spending cuts in higher education. What would you say to those advocating reduced government funding?**

**PG:** Queen's University Belfast is part of the fabric of Northern Ireland. For more than 150 years, it has played a leadership role in the region's educational, economic, social and cultural life. We are a member of the Russell Group of the UK's 20 leading research-intensive universities, and our progressive approach was recognised when we were named Times Higher Education Entrepreneurial University of the Year.

Queen's contributes some £600 million to the local economy, is one of Northern Ireland's largest employers and underpins the region's skills resource and economic capability. The University has also created more than 50 businesses, generated around 1,000 high-value jobs and leads the UK in terms of spin-out turnover.

**RG: Clearly QUB has a significant impact for the business community, but it also plays a wider part in society**

**PG:** Absolutely. Queen's led the programme for the Improvement of Cancer Services in Northern Ireland, in collaboration with local Health and Social Care Trusts. This initiative, recognised internationally for its excellence, has led to the formation of a Comprehensive Cancer Centre and to significantly improved cancer survival in Northern Ireland.

**RG: So where does your focus lie in the year ahead?**

**PG:** Without doubt, on our students. We believe that an exceptional university must offer an exceptional and life-changing student experience.

**RG: But the links into the business world remain a priority?**

**PG:** Very much so – Queen's recently became the first university in Ireland to offer a BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics, while this summer will see the first graduates to emerge from our highly competitive degree in Actuarial Studies.

## Strength in depth, STRENGTH IN BREADTH

*McGrigors has announced the establishment of a new branch office in Doha, Qatar.*

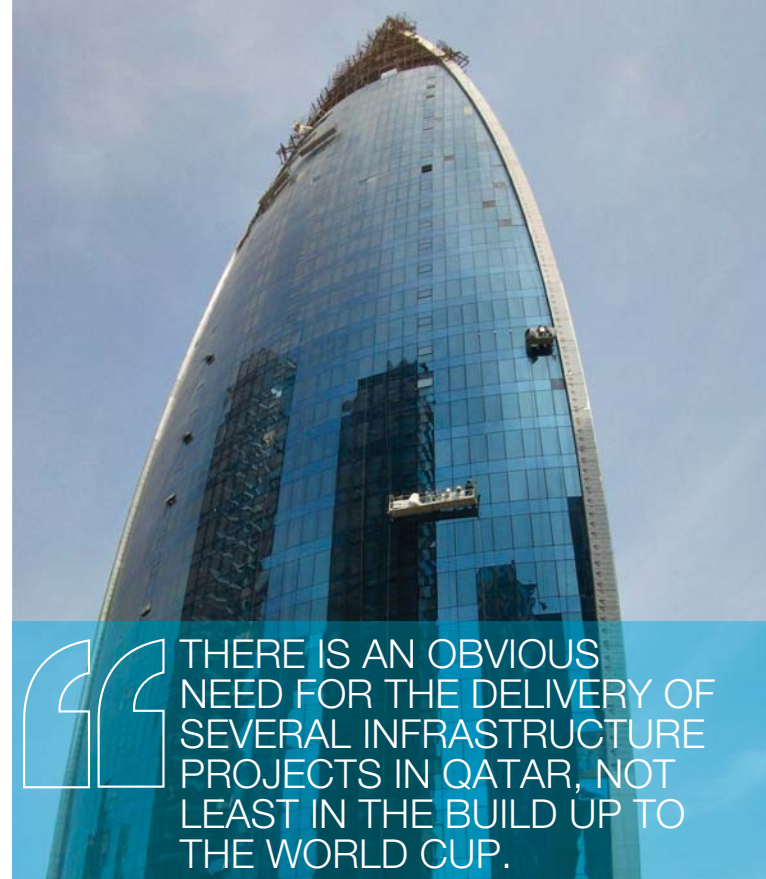
For several years, McGrigors has worked for Qatar-based clients without having a physical presence in the country. Having seen strong demand on the ground in Doha, the Firm has now set up locally.

McGrigors is now the only law firm with offices across all three UK legal jurisdictions to also have a branch office in Doha. The Firm expects to advise Qatari businesses on investment throughout the UK, and is also focusing on advisory work for clients in Northern Ireland who might see opportunities in the region. **Adrian Eakin**, Partner, has already spent a week in Qatar laying the groundwork for future connections.

As **Paul McBride**, a Partner in the Belfast office, points out: "One of the reasons we were so keen to merge L'Estrange and Brett with McGrigors was to offer expansive clients in Northern Ireland access to a recognised legal name in different geographic markets. We didn't necessarily think at the time that this would extend much outside the UK, but this move clearly makes sound strategic sense."

Paul reveals, "In addition to having an established client base in Qatar, we have already had a lot of conversations with clients and intermediaries here in Northern Ireland and are aware of a number of burgeoning business links between the province and Qatar."

"There is an obvious need for the delivery of several infrastructure



THERE IS AN OBVIOUS NEED FOR THE DELIVERY OF SEVERAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN QATAR, NOT LEAST IN THE BUILD UP TO THE WORLD CUP.

