THIS IS WALES

Making waves across the Atlantic
Heroes of medical development
Capitalising on waste recycling
Attracting talent to Wales

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Wales has been welcoming businesses for many years, helping them to thrive, grow and realise their potential. Companies that locate here have the advantage of easy access to the UK market, with its population of 65 million. Crucially, they can draw upon the support of the Welsh Government – offering ready access to decision makers and the ability to make things happen quickly.

Welsh Government recognises that we live in an age of unprecedented change alongside huge opportunity. Fired by the fourth industrial revolution, the way we live, work and spend our leisure time is transforming before our eyes. We must get ahead of that change to equip our people, businesses and places to face the future with confidence.

A new economic action plan seeks to do just that. At the heart of the plan is a commitment to develop a new and dynamic relationship between Government and business that is based on the principle of public investment with a social purpose.

Today, the Economic Action Plan represents a new way of thinking about business in Wales, but it’s working toward a long-standing goal: to achieve prosperity for all. It’s about supporting people and companies to stimulate growth, increase productivity and make Wales a fairer and more competitive nation. It promises to tackle inequality between regions, promote fairness in the workplace, develop the skilled workforce of tomorrow and foster the environmental practices that will boost Wales’ transition to a low-carbon economy.

These ambitions are for the long term. A new Economic Contract lays down clear requirements for companies seeking investment from the Welsh Government. They will be expected to show their commitment to the principles of growth, fair work, reducing their carbon footprint and promoting health, up-skilling and learning in the workplace.

Businesses fulfilling these criteria can proceed to a full application, where they are invited to demonstrate their commitment to at least one of five Calls to Action: decarbonisation; innovation, entrepreneurship and headquarters; exports and trade; high-quality employment, skills development and fair work; and R&D, automation and digitalisation. All are designed to ensure that companies based in Wales are prepared for future change.

In return, and in response to calls from the sector, the Welsh Government will provide a simplified, unified and competitive package of business support.

As a destination Wales offers an environment geared to the needs of business. You’ll have the benefits of a skilled workforce, strong links to world-class universities with excellent transport links to the UK and the rest of the world, and the quality of life is often cited as a factor in attracting and retaining talent. It all adds up to a compelling offering for owners, managers and employees alike.

The Economic Action Plan was launched at the South Wales headquarters of Orangebox, an innovative office-furniture business based in Treforest, South Wales. The company has received support from the Welsh Government, helping it to reach a worldwide clientele and expand its workforce to 430 people across Wales, England, the UAE and the US.

Commercial director Ewan Tozer says: “The reason I like the Plan is that I can’t imagine a successful business not wanting to be at the forefront of this agenda. The five Calls to Action aren’t just a prerequisite if you want financial support – they’re a model for doing good business in the 21st century.”

Tozer believes there’s a strong rationale for making decarbonisation and environmental awareness the first Call to Action. “It’s pivotal to long-term success,” he says. “We now have to provide our clients with as much environmental information as product information. You have to have a clear strategy that tackles your major impacts.”

International trade has always been key to Wales’ prosperity, and there remains a vast and untapped potential for export that the Welsh Government is keen to promote. One company to have benefitted greatly from its support is Zip-Clip, which manufactures high-quality wire suspension products for use in electrical, mechanical, heating and air-conditioning systems. In recent years, the Powys-based business has switched its attentions from the UK to a global market worth more than £30 million, and taken part in trade missions to India, Australia, Dubai and Japan.

Steve Goldsworthy, CEO of Zip-Clip, says: “The Welsh Government helped us to get a global platform. They offered us overseas business-development visits that put us in front of the right people. For example, the Welsh Government helped us get involved in the forthcoming 2020 Olympics and 2022 World Cup.”

The fourth Call to Action recognises the demand for high-quality skills in the Welsh workforce, and the obligation to treat employees fairly. What’s more, businesses that employ highly skilled workers are able to offer higher wages that help to sustain local communities. “It’s about creating an environment where everyone can fulfil their potential,” says Ewan Tozer of Orangebox. “We’ve got a great culture here that makes people feel engaged. We’re always trying to up-skill our workforce, and we have a company-wide profit-share scheme.”

Finally, no company can ignore the need to pursue research and development, automate its processes and keep on top of digitalisation. Wales’ universities will have an important role to play in helping industry respond to this Call to Action, exchanging knowledge and expertise to the advantage of both business and academia.

