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L/R: Chukwuebuka Madubuko (Radiographer), Fiona McCloskey (Consultant Radiologist), Simon Cliffe (Senior CT Applications Specialist, HeartFlow), Hilary Brownlee (Radiographer), Kerry Filmer (Radiographer) & Charis McNabney (Consultant Radiologist)

## SOUTH EASTERN TRUST RADIOLOGY DEPARTMENT RECOGNISED WITH PRESTIGIOUS HEARTFLOW QUALITY AWARD FOR THIRD TIME

The Department of Radiology within the South Eastern Trust has been awarded the esteemed HeartFlow Quality Award for Excellence in Coronary CT Imaging, marking the third time the team has received this prestigious recognition.

The department previously earned the award in 2021 and 2024 underscoring its sustained commitment to delivering exceptional cardiovascular imaging services and prioritising patient-centred care.

The HeartFlow CT Quality Award recipients are selected based on metrics that evaluate the quality and implementation of a practice's cardiovascular imaging program. The HeartFlow Analysis is an innovative

approach that transforms data from a patient's non-invasive coronary CTA into a personalized, digital 3D model of the patient's coronary arteries.

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and analytics to provide detailed insights into coronary artery disease, enhancing diagnostic accuracy and patient outcomes.

**Continued on  
page 4**



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## Improvement in planning processing times promised

**Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins has welcomed improvement in processing times for planning applications during 2024/25.**

Commenting on the latest statistics Minister Kimmins said: "My Department has been working collectively over the last two years with local government and other stakeholders to deliver the Planning Improvement Programme with the aim of enhancing and making a tangible difference to the planning system in the North.

"Significant progress has been achieved so far and I now welcome the improvement in processing times for both local and major applications in 2024/25. It is particularly pleasing to see a significant improvement in the average processing times for major applications which has seen its lowest annual processing time since the transfer of planning powers in 2015

and a decrease of 6.9 weeks compared with 2023/24.

"Recently I also hosted a round table event in Belfast entitled 'Plan to Improve: Pathway to Progress'. The event brought together a variety of organisations from across business, education, public sector, environment, Councils, and legal professions to encourage open and collaborative dialogue on the planning system.

The event discussed many of the key current themes particularly relating to the performance and resilience of the planning system for the future and my officials are now considering the diverse perspectives, discussions, views, ideas and key messages from the event to help inform and prioritise future actions."



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# BELFAST CITY AIRPORT SUPPORTS PEOPLE'S KITCHEN BELFAST'S HOMELESS OUTREACH

Belfast City Airport's Community Fund is supporting the delivery of vital outreach services by People's Kitchen North Belfast, helping to provide food, warmth, and essential care to individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty across the city.

Operating seven nights a week, the charity's mobile support unit reaches up to 100 people each evening, offering hot meals, sleeping bags, warm clothing, and toiletries to those in need.

The funding will also enable the charity to continue providing hospital care packs and tailored assistance to elderly individuals and those living in severe deprivation, particularly in areas with some of the most economically disadvantaged communities in Northern Ireland.

Nicole Kelly, Community Fund Ambassador at Belfast City Airport, said:

"At Belfast City Airport, we are committed to supporting projects that deliver real, lasting impact within our local communities.

"People's Kitchen Belfast provides vital support to those experiencing homelessness and



hardship, meeting immediate needs while also helping individuals take steps toward stability and recovery.

"We are proud that our Community Fund can contribute to such meaningful, compassionate work."

Councillor Paul McCusker, Belfast City Council, added:

"Thanks to the support from Belfast City

Airport's Community Fund, we can continue to deliver life-saving outreach services.

"Every sleeping bag, every warm pack, and every hot meal helps restore a sense of dignity and safety to people who are facing incredibly tough circumstances.

"Our volunteers don't just hand out essentials – they build trust, offer comfort, and help people

take their first steps toward a better future."

Since 2009, Belfast City Airport's Community Fund has donated over £656,000 to more than 231 local charities and community initiatives across Greater Belfast and North Down.

To learn more about Belfast City Airport's Community Fund, visit: [www.belfastcityairport.com/Our-Community](http://www.belfastcityairport.com/Our-Community)

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# New regional breast assessment booking centre at Ulster Hospital

Health Minister Mike Nesbitt visited Northern Ireland's new regional breast assessment booking centre just weeks after launching the major reform initiative.

The Minister's visit highlights his ongoing commitment to tackling long standing inequalities in breast cancer care and the unacceptable variations in waiting times that had existed between different Health and Social Care Trusts across the province. Launched in early May 2025, the new centralised regional assessment booking service provided by South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) is supported with assessment clinics located in each of the five Trusts, ensuring that all patients referred with suspected breast cancer are seen at the earliest opportunity based on clinical need, rather than their postcode. This initiative is part of the Minister's wider efforts to improve patient outcomes and increase public confidence in diagnostic services. During the visit to the Ulster Hospital site, the Health Minister met with the centralised administration team alongside the clinicians and staff responsible for the delivery of one of the five regional clinics. Minister Nesbitt praised the collaborative effort behind the reform: "This is a change built on partnership. It has been achieved through genuine co-production between clinicians, Trusts, administration teams and, most importantly, the patients we serve. I want to thank everyone involved in making this major reform possible. "I launched this service to ensure that all women across Northern Ireland have fair and timely access to potentially life-saving assessments. It's heartening to now meet the administration team, clinicians, nurses and patients who are seeing the benefits of this reform. This is a powerful example of how regional working can lead to better, more equitable care. The Minister's visit also aligns with broader efforts to reform health services in Northern Ireland and the importance of consolidating assessment and surgical services while ensuring that aftercare and chemotherapy are provided as close to patients' homes as possible. This approach reflects a patient-centred model of care, recognising the need for both specialised treatment and accessible follow up services. In addition to the regional assessment clinic, Minister Nesbitt has been involved in other initiatives aimed at enhancing cancer care. These initiatives collectively represent a significant step forward in the transformation of cancer services in Northern Ireland, aiming to provide timely, equitable, and patient-centered care for all individuals affected by cancer.

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# Belfast Businesses Encouraged to Shine in High Street Heroes NI 2025 Awards

Retail NI, in partnership with National Lottery operator Allwyn, SSE Airtricity and Gig Grafter, has officially launched the High Street Heroes NI 2025 campaign.