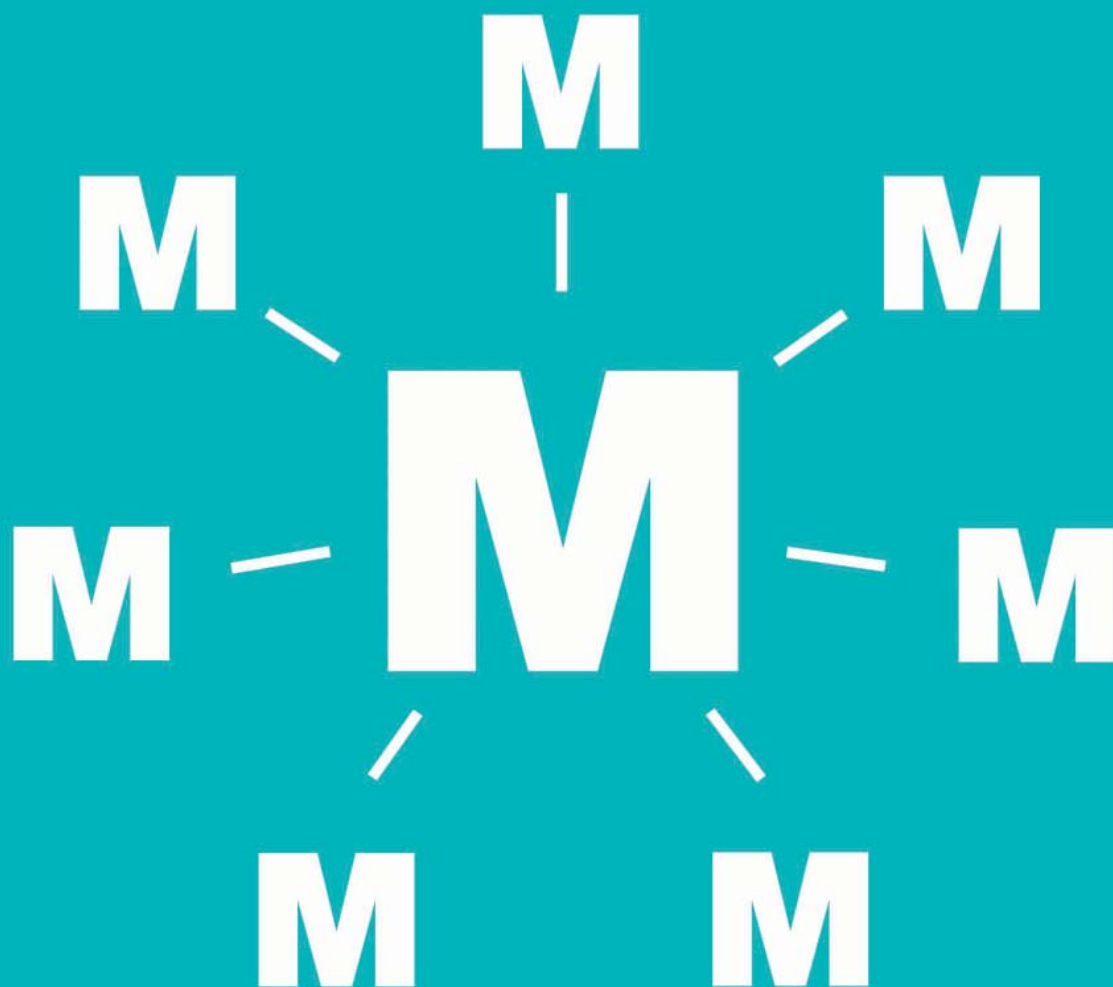
projects in Qatar, not least in the build up to the World Cup. In addition to that, there are a number of ambitious construction projects already going on. That could well create some opportunities for the construction industry over here.

"In addition, there are food security issues in Qatar and a need for physical commodities and agricultural knowhow is evident. We really do think Northern Ireland can bring something to the party."

The figures seem to bear that out. According to the most recent Northern Ireland Trade and Export Survey exports from Northern Ireland to the Middle East were worth a total of £253.3million, or 9.4% of exports outside the European Union, in 2009/10. Additionally, figures from the US Department of State estimate that Qatar's GDP in 2010 was around \$128billion, and that the state achieved a real growth rate of around 19%.

Paul believes that, particularly after the challenges in Dubai over the past few years, a lot of exporters seem to favour Qatar as the best option when forming a bulkhead for operations in the Middle East. "Invest NI is running a trade mission to Qatar so I don't think we're alone in thinking there is a burgeoning commercial relationship between the two regions," he says.

The initiative has been led by **James Elwen**, a partner in the Firm's Energy and Infrastructure practice. James has relocated to Doha to lead the team in the new office. James says: "The State of Qatar is ambitious, with a clear vision for its future. We are confident that we can make a valuable contribution towards meeting its aspirations. For some time we have been committed to the Qatari market and are pleased to have the opportunity to demonstrate that in a very tangible way through this new office."



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