The Economic Action Plan marks Wales out as a nation that’s serious about meeting the challenges of the future. It’s a place where your business will receive all the help it needs to prosper, and to play its part in a new chapter of inclusive, fair and sustainable economic growth.

“You get a voice with the Welsh Government,” says Steve Goldsworthy. “They don’t just tell you what you want to hear, but take the effort to understand your needs. Zip-Clip certainly wouldn’t be where it is now without their support. We’re testament to the success story of Wales.”
**Veeqo** is a Welsh company with global ambitions — not just to export its software all around the world, but to attract the cream of international talent to Wales.

The Swansea-based technology firm, which has developed an all-in-one platform to help online retailers manage inventory and ordering, aims to create 170 jobs over the next three years. And with the help of the Welsh Government, it has been able to cast its net wide to fill critical positions.

“We want the best, and that costs money,” says Duncan La Barre, Veeqo’s head of communication and brand. “We’ve had people from London, New York and all over the world coming to work for this growing company in Wales with big ambitions.”

For some of them, joining Veeqo has been a homecoming. Veeqo’s new head of HR, Swansea University graduate Cerys Davies, was tempted back from New York where she had headed up the North American HR operation for the review website Trustpilot.

She says: “I wanted a new challenge, and there was this pull back to Wales. It’s great to have the chance to get into a company when it’s relatively small and young, and help it to reach exciting heights. And it says a lot about where the company is going that Matt Warren, the founder and CEO, is willing to put money into HR this early on.”

Veeqo now plans to raise £3.75 million to fund its expansion into overseas markets, and building a team in the US will be among Cerys’s priorities. Already, 65 of Veeqo’s 300-plus clients are based in America, without a single dollar having been spent on Stateside marketing. There’s also an ambition to tap into Australia’s emerging e-commerce market.

Duncan La Barre says: “The only way we’re going to dominate the UK and expand into these new territories is to have a really world-class product. And for that we need top engineers, software developers and sales people. We’re on a mission to make Wales a destination for tech talent.”
With three world-renowned restaurants in Wales, Dylan’s are best known as award-winners for their food and atmosphere. But they’ve also won honours for their commitment to the environment, as Investors in People and for the sensitive restoration of their 1950s Criccieth home.

**Sector—** Tourism

**Location—** Menai Bridge, Criccieth and Llandudno, North Wales

**Employees—** 76

**Founded—** 2012

When they opened their newest restaurant in the grade II-listed Morannedd building in 2015, co-owner David Evans and his team at Dylan’s knew they were moving into a spectacular home. As well as retaining the art deco features of Sir Clough Williams-Ellis’s promenade design, these food lovers set about nurturing links with local suppliers and fishermen, who often light up the restaurant’s year-round events programme, telling tales of the famous Menai mussel.

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“It’s a way of introducing our customers to the local seafood supply in a very informal way,” says Evans, who has established strong bonds with Bangor University’s School of Ocean Sciences, a frequent partner of the team’s visits to schools and festivals across the country. “Seafood is such a healthy and sustainable option. We try to persuade people to have mussels for supper instead of breaded, golden food.”

Criccieth is an enchanting setting, with a population that more than doubles from its usual 1,700 residents for the annual bonfire Dylan’s organise on the beach. The restauranteurs are as passionate about preserving the beauty of their surroundings as they are about the produce of the Welsh coastline.

“Criccieth is a beautiful, quaint and unspoilt Welsh seaside town,” says Evans. “We’re right on the beach with views of the castle and out to sea.” That vantage point can lead to surprises: during one meeting, Evans was distracted by the sight of a pod of dolphins. “They were only 100 metres away from us, just swimming around, jumping in and out of the water,” he says. “It’s a wonderful, natural environment, very warm and friendly – it’s a special place.”
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As one of the global law firm’s largest bases in the world, business was already booming for Eversheds in Cardiff before they formalised a new partnership with a major US firm to become Eversheds Sutherland last year. With a reputation for talent and the ability to support their clients wherever they are in the world, the firm’s ambition to provide an exceptional global service meant the opportunity to increase their reach in North America was hugely exciting.

For the 450-strong Cardiff team and their new transatlantic colleagues, the move has proved a seamless success. “It has taken us from strength to strength,” says Kathryn Roberts, who has been senior partner of the Cardiff office since 2014. “The Cardiff office was already doing a lot of US work before the partnership, but our success rate for winning clients together is phenomenal now. I think one of the concerns was cultural fit – we’ve all got impressions of what it might be like working with a US law firm. But the good thing is that it’s very much a combination of businesses, rather than a takeover.”