This vibrant initiative celebrates the independent retailers and local businesses that form the backbone of Northern Ireland's communities and high streets.

Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive of Retail NI, said: "The High Street Heroes NI campaign continues to grow from strength to strength, with a record-breaking 15,000 votes cast last year. Our high streets are more than shopping destinations. They are vital centres of employment, entrepreneurship and community life.

"Independent retail is the lifeblood of communities right across Northern Ireland, and this campaign is the biggest celebration of our thriving local retail sector. This year, we are preparing to host our biggest ever showcase and a major celebration of the individual businesses that form the beating heart of our towns and cities.

"Retail NI is delighted to collaborate with Translink to amplify the campaign's visibility and to recognise the vital role public transport plays in connecting people to their local high streets."

The annual Retail NI High Street Heroes Awards shine a spotlight on the impact independent retailers make on the local economy and community, as part of a major celebration of the very best in Northern Ireland's independent retail sector.

This people-powered awards programme invites the public to vote for their favourite local businesses across 13 categories, ranging from food and drink to fashion and essential services. It is entirely driven by the public's voice,



L-R Anett Hatarik, SSE Airtricity; Michele Bryans, Chief Executive of EastSide Partnership; Joeline Poole, Retail NI and Estera Obuchowska, Gig Grafter.

giving communities the opportunity to recognise those businesses that go the extra mile.

Helping to launch the awards at Hoggs Pharmacy on the Shankill Road Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Tracy Kelly, added:

"Local businesses are the lifeblood of our city, providing residents and communities with a wide variety of services, products and facilities right on their doorstep.

"They also create jobs, bring vibrancy, attract investment and foster a sense of community spirit which is invaluable to our communities.

"The NI High Street Heroes Awards offer a chance to recognise this contribution and give a shout out to the cafés, hairdressers, chemists and other independent retailers who make a real difference to our neighbourhoods."

Voting opens on Friday, July 4 (Independence Day) which is a fitting date to mark the independence and resilience of Northern

Ireland's independent retailers. Among the top honours are "High Street of the Year" and "Independent Retailer of the Year." These awards celebrate innovation, outstanding customer service, sustainability, lasting community impact and contributions to local economic growth.

A new feature for 2025 is the "Winners Hall of Fame," which recognises businesses that have consistently topped the polls since the campaign began in 2020. While these champions are now celebrated in a dedicated hall and step aside from this year's competition, their legacy is cemented and space is made for new contenders to shine.

Local businesses across Belfast are encouraged to promote themselves and rally customer votes. Shoppers are also being urged to get involved and support their favourite high street stars.

Retail NI, which represents the independent retail and wholesale

sector in Northern Ireland, launched the High Street Heroes NI campaign to recognise and reward local retailers for their impact on local communities. For every £1 spent at an independent retailer, 70p stays in the local economy. That is a direct investment in farmers, producers, jobs and the vibrancy of local neighbourhoods. It supports the wider community and strengthens the local economy.

In a world dominated by big chains and online giants, High Street Heroes NI offers a timely reminder of the value, character and resilience of our local businesses. If ever there was a time to celebrate your local heroes, this is it. Vote, share and spread the word.

For more information on how to cast your vote, visit High Street Heroes 2025: Voting now open | Belfast Live

Shortlisted retailers will be announced in early August, with an awards evening scheduled to take place on Thursday 21 August.

## Continued from page 1

The Department of Radiology has consistently demonstrated excellence in cardiovascular imaging through attention to detail, adherence to best practices and the integration of cutting-edge technologies. This award highlights the

department's ongoing efforts to stay at the forefront of medical advancements.

Delighted to receive this award for the third time, South Eastern Trust, Radiology Services Manager, Jayne Hutchinson, said, "We are honoured to receive the HeartFlow Quality Award once again. This recognition reflects the dedication, skill

and innovation of our entire team, who work tirelessly to ensure patients receive the highest standard of cardiovascular care. It also reinforces our commitment to embracing advanced diagnostic tools that lead to better patient outcomes."

Congratulating the Department of Radiology, Director of Surgery, Elective

Care, Maternity & Paediatrics, Maggie Parks added, "This is a fantastic achievement for the staff in Radiology and a testament to their continued drive for excellence. The team's expertise and commitment to innovation makes a real difference in the lives of patients across the South Eastern Trust."



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# Crane name's a winner at Short Strand site

A pupil at St Matthew's primary school in Short Strand, Belfast has won a competition to name a crane on a Clanmil Housing development on Mountpottinger Road, Belfast

Primary 7 pupil Kamallesh Vadlaman's winning name, An Craein Tithochta, which is Irish for 'the housing crane', stood out among the entries in the competition. He explained his thinking behind it: "I picked the name because I enjoy speaking in Irish, and the crane will help build houses for people."

Kamallesh was presented with an iPad by Dermot McBride of MJ McBride construction company who are building the homes for Clanmil.

Kamallesh's principal, Ciara O'Neill, added: "Well done to Kamallesh for his winning name and a big 'thank you' to Clanmil for their commitment to investing in the education and wellbeing of our children. It is important for our children to



Kamallesh Vadlaman with his mum Lalitha, St Matthew's school principal Ms Ciara O'Neill, Dermot McBride of MJ McBride Construction and Clanmil Development Officer Julie Donaghy.

engage in what is happening in the local community, and the partnership between Clanmil and St Matthew's has enhanced the learning experiences of the children and fostered a sense of responsibility."

The newly named crane overlooks a site where 13 new homes are being built for people on

the social housing waiting list, including 11 2-bedroom apartments, 1 2-bedroom wheelchair accessible apartment and 1 3-bedroom apartment. The homes, which are being built to Lifetime Homes and Secure by Design standard, will be completed in summer 2026.

Jan Sloan, Executive Director of

Development and New Business at Clanmil added:

"Congratulations to Kamallesh on choosing such a unique name for the crane at this site. Work is progressing well on this site and we're looking forward to the apartments being ready by summer 2026, providing much-needed new homes for this part of Belfast."

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# REVOLUTIONISING THE LOCAL TOURISM EXPERIENCE WITH IMMERSIVE TECH

Three companies have each been awarded £100K to develop prototypes for innovative tourism experience

As part of Augment the City, an 18-month programme led by Belfast City Council's City Innovation Office, the companies have been working with the region's tourism partners to harness cutting edge immersive tech and wireless connectivity to develop prototypes that inspire locals and visitors alike to tell their Belfast Story.

The three companies have now made it through to the final stage, and over the next six months will turn their concepts into prototypes to be trialled in real-world settings.

The successful companies and concepts are:

Hamilton Robson's Belfast Stories Generator (a collaboration with 1Up Studios and Nerve Centre) - an AI-powered interviewer and holographic interface designed to spark natural conversations and a



powerful story discovery tool. The final prototype will be a scalable, searchable archive capturing authentic, unfiltered "Belfast Stories."

Liquid City's Amergin will develop a simple story tool, with an AI interviewer that can aid storytelling by anyone, anywhere on their

mobile device.

Ekaterina Solomatina's Memory Fractal Belfast will use a mixed reality experience to inspire, capture and share personal and cultural memories from lesser heard voices within our communities.

Dr Adrian Johnston MBE, Chair of the Belfast Region City Deal's Digital Advisory Board and Innovation Commissioner for Belfast added: "Augment the City has been funded through the Digital Pillar of Belfast Region City Deal, with additional contributions from Belfast City Council. First and foremost, it's about supporting

collaborative innovation across sectors for local economic and social impact. And it's about encouraging our SMEs and entrepreneurs to adopt digital technologies to support them on their own journey of success. From what we've seen from all the companies involved in Augment the City, there are some truly exciting concepts here that have the potential to go global."

For more information on Augment the City, visit [www.smartbelfast.city](http://www.smartbelfast.city) or on the Belfast Region City Deal programme of investment, visit [www.belfastregioncitydeal.co.uk](http://www.belfastregioncitydeal.co.uk)

# Learners take centre stage at OCN Awards

Over 350 learners, teachers, tutors, and special guests celebrated the OPEN COLLEGE NETWORK NI (OCN) Learning Endeavour Awards 2025 at Titanic Belfast recently.

The annual awards, now in their 7th year, were hosted by Denise Watson and aim to celebrate the achievements of learners who have gone to exceptional lengths to achieve their learning goals. This year's special guest was Matthew Bell, the former Ireland international hockey player who shared his remarkable story after being given a day to live by medics back in 2019 when they discovered he had a brain tumour.

A total of £16,000 was awarded to learners and education and training providers through learning bursaries from across the province who have achieved extraordinary results, with some learners overcoming numerous personal hurdles to achieve their technical and professional OCN qualifications.

The learners and providers recognised at the OCN Learning Endeavour Awards are a powerful reminder of the profound impact that education can have on individuals and communities. Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald gave the opening speech at the awards ceremony.

Martin Flynn, Chief Executive OCN, said: "This year's awards ceremony had an extra



special feel to it given it's our 30th anniversary year. I am delighted that once more OCN was able to provide a unique platform for learners to take centre stage, sharing their inspiring stories of achievement."

Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald said: "I was delighted to open the OCN Learning Endeavour Awards. OCN help people build confidence, gain recognised skills, and progress into meaningful employment. I offer my warmest congratulations to all the award nominees and winners and want to pay tribute to their commitment and inspiring stories."

The Third Sector

Learner of the Year winner was Siun McCarthy, Bolster Community, taking home the Schools Learner of the Year award was Leon Callaghan, St Patrick's College, Maghera; OCN Provider of the Year category winner was Clanrye Group and the Inspiring Tutor/Teacher of the Year award went to Peter Knox, Rossmar School, Limavady.

Sam Welsh, Northern Regional College won Further Education Learner of the Year category, with Mustafa Alshowely from People 1st, collecting the Essential Skills Learner of the Year category.

The Health & Well-being Learner of the Year went to Gavin Boyle,

Action Mental Health; and South Eastern Regional College – Truffle Shop won the Advancing Learning Through Innovation category; Traineeship/Apprenticeship Learner of the Year was won by Eugene Prunty, South Eastern Regional College.

The final Award of the 2025 ceremony, the Hilary Sloan MBE Learning Endeavour Award, in memory of former OCN Chair who was a powerful advocate of life-long learning, was announced by OCN Vice Chair Anne-Marie McClure, the award went to Eugene Prunty winner of this year's Traineeship/Apprenticeship Learner of the Year category.

# First 'legal wall' in Belfast opened with street art paint jam

The first legal street art wall in Belfast officially opened recently with a free street art paint jam for up-and-coming artists and creatives.

The wall, funded by Belfast City Council, is located on Little Patrick Street in the city centre and will be managed by Seedhead Arts, with permissions from NIE Networks which owns

the wall.

It is the first of three walls due to be open this year, providing a place for artists to freely express themselves, without the need to seek permissions from landowners to house their artworks.

It is hoped the legal walls, as they are known, will deter

graffiti in the city. They are the latest initiative from the council to support street artists and nurture creative development.

The locations for the other two walls are still to be finalised, with engagement ongoing between council, Seedhead Arts and property owners.

Adam Turkington

from Seedhead Arts will help operate the wall at Great Patrick Street.

It will be open 24/7 for professional and emerging artists to use, along with anyone with an interest in street art.

No booking is needed, but the wall will be continuously monitored to manage content and ensure it is well maintained.

"Legal walls are a key



building block for any city wanting to support its artistic community and, although there are

spaces in the city that have been unofficially legal for some time, this is the first time that Belfast has a formally designated a space in this way," said Adam.

"In particular, in Belfast, where we have a huge number of young women who are street artists, this will hopefully provide a space where they can safely meet and practice their skills."

Further details are available on the council website - [belfastcity.gov.uk/events](http://belfastcity.gov.uk/events)

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# Local sporting heroes honoured at the GolfNow Belfast Sports Awards 2025

Guests at the awards ceremony in City Hall included Olympians, athletes, volunteers and coaches of all ages and abilities from across Belfast.

As well as a host of awards, two athletes were inducted into Belfast City Council’s Sporting Hall of Fame – Marissa Callaghan (Football) and Michael Halliday (Football).

Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Micky Murray, said the GolfNow Belfast Sports Awards celebrated all the winners’ sporting achievements and accolades this year and recognised all the sport and physical activity that goes on, in the city.

Inducted into the Council’s Sporting Hall of Fame, Marissa Callahan is a trailblazer in women’s football and a dedicated ambassador for sport. Marissa made her international debut for the Northern Ireland women’s national under-19 team in 2002 and progressed to earn her senior cap in 2010.

She captained Northern Ireland at the UEFA Women’s Euro 2022—an historic moment as the team competed in a major tournament for the first time. Marissa retired from international football in 2025 with an incredible 91 caps, leaving behind a legacy that continues to



inspire. She was awarded an MBE in The Kings New Years Honours List in 2025.

Also inducted into the Council’s Sporting Hall of Fame, Michael Halliday began his footballing career with East Belfast and then he moved to Glentoran, a club he has supported all his life, where he played for 11 years and won numerous trophies. He made his debut towards the end of the 1999/2000 season. Signed as a midfielder, Glentoran manager Roy Coyle soon converted

him to centre forward and over the next ten years he made 468 appearances, scoring 141 goals. He won fifteen winners’ medals, including three league titles and two Irish Cups.

Olympic medalists Rebecca Shorten and Jack McMillan were awarded Sports Personality of the Year.

Former Methodist College Belfast pupil Rebecca Shorten and her teammates became World and European Champion in the coxless fours. Rebecca competed at the Paris 2024 Olympic

Games in the Women’s Four where the team secured a silver medal. Rebecca continues to inspire the next generation of rowers in Belfast as she often returns to Methodist College’s boathouse.

Jack McMillan, past pupil of Belfast INST, competed as part of the men’s 4X 200 freestyle relay at the Paris 2024 Olympic games as part of team GB where they won gold. Jack has become only the second Northern Irish swimmer ever to win an Olympic gold medal in 128 years.



## Did you, a loved one, or someone you know serve in The Ulster Defence Regiment?

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# Lizards and Legends

JV Allister focuses on our only native reptile, The Common Lizard

Legend has it that St. Patrick banished all the snakes from Ireland, but if he had had all the reptiles in mind, he overlooked one, the Common Lizard. Maybe it was hiding under a stone at the time!

In any case, it's our only native reptile, and a very interesting animal.

Like all reptiles, common lizards are cold blooded, relying on external heat to regulate their body temperature, and are often found sunbathing on rocks or sand in the mornings in their known habitat 'hot spots', mostly in mountainous areas such as the Mourne and Sperrins, even the Belfast Hills, as well as some bogs and coastal dunes.

They might be slow when cold but can run fast when fully heated, which is their main means of escape if birds or mammals try to catch and eat them. But they have another much more cunning plan: they can shed their tails (still wriggling) to confuse predators, and regrow them, even if they're



usually shorter than the originals. A remarkable adaptation for survival of an otherwise vulnerable creature.

They have also adapted to living in colder northern regions as they spread through Europe and beyond. Most reptiles, and all birds of course, lay eggs, but our female common lizards give birth to live young. In more southern, warmer climes, common lizards are known to lay eggs.

While their overall numbers here are not

exactly known, it's thought likely that they are in decline, mainly because of habitat loss; and the extensive wildfires this year will have destroyed precious habitat for many years to come, as well as killing many lizards.

Despite their adaptations, they live precarious lives, particularly as weather patterns change and people do stupid things like setting fire to wild places.

Incidentally, St. Patrick didn't banish the snakes from

Ireland, for the simple reason that there were none in his time, since before the last Ice Age. Rather, it seems that snakes served as an allegory for paganism, which Patrick 'banished' as he brought Christianity to our shores.

Myths and legends have their place in our folk memories, but we also need to know the stories about our highly adaptable native wildlife, and in the case of common lizards, protect our only native reptile.

JVA

# SUMMER EVENTS TO ENJOY IN BELFAST

If you are enjoying a staycation this summer, then exploring the history and heritage on your doorstep is a great way to find out more about the city you call home...Belfast.

We have a number of seasonal tours over the holidays, where every weekend we cover different stories, topics and even locations.

We're kicking off our seasonal tours on the 26th July with the North Belfast Heritage Walking tour, a great introduction to some of the historically significant buildings in the city.

On 8-9 August, "The Medical History of Belfast Charitable Society" Cemetery Tour delves into how 18th and 19th century philanthropy and pioneering surgery left their mark.

The following weekend, 15-16 August, "The Hidden History of the Women of Clifton Street Cemetery" shines a spotlight on heroines like Mary Ann McCracken, Martha McTier, and Charlotte Sinclair—women whose powerful



yet often overlooked contributions shaped the city of Belfast.

On 22-23 August, we invite you to join our "Plots & Plotters,". This tour of Clifton Street Cemetery unravels the radical roots of the Belfast Charitable Society and their entanglement in the 1798 Rebellion, through the stories of William Drennan, the McCrackens, and the

Joys.

Finally, on 29-30 August, "Belfast's Heroines: Mary Ann McCracken and Martha McTier Walking Tour" returns, revisiting Belfast's most courageous women as they fought inequality, championed education, and shaped civic life.

This tour starts at Clifton House and ends at Belfast City Hall.

Each tour is fully

guided by one of our expert white badge volunteers, with group sizes limited for the maximum comfort of those attending. So whether you're a history buff or simply curious, August at Clifton House promises rich storytelling woven into the city's very fabric.

For full tour details and to book, visit [www.cliftonbelfast.com](http://www.cliftonbelfast.com) or call 028 9099 7022.

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# Welcome expansion of support for school age childcare from September 2025

Many families with school aged children across Northern Ireland rely on registered childcare providers every day to enable them to go to work.

## Employers For Childcare

This childcare may be being provided by a registered childminder or a day nursery, or in a setting attached to a primary school. While childcare costs remain a significant expense it is welcome news that there is an increase in the number of families who will be able to claim vital support from September 2025.

NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme extended  
The Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme currently provides a 15% subsidy on childcare costs for eligible working parents of children under Primary school age, who are in receipt of

Tax-Free Childcare.  
The Education Minister, Paul Givan, has announced that from 1 September 2025 the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme will be extended to include school age children who attend a registered childcare facility.