Eversheds Sutherland has a long history in Wales. Its origins come from Phillips and Buck, with whom Eversheds merged in 1989, and Roberts and her team take equal pride in guiding the group’s “fantastic” Welsh clients and burgeoning international portfolio. Their location in the capital means they often welcome politicians through their doors: Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport Ken Skates has visited to discuss ways of nurturing international growth, and the newly-appointed US ambassador, Woody Johnson, called on Eversheds Sutherland during his visit to Wales. “He was very interested in our story,” says Roberts. “A group of businesses talked to him about how US and Welsh businesses can thrive together. We find it very helpful to engage with senior politicians at that level. They aim for a reciprocal relationship with Welsh Government, and will also host a major business event in the US as part of a productive network of US and Welsh trade collaborators. A visit to the US embassy in London could result in Eversheds Sutherland playing a part in the Independence Day celebrations in Wales this summer, and their work in the US includes advising on massive projects such as the $64 billion California High Speed Rail Program. In the UK, they are assisting Capita in an £888 million sale of its service division, and their international business groups range from India and Japan to Africa and Latin America.

“When you have international businesses like Tyco, Eaton, Barclays or HSBC, they don’t want to have a separate law firm in each jurisdiction they work in,” explains Roberts. “We can allow them to consolidate that by servicing from one firm, often with significant involvement from our Cardiff office. This is world-class international work that we provide from our capital city.”
More than 30 years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the international consortium responsible for making the site safe called upon the expertise of Welsh innovators to create the world’s largest moveable building. It’s the latest global win for Flamgard’s specialist team.

Sector—
Advanced Materials & Manufacturing
Location—
Pontypool, South Wales
Employees—
62
Founded—
1981

Three years ago, Lee Bramald and his team at Flamgard Calidair, one of the world’s leading companies in design and manufacturing innovation, received a call about an unspecified job overseas. Bramald finds it tricky to describe the sheer scale of the safe confinement they have created at Chernobyl. Working from their base in Pontypool, Flamgard collaborated with Swansea University to carry out part of the seismic testing on their fire and shut off dampers, which regulate the climate and air flow as part of a €1.5 billion development at the site of the world’s worst nuclear disaster.

“It became the largest roaming building ever built,” says Bramald. “This new sarcophagus, as they call it, is designed to protect the world for 100 years.”

The huge steel dome, which has been wheeled over the former nuclear reactor area, was commissioned as part of the major international contract to make Chernobyl safe, secured with Welsh Government support. It has since been nominated for a UK Export Excellence Award.

“It was amazing to go over there and see it,” Bramald says. “We’re innovative and look at all options, advancing the products and market sectors.

“The government has been extremely helpful. They’re always receptive to our ideas and keen to work with industry. We’ve been really pleased with our relationship.”

A proud Welshman born in Newport, Bramald has been with Flamgard for 40 years, gradually progressing from apprentice to chairman of an ever-expanding company playing a key role in projects worldwide.

They’ve also been able to call upon ASTUTE 2020, the cutting-edge research and development partnership in West Wales and the Valley.

“We’ve got an eager, hardworking and loyal workforce here,” he says.

“We knew this was going to be a huge project, but we’ve had great support and access to lots of advice.”
Fans of *Doctor Who* may notice a Welsh landmark or two in his latest interactive adventures. A new computer game sees the Doctor encounter mods and rockers in 1960s Barry Island, the Lady of the Lake in North Wales and a Dalek invasion in the quiet Cardiff suburb of Llandaff.

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**TINY REBEL GAMES**

*Doctor Who Infinity* has been developed by Tiny Rebel Games, the husband-and-wife team of Lee and Susan Cummings, with financial support from the Welsh Government. The role-playing game is a showcase for Wales’ creative talent as well as its landscape, with Welsh artists, writers, actors and technical staff all involved in its creation.

The couple – both of whom have a long calibre in the games industry – moved to Newport from Los Angeles in 2016, Susan says: “We’d gone to LA to work for Paramount on *Star Trek*, but we decided to move back to Wales so we’d have a better lifestyle for our nine-year-old son. My husband’s from Newport, and his family have several businesses here including our sister company, Tiny Rebel Brewery.” She hopes the new game will replicate the success of Tiny Rebel’s previous release, *Doctor Who Legacy*, which has attracted more than 2.5 million players since 2013. *Doctor Who Infinity* will initially be released in five self-contained episodes; and although some aspects of its gameplay will be familiar from the earlier title, Susan is careful to stress that it’s not a sequel.

“We’re thinking of it more as a platform for telling stories, written by well-known *Doctor Who* writers,” she says. “After the first five episodes, there’s already a sixth on the table, and we’re in the early stages of planning a seventh.”

The game’s technical aspects were developed in collaboration with Seed Studio, a Taiwanese firm, and it has been funded as a joint venture between the British game publisher Double Eleven and the Welsh Government. Susan says: “Soon after we arrived, we started talking to them about their Media Investment Budget. Until it had only financed TV and film, but we knew they were interested in investing in games.

“Coming off our success with *Doctor Who Legacy*, we said that we had relocated here and had the track record and connections to do something really cool. We made clear that the project wouldn’t necessarily be about job creation, in the sense of permanent employment for people. It would be about providing avenues of freelance opportunity for local talent, like a production in the film industry.”

“To secure the funding, Tiny Rebel undertook to find the lion’s share of this talent within Wales’ borders. “Initially I was slightly sceptical, because the games industry is still nascent here,” says Susan. “But when we looked around, we found a lot of what we needed in Wales. *“There were comic-book authors with tremendous pedigrees, who had done *Doctor Who* before and worked on *Star Trek* and Marvel Comics. In the end, all the artists working on the game, whether drawing, inking or colouring, were based in Wales. Three of the five writers for the initial stories live here, and we have an award-winning audio director, Stafford Bawler, who’s local to Cardiff. The couple have been keen to pass on their industry expertise, with Susan taking up an advisory seat at a Caerphilly-based games start-up called Runwild Entertainment. “We’ve also got involved with the University of South Wales,” she says. “We help out with their computer games courses, and we hired one of their recent graduates as an intern. He quickly proved himself indispensable, so we took him on full-time for six months as a technical artist.”

She believes that Tiny Rebel’s business model is good both for the company and for the burgeoning games industry. “We can use people both locally and internationally,” says Susan. “On *Doctor Who Infinity*, we’ve brought on board at least 15 people in Wales, including some who have never touched a video game before, and we can train people up. But we can also fill the recruitment gaps from elsewhere.

“It’s not a new idea: if you were going to cast a film in Wales, you wouldn’t necessarily have an all-Welsh cast. But by putting it all together here, we’re helping core competencies to grow, which makes Wales a better environment for games – and will lead to more projects being done here.”
Contract research organisations are the unsung heroes of medical development, providing vital services to help bring new drugs to market. With 15,000 employees across 80 countries, PRA Health Sciences is among the biggest players in the industry — and is committed to growing its operations in Wales.

The company has had a base in Swansea since 1996, originally employing just five people. But with the help of a Welsh Government grant, the company is being supported to build the employee count up to 280.

Now located at the city’s waterside SA1 development, PRA’s clinical informatics hub supports pharmaceutical companies as they undertake trials of new drugs and therapies. It’s highly specialised work that demands skilled graduates with the right qualifications, and most recruitment is from the local area.

Ben Rodway grew up in Swansea, and joined PRA as a clinical informatics specialist in 2013 after completing a biology degree. He now works as a lead data manager. “I was very excited to find a clinical research organisation on my doorstep,” he says. “And I have to say, our colleagues worldwide are slightly envious of our seaside location."

“The ties that PRA has with Swansea University are incredibly important. A lot of my colleagues are graduates of Welsh universities, and we’re aiming to build up the bond between high-quality education and not just jobs but careers. “But beyond that, we feel as though we’re part of a whole life-sciences ecosystem in Wales. The university is developing a science park close to our offices, where industry and academia will be able to develop as a connected whole. It feels like a sea change, and it’s great to watch it succeed.”

It’s a satisfying job, too, to play a part in potentially life-changing medical advances. “Drug development is a huge task,” he says, “and data management is a small but crucial part. I make sure the data is of high quality and fit for analysis, and it’s very exciting to contribute to the end goal of getting new therapies out there.”
The world is coming to Wales to make movies. At the same time, Welsh drama is enthralling audiences around the world, says producer Ed Talfan.