These families will now also qualify for the 15% subsidy. It is estimated that this extension could give financial support to the families of a further 8,000 children who are currently unable to access support through the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme. The NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme is



administered by Early Years, their website [www.early-years.org](http://www.early-years.org) will be updated in due course as more information becomes available.

Get advice to make sure this is right for your family While these changes will provide valuable

additional support to more families, working out which is best form of support for your family can be confusing. We would encourage anyone using registered childcare to call the Family Benefits Advice Service on 028 9267 8200 for advice

to ensure they are receiving the best form of support or email [hello@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:hello@employersforchildcare.org).

# Hydraquip Opens New Trade Counter in Lisburn, Northern Ireland

Established in 1989, Hydraquip Hose & Hydraulics, one of the UK's leading providers of hydraulic solutions, is proud to announce the opening of its new hydraulic trade counter in Lisburn, Northern Ireland.

This exciting development coincides with Hydraquip's first anniversary of operating in Northern Ireland. The launch of the Lisburn branch marks a key milestone in strengthening support for local customers and enhancing service delivery throughout the region. The company is proud of the progress made over the past year and is looking forward to further growth in the years ahead.

Hydraquip's trade counters provide access to over 70,000 products, offering customers immediate availability of essential

parts. From hoses and fittings to vital hydraulic components, there is no need to wait for delivery, helping projects to stay on schedule.

Alongside the trade counter, Hydraquip operates a dedicated fleet of mobile hydraulic service engineers across Northern Ireland, delivering a 24-hour HQ Onsite Hose Replacement Service. The team, equipped with up-to-date and specialised training, achieves a 95% first-time fix rate for on-site repairs. From hose replacements to full hydraulic installations and maintenance

contracts, Hydraquip offers tailored solutions to meet the diverse needs of various industries.

Avoid costly downtime by visiting the Lisburn trade counter, open from 8 am to 5 pm at 19

Ferguson Drive, Knockmore Road, BT28 2EX.

For assistance, call 028 92 29 4000 or email [sales@hqonsite.com](mailto:sales@hqonsite.com). Follow @hqonsite on Instagram for job updates and team insights.



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# Host a Builders' Tea and Raise Funds for Life-Saving Skin Cancer Detection

Action Cancer, Northern Ireland's leading local cancer charity, is calling on construction and property companies across Northern Ireland to host a Builders' Tea during July or August in support of its award-winning Skin Cancer Detection Service.

The campaign, launched in partnership with Hagan Homes, encourages companies to choose one Friday morning over the summer months to bring their teams together for a tea break and raise vital funds. With construction workers at significantly higher risk of skin cancer due to prolonged outdoor exposure, this initiative offers a chance for companies to come together over a cup of tea and support a campaign that combines fundraising with raising awareness.

Each participating company will receive a Builders' Tea pack, including a tea chest from local brand Thompson's Punjana and biscuits generously provided by SuperValu.

All funds raised will directly support Action Cancer's Skin Cancer Detection Service, which offers free appointments with specialist nurses for anyone aged 18 or over with a concerning mole or lesion. If the

campaign reaches its combined fundraising target of £5,000, it will fund 40 potentially life-saving skin cancer detection appointments for people across Northern Ireland.

The campaign also aims to promote sun safety awareness within the construction industry, encouraging men and women to wear SPF 30, or preferably SPF 50, as it provides far better protection for outdoor workers, and regularly check their skin for any changes. In Northern Ireland, seven people are diagnosed with skin cancer every day, and many cases could be prevented through proper sun protection and early detection.

Jim Burke, Managing Director of Hagan Homes, said: "We are incredibly proud to support this important initiative from Action Cancer. As a local homebuilder, we recognise the unique risks construction workers face from



prolonged sun exposure. By coming together for a simple tea break, companies can help fund vital skin cancer detection services that have the potential to save lives. It's a small gesture that can have a big impact."

To register your interest and receive your free Host a Builders' Tea pack, please email Christopher Corbett at ccorbett@actioncancer.org.

In addition to its Skin Cancer Detection Service, Action Cancer

provides a wide range of support, including health checks, breast screening, therapeutic services and its Big Bus mobile detection unit, supported by SuperValu, Centra, and their network of local independent retailers.

## TAKE ON AN ABSEIL OR BOAT CHALLENGE WITH AIR AMBULANCE

As summer brings more people outdoors—on the roads, enjoying sports, tackling DIY projects, or working on farms—the need for Air Ambulance Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) is likely to rise.

On average, two individuals each day in Northern Ireland require this critical service following traumatic incidents. The team, which includes a Doctor and HEMS Paramedic, performs advanced medical interventions, including out-of-hospital surgical skills, blood transfusions, and advanced pain relief in time-critical, life-threatening situations at scene. To keep the aircraft flying and the medical team ready, the charity must raise over £8,000 daily to ensure the Doctor and HEMS paramedic are there when people need them.

- Dragon Boat Race — Thursday 4th & Friday 5th September
- Bryson Lagan Sports, Belfast

Unleash your inner Viking and compete in our legendary Dragon Boat Race on the River Lagan! Perfect for corporate teams, community groups and friends, this high-energy event is all about

teamwork, fun, and friendly competition. With prizes for speed, spirit and style, a BBQ and DJ riverside to keep everyone fuelled and entertained, it's one of the most exciting days on Belfast's event calendar.

Register now: [airambulanceni.org/dragon-boat-race](http://airambulanceni.org/dragon-boat-race)

- Europa Abseil — Saturday 12th October
- Europa Hotel, Belfast

Dare to descend one of Belfast's most iconic landmarks? The Europa Abseil is your chance to face a thrilling personal challenge while raising vital funds for Air Ambulance NI. Ideal for individuals, colleagues or adventurous friends looking for an unforgettable experience.

Sign up today: [airambulanceni.org/europa-abseil](http://airambulanceni.org/europa-abseil)

- Roe Valley Abseil — Saturday 20th September
- Roe Valley Country Park

Surrounded by the beauty of Northern Ireland's countryside, the Roe Valley Abseil

offers a heart-pounding descent in a spectacular setting. This challenge is perfect for individuals, families, school groups or community teams looking to take on a daring outdoor experience — all in support of a local cause that saves lives.

Join us: [airambulanceni.org/roe-valley-abseil](http://airambulanceni.org/roe-valley-abseil)

Your Support Matters  
Air Ambulance NI works in partnership with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to provide the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS). The service operates 365 days a year, bringing emergency medical doctors and paramedics to trauma patients wherever they are. On average, the HEMS team is tasked twice a day, helping to save lives, brains, and limbs.

Get involved today  
• Learn more at [www.airambulanceni.org/events](http://www.airambulanceni.org/events) or call 028 9262 2677 to speak to the charity fundraising team.

**Europa Abseil**  
Sunday 10th October 2025  
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Air Ambulance NI



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## Game Locker: Celebrating 5 years in Business in Dundonald

Get ready to step into a digital realm where pixels meet passion!

Game Locker, a premier gaming destination, is revolutionizing the gaming experience, offering an immersive environment for individuals, groups, and even corporate events. Established since 2020; Game Locker is proud to be celebrating 5 years in business!

More than just a gaming company, Game Locker prides itself on being “architects of epic experiences” and game-changers that set new standards of epic fun.

Located at Carrowreagh Rd, Belfast, Game Locker provides a unique opportunity to “unlock the player inside.” Their state-of-the-art arena is designed to elevate your play, forge new friendships, and power up positive vibes.

Experience Gaming Like Never Before:

Game Locker offers a diverse range of gaming experiences to cater to every interest:

Levelling Up Community: Beyond just individual play, Game Locker extends its arena to schools, community groups, and workplaces, bringing the joy of gaming directly to the doorstep. This initiative aims to build a vibrant gaming community and foster connections through shared experiences.

New Racing Simulators: For speed enthusiasts, Game Locker now features cutting-edge racing simulators, promising an adrenaline-pumping experience that puts you right in the driver’s seat.

Private, Personal & Corporate Events: Looking for a unique venue for your next gathering? Game Locker is the perfect spot for:

- Birthday Parties: Host and plan an unforgettable birthday celebration with Game Locker.
- Corporate and Private Events: Offering a virtual pistol in your hands with



kickback and rumble, these events are perfect for team-building or private gatherings.

- Family Time: Spend quality time with loved ones through some competitive gaming.
- Playing with Friends: Gather your gaming crew and create lasting memories in a dynamic and exciting environment.

With a focus on providing unparalleled gaming experiences, Game Locker

is quickly becoming a go-to destination for gamers of all ages and skill levels in the Belfast area.

You can reach Game Locker at:

- Tel: 07519 312338
- Email: gl.gamelocker@gmail.com
- Website: WWW.GAMELOCKER.ONLINE

Follow Game Locker on their social media channels (Facebook and Instagram) to stay updated on their latest offerings and events.

## Bring Your Outdoors to Life This Summer with Urban Outlet!

Looking to transform your garden or outdoor space? Head straight to Urban Outlet, located at 163 Moneyreagh Road – your one-stop destination for all things landscaping and hardware!

Whether you’re revamping your patio, fencing in your garden, or just giving your outdoor area a fresh new look, Urban Outlet has it all. From a massive selection of fencing, paints, patio flags, and timber, to eye-catching decorative stones and aggregates – available in both bulk bags and full loads – we’ve got everything you need under one roof.

Need tools, accessories, or building supplies? We’ve got you covered. We even carry concrete, screed, and both building and plastering mortar. Our shelves are stocked and updated daily, so there’s always something new to discover.



And don’t worry about delivery – with our fleet of tipper lorries and Hiab crane lorries, we’ll get your order right to your doorstep. Or if it fits in your car, we’ll gladly help you load up and hit the road.

From railway sleepers and kerbs to decorative bark and agricultural supplies, Urban Outlet is your go-to place to create the perfect outdoor living space.

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## AC HOTEL BY MARRIOTT BELFAST MARKS 7TH BIRTHDAY

AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast celebrated its seventh year in the city with an exclusive summer event on Thursday 12 June, welcoming guests to The Terrace for an evening of Mediterranean-inspired food, signature cocktails and al fresco entertainment hosted by celebrity chef Jean-Christophe Novelli.

The event featured a curated culinary journey by Jean-Christophe Novelli, fresh from filming the latest season of MasterChef Australia. His Mediterranean-inspired menu showcased seasonal ingredients, bringing flair and flavour to The Terrace at AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast.

The celebration also marked the launch of the hotel's new express lunch menu and the return of the ever-popular Terrace Airstream, now serving Belfast Coffee Company refreshments daily with panoramic views over the River

Lagan.

Guests enjoyed dishes from The Terrace grill and Novelli-style small plates in a vibrant yet relaxed riverside atmosphere, reinforcing the hotel's reputation as a stylish all-day dining destination in the heart of the city.

Jean-Christophe Novelli, the acclaimed chef behind both Novelli's restaurant and The Terrace at AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast, added:

"Coming back to Belfast, to my baby – Novelli at the AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast – always feels incredibly special. With its stylish riverside setting, iconic



views of the Belfast skyline, and the warm, attentive service from the team, it was the natural choice for my signature restaurant, and I'm proud to see it growing year on year.

"I was honoured to be invited to contribute to this hotel, which truly is a treasure in the city. It means a great deal to me, having had the privilege of being offered this unique partnership over eight years ago and working alongside the Harbour

Commissioners' team. "I love collaborating with the hotel team to create seasonal menus that reflect my Mediterranean heritage while showcasing the best of local produce and regional influences. Whether you're looking for a laid-back coffee, pre-theatre dining, or an all-day destination with the option to stay over, this is a truly unique spot in Belfast.

"Our journey is also far from over. We're fuelled by an ambitious

vision: to become one of the best and most talked-about dining destinations in Northern Ireland. That's the aim!"

For those seeking a more exclusive experience, AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast also offers private dining options, as well as meeting and event spaces ideal for weddings, corporate functions and private celebrations. With bespoke menu options, flexible layouts, and

attentive service, the hotel provides a refined and distinctive setting for every occasion.

Building on its reputation as one of the city's most versatile venues, the hotel caters to every part of the day, from morning coffees and relaxed lunches to evening celebrations and overnight stays. The Terrace, with its panoramic views, continues to be a standout spot for stylish, seasonal dining in the heart of Belfast.