The rise of the Welsh TV and film industry over the last decade has been little short of astonishing. The world’s film-makers are flocking here to exploit the gorgeous locations and a rich seam of local expertise. At the same time, Welsh talent is creating its own home-grown drama, and exporting it to the world.

“We’ve had an incredibly busy year,” says Ed Talfan, the creative director of Cardiff-based Severn Screen. “We produced eight hours of drama for S4C, BBC and All3Media, a two-hour film for Netflix, and we’re now in post-production on a 90-minute film for BBC Films. That the vast majority of this content was developed, filmed and post-produced here is testimony to the underlying strength of the industry in Wales. Having so much talent on our doorstep has been instrumental in creating new creative opportunities.”

Ed was a co-creator of the crime drama Hinterland/Y Gwyll, a moody whodunnit that was shot back-to-back in English and Welsh. Distributed by All3Media International, the series was shown by networks across Europe and, via Netflix, worldwide.

“Hinterland was born out of a simple idea that every country should have a detective show to call its own” says Ed. “But that wasn’t the only motivation,” he adds. “Ultimately you’re driven by a desire to tell stories. And if those stories can reach an appreciative audience both locally and internationally, then all the better.”

Severn Screen’s new series, Craith/Hidden, was also shot bilingually, with a steady eye on the international market. The series is backed by BBC Wales and S4C and is being sold internationally by All3Media International.

Dark thriller Apostle, written and directed by Gareth Evans (The Raid), was co-produced with US-based XYZ Films and with the support of the Welsh Government. The film was shot entirely on location in South Wales and will premiere on Netflix in 2018.

Meanwhile, the BBC continues to produce high-quality drama from its Roath Lock base. Wolf Studios Wales, a vast new complex in Cardiff Bay, is home to Sky One’s fantasy series A Discovery of Witches and the BBC adaptation of Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials.

The investment in Welsh film is paying rich dividends, says Ed: “The Welsh Government has been hugely supportive to a lot of companies who are trying to make ambitious work and also, importantly, to companies who are looking to put down roots here.”

Another example: Sky Atlantic’s historical epic Britannia was filmed in several Welsh beauty spots. Some viewers were baffled by the ‘mystical’ language spoken by its druid characters. But we weren’t. They were speaking Welsh, obviously.
The team at Thermal Compaction Group are innovators in solving one of the most important issues of our times. As sustainability becomes increasingly vital for business, the Cardiff-based inventors have collaborated with a vast network of industry partners to offer solutions that save time and money.

One of their greatest early successes has been the Sterimelt – an oven-like recycling machine capable of transforming huge quantities of plastic waste into a sellable asset for hospitals. “We effectively take a waste disposal cost and turn it into a revenue stream,” says Thomas Davison-Sebry, of the group. “The waste would normally go for clinical incineration. We use a thermal process to re-engineer the uncontaminated plastic wraps into a solid block that has a good commodity value for the hospital to sell. It’s a full circular economy event.”

After years of research and development in Wales, a green business has set its sights on helping global firms capitalise on waste recycling. The NHS is already benefitting from Thermal Compaction Group’s award-winning technical thinking. Business Awards, TCG has now realised its ambition to roll the machine out to the NHS in the UK. Davison-Sebry, who was born in Cardiff, was proud to be part of the party visiting the National Museum of Wales to pick up the trophy.

“Wales is rich in academic and industrial resources,” he says, having helped organise years of research and trials for the machine at St Woolos Hospital in Newport. “I want to build TCG up to be a global force in sustainable and responsible recycling. The Welsh government appears to be very receptive to our ideas. They have supported our efforts to break into the exports market through their subsidised trade missions. We have some of the best university establishments in the world here, and we often look to them for collaboration. The industry sector created from university projects and personnel in Wales has been integral to the economy.”
A humanitarian teams work tirelessly to respond to crises around the world, one of the most vital issues is making sure funding for relief efforts has the maximum impact possible. The stakes couldn’t be much higher for the problems that Ben Joakim, of innovative aid finance platform Disberse, are addressing. With a background in international development, Joakim is passionately building an alternative financial infrastructure that means charities and donors can transfer and track where their funds go, ensuring that every penny will count.