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Old School Lime Restorations Limited is based in Belfast, covering all of Northern Ireland.

The company carries out specialist work of conserving, restoring, and repairing period, listed, and historic buildings using traditional lime-based materials and techniques including:

Applying breathable lime plasters to interior walls.

Lime rendering: Applying lime-based renders to exterior surfaces.

Lime pointing: Re-pointing brickwork or stonework with lime mortar.

Stucco restoration: Repairing and restoring decorative stucco facades.

Conservation of decorative mouldings and ceilings: Working on intricate plasterwork.

The company adheres to conservation principles

- working to repair and retain original fabric rather than replace it. They aim to preserve and utilise traditional skills and heritage craftsmanship. This company has specialist knowledge and understanding of historic buildings, such as, how lime materials interact with older structures, allowing them to "breathe" and manage moisture, making use of natural materials. Old School Lime Restorations Limited can work on a variety of properties, from private homes to major heritage sites.

For specific inquiries about their services or to obtain a quote contact them directly.

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# HOWDENS PRINCE REGENT ROAD, CASTLEREAGH BT5

**Howdens is a leading supplier of fitted kitchens, wardrobes, appliances, and joinery products. These are exciting times for the Howdens Brand as the company is rapidly expanding across Northern Ireland and Howdens' Castlereagh is a fast-growing depot!**

Howdens is a family friendly organisation with upwards of 900 depots in the UK. They do much of their own manufacturing in kitchens, bedrooms and joinery. Howdens pride themselves on providing the best service to customers, and as a result, are already the UK's Number 1 Trade Kitchen Supplier! The manufacturer literally has 1000's of lines available for immediate delivery. Howdens Castlereagh is known to build strong relationships with customers and compete well on price. The devil is also very

much in the detail from Quality in Constructed cabinets to supplying a wide array of cabinet sizes and configurations, allowing for efficient use of space and tailored storage solutions, from integrated appliances to clever pantry units. Aspects such as worktop, lighting, splashbacks and flooring as well as joinery supplies are not forgotten ensuring a seamless look and finish for your kitchen. Free design appointments are available! Howdens Castlereagh, reports strong local performance and positive customer feedback,

reflecting the successful implementation of the Howdens model at a regional level. This local engagement is crucial for gaining and maintaining market share. Howdens Joinery Group Plc has solidified its position as the UK's leading specialist trade kitchen and joinery supplier, driven by a distinctive business model and consistent strategic expansion. Serving primarily local builders through its extensive depot network, Howdens has demonstrated remarkable resilience and continued growth,

even amidst challenging market conditions. At the heart of Howdens' success is its trade-only model. Unlike retail kitchen showrooms, Howdens caters specifically to professional tradespeople, offering immediate availability of stock, competitive pricing, and dedicated expert support. This approach fosters strong relationships with builders, who in turn rely on Howdens for their projects, creating a robust and loyal customer base. Key elements of their

strategy include: **Extensive Depot Network:** Howdens operates a vast network of depots, allowing builders convenient access to products and services. Each depot functions as a local business, with incentivised teams focused on building strong relationships with local trades. **Stock Availability:** A crucial differentiator is the immediate availability of a wide range of products, allowing builders to collect materials on demand and keep projects moving without

delays. **Comprehensive Product Range:** Beyond kitchens, Howdens supplies a broad array of joinery products, including doors, flooring, and appliances, making it a one-stop shop for builders. **Investment in Manufacturing and Supply Chain:** Howdens invests heavily in its own manufacturing capabilities and a highly efficient supply chain, ensuring quality control, cost effectiveness, and high service levels to its depots. **Digital Evolution:** The company is continuously

enhancing its digital platforms to support its trade customers, including online accounts, click-and-collect services, and improved CRM systems. In 2022, Howdens publicly stated its aim to increase its UK depot count to 950, specifically identifying potential for around 25 depots in Northern Ireland. This proactive target highlights Northern Ireland as a key area for concentrated growth within their UK expansion strategy. Despite macroeconomic headwinds and an anticipated contraction in

the UK kitchen market in 2025, Howdens remains confident in its ability to continue gaining market share. This confidence is rooted in its robust trade-only model, continuous investment in its network, product range, manufacturing capabilities, and digital platforms. The sustained focus on supporting local builders, combined with strategic expansion into new areas like Northern Ireland, positions Howdens for continued long-term growth and market leadership in the UK kitchen and joinery sector.



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## Your home, your style, your solution!

Check out the new curtain department at The Blind Spot

The Blind Spot is now offering made to measure curtains and also curtain rails, complete with a full measuring and fitting service, at their spacious new showroom in East Belfast.

The Blind Spot is already a well-established blinds and shutters company with over 30 years of experience.

Manager Krystina Bradford says:

"The original factory shop was opened in 1990 by my mum and Grandfather. We still specialize in manufacturing and fitting high-quality window coverings for both residential and commercial properties. This now includes venetian, vertical, roller and roman blinds but also embraces new technologies and advancements – today we also offer motorised blinds, shutters, multi-function Blindscreens as well as our new curtain department!"

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# SUMMER BARBEQUE GUIDE

With the sun beating down and heat slowly rising, it is clear to see that barbeque season has finally arrived. However, if you are thinking of investing in a barbeque, there is a great deal to consider.

Prices for barbeques can range from £10 to the multiple thousands and the extensive range has something to cater for every possible need. Depending on the number of grills, number of additional features and quality of its production – there is a lot to consider when choosing your perfect barbeque.

The timeless debate which has been had over many a family barbeque once again raises it's head on this occasion – gas or charcoal?

In many cases your budget might well dictate your choice for you as charcoal barbeques tend to be significantly more cost effective. For those barbeque stalwarts, nothing will compare to a traditional charcoal barbeque and using a gas equivalent is as good as cheating. It is also widely held that the taste from cooking on a charcoal barbeque is distinctive and cannot be reproduced by a modern gas counterpart.

Charcoal does, however, take a considerable length of time to heat up whereas with gas, you can begin cooking almost immediately – providing an obvious advantage. For the sheer convenience of instantaneous cooking, gas barbeques are hard to beat.