“I’ve run charities in the UK that were primarily fundraising entities for organisations in Africa and beyond, and then I ran a multi-million dollar portfolio of projects for a Dutch NGO across the globe,” he explains. “What I saw across those different roles was recurring transactional inefficiencies. If you’re a charity sending money internationally, you’re subject to upfront banking fees, poor exchange rates and currency fluctuations. Once funds have been transferred, being able to track what happens to that money is very difficult.”

Statistics from the UN show that up to 30% of government spend on aid can be lost to fraud and corruption, and that doesn’t even account for losses incurred through foreign currency exchange. “Money is lost through banking infrastructures that weren’t built to serve the charity sector. Yet fraud and corruption is a complex challenge that manifests both inside and outside of the sector. These stem from systemic failures, rather than individual greed,” points out Joakim.

“If you donate to a charity, how do you know where your donation is going, where it’s being spent and the impact that it has? The reality is we don’t.”

Disberse’s technological ingenuity aims to fundamentally redefine this. Their current projects involve the Start Network, which has managed approximately £400 million in humanitarian response funds over recent years on behalf of 42 aid agencies, including Oxfam and Save the Children.

“We’re starting to test with a range of charities and NGOs. We’re still in closed beta testing working to make the process more transparent and accountable, whilst driving cost efficiencies for those organisations. Our vision is to transform how funds are distributed within the sector, ensuring they have the greatest impact for communities and individuals facing poverty and crisis.

“There’s an increasing lack of trust in charities, primarily because people don’t know where their money is going. This growing scepticism is real, and something that the sector cannot ignore.

“I’m a huge supporter of aid finance, but the sector must recognise that we need to do more. This starts with how public and charitable funds are managed and distributed.”

A year and a half in, Disberse has been recognised as one of the Digital Dozen leading start-up companies in Wales for their pioneering use of blockchain technology. Whilst blockchain technology is commonly associated with cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Disberse is deploying it in a different way. “There is a lot of hype and excitement around Bitcoin at the moment, but it is also surrounded by negative perceptions, both in terms of its volatility, and also the need for regulation. Instead, we are issuing e-money (digital money) onto the blockchain, which is backed by funds held in deposit. Digital funds can be distributed down the chain, and be traced from end to end, from donor to beneficiary.”

Last year, for their first pilot, a girls’ education project in Swaziland, funds were distributed by Welsh charity Positive Women in support of four schools educating vulnerable orphans. The savings enabled an additional three girls to attend school for a year at scale; they are hugely excited by the potential.

“We’re building the future of aid finance from Wales, harnessing the potential of emerging technology,” says Joakim. “We see ourselves as a global company, but established in Wales. It’s home – it’s where I want to grow Disberse.”

Four local universities and a range of like-minded tech businesses also make South Wales a great base for Disberse. “There’s access to good infrastructure, there’s Cardiff Airport, and although London is only two hours away, Wales provides us with a really good opportunity that’s not London.

“There are a number of upsides to that, from costs of living, access to talent, and work-life balance. It’s a great place to live, especially with young children, I can drive from home or my office and be on the beach in 10 minutes, or head north and be in the mountains in 20. There aren’t many places in the UK where that’s possible. We’ve got a really dynamic start-up ecosystem in South Wales, particularly in the Newport, Swansea and Cardiff area. There are lots of different businesses doing exciting things, but who all want to see each other succeed. They see Wales as a great place to start and grow a business.”
Sales director Sam Radion says: “We deal with everyone, from people setting up in their bedroom to big multinationals with thousands of workers. We’re now branching out from the recruitment marketplace with a new online tool to manage expense claims, which can be used by any type of business.”

Since outgrowing its original Tenby premises in 2002, the company has been based at Neyland Marina near Milford Haven. And when it comes to recruiting and retaining its own staff, the quality of life in Pembrokeshire has proved to be a powerful draw.

Working at the quayside surrounded by yacht masts is a particular pleasure for Sam, who volunteers as an officer-in-charge at the local coastguard in his spare time. “The standard of life here is a major driver,” he says. “Everyone knows everyone in the community and there’s none of the office politics you’d get in the city.”

Merit Software now employs 47 people, and there are plans to increase the workforce as its portfolio of products is expanded. As well as recruiting directly into executive roles, the company culture is to start young employees on the customer support team and furnish them with the technical skills they need to progress in the IT industry. Sam says: “The support team is like a call centre – they’re the first people that our clients speak to. So while they’re working there, our employees get an introduction to the products and the marketplace, and can work their way up. Most of the people in our management team originally spent time in support.”