In terms of running costs, with gas barbeques you will often 'rent' a cylinder and pay for each refill of gas that you require - a 13Kg canister costs approximately £35. With charcoal however, costs approximately £15 for a 10kg bag which will serve up to three medium barbeques.

Other factors that should be considered include if the barbeque has a lid, the number of people you are likely to be cooking for and what type of food you intend to be cooking.

Buying a barbeque with a lid brings a degree of versatility



to your barbequing that is not otherwise available. It grants you far greater control over the heat and allows you to cook food more thoroughly as opposed to burning the outside whilst leaving the inside underdone. If you are sticking to traditional burgers and sausages then perhaps charcoal is for you, however if you wish to branch out and cook chicken or pork then gas may be the safest option.

If you have a large family or intend on cooking for guests on a

regular basis, it might be worth investing in a gas barbeque as it will give you the reliability and accuracy that is required when hosting for numerous guests. It also brings unrivalled convenience that allows its owner to mingle freely knowing that the cooking is fully under their control. More upmarket barbeques will also come with various features such as heating racks that allow food to sit above the heat of the grill whilst still in the barbeque to ensure that it will remain warm.



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## The 2025 Trends Bringing Light and Freshness to Homes

As the warm season arrives, homeowners are embracing light, airy, and nature-inspired interiors to create refreshing spaces that feel both stylish and comfortable.

This summer, the focus is on soft textures, organic materials, and breezy color palettes that enhance relaxation while keeping homes cool.

One of the standout trends is coastal chic, which brings a beachy, laid-back vibe indoors. Think soft blues, sandy neutrals, and crisp whites, paired with natural elements like rattan, linen, and driftwood. This

aesthetic creates a serene atmosphere that feels effortlessly elegant.

Another popular approach is bringing the outdoors inside. Large windows, indoor plants, and botanical prints are being used to blur the lines between indoor and outdoor spaces. Vertical gardens and hanging planters are particularly trendy, adding a lush, green touch to interiors

while improving air quality.

For those looking to add a touch of luxury, sculptural lighting is making a statement. Hand-blown glass globes, matte brass finishes, and artistic silhouettes are transforming lighting into a focal point rather than just a functional element.

Soft textiles are also playing a key role in summer interiors.



Linen curtains, cotton throws, and bamboo-blend bedding provide a cooling effect while maintaining a cozy feel. These materials are perfect for creating a relaxed yet sophisticated ambiance.

When it comes to color, warm neutrals and pastel tones are dominating the scene. Shades like soft peach, mint green, and powder blue reflect light beautifully, making spaces feel open and inviting. Accent walls with understated floral

prints or textured paint techniques add depth without overwhelming the room.

With homeowners prioritizing comfort and style, these summer interior trends are all about creating spaces that feel fresh, breathable, and effortlessly chic. Whether you're revamping your living room, bedroom, or outdoor patio, this season's design choices ensure that your home remains a sanctuary of relaxation and beauty.



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# Balcony Gardens – What You Need To Know

For those in cities across the globe, apartment living is becoming more and more common as contractors have begun building towards the skies on account of the limited ground space.

A consequence of this drive towards urban living has been that apartment dwellers have had to be pragmatic in the use of their outdoor space – often limited to only a balcony area. This has allowed for the rise of balcony gardens, a feature that has grown in popularity over the last number of years. These unique spaces are the ideal compromise for urban dwellers, providing a comfortable outdoor seating area surrounded by plants whilst limiting the amount of maintenance work required. Balcony gardens are very low maintenance on account of the fact that they do not have soil, weeds or pests and yet still offer the openness and beauty factor of any outdoor space.

When planning your own balcony garden, you must firstly consider whether it is in the sun or shade. This tends to be relatively binary, either you have sun or you don't and can be a determining factor as to if a balcony garden is realistic option. It is vital that you think about safety when considering balcony gardens. One of the main issues is the risk of



something falling from a significant height and causing damage to a person or their property below. Be careful that adequate drainage is in place and that not too much weight is put on the balcony. Pragmatism is also key. Work with what is on offer, if you have natural sun, think about providing shade and if it's windy

then consider wind-breaks. Even if the view leaves a lot to be desired, this can be blocked by plants or trellis. In such a confined space, the scent of your balcony is an essential element of your space. Creating a scented garden can both create a magical area to relax outdoors, whilst also defusing throughout your home. Scented plants can

reap rewards year round by providing beautiful scents. Maintenance is of the utmost importance for any balcony. Even with the most beautiful display, if left untouched it will begin to depreciate and lose the beauty factor that it once had. Even 10 minutes a week to water, clean and maintain your balcony can make a huge difference.

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development, investment, and product advancement ensures that Olympic Lifts offers the most up-to-date, highest quality products and services. This dedication translates to an improved purchasing experience, enhanced

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# Creating Eye-Catching Summer Containers

Summer is the season of vibrant life, and what better way to bring that energy to your doorstep than with overflowing window boxes and cascading hanging baskets?

These portable gardens offer a fantastic opportunity to showcase a riot of colour and texture, transforming even the smallest outdoor space into a floral paradise. But creating truly eye-catching displays takes a little more than just scattering some seeds. Let's delve into the secrets of crafting stunning summer containers that will have your neighbours green with envy.

**The Foundation:** Choosing the Right Containers and Location

Before you even think about plants, consider the containers themselves. For window boxes, ensure they are sturdy, have adequate drainage holes, and are the right size for your window ledge. Hanging baskets should also be well-draining and strong enough to support mature plants and moist soil. Consider the material too – terracotta offers a classic look but dries out faster, while plastic is lightweight and retains moisture better.

Next, assess the location. How much sunlight does the area receive? This will dictate the types of plants that will thrive. South-facing spots bake in the sun, ideal for heat-loving varieties, while shadier north-facing walls call for different selections. Understanding your microclimate is crucial for long-lasting, vibrant

displays.

**Selecting Your Summer Stars**

To create eye-catching arrangements, consider these key elements:

- **Thrillers:** These are your focal point – tall, upright plants that add height and drama. Think geraniums (Pelargoniums), petunias with interesting habits, snapdragons, or even small ornamental grasses.

- **Fillers:** These bushy plants fill out the container, adding volume and supporting the thrillers. Consider calibrachoa (Million Bells), lobelia, verbenas, or cascading petunias.

- **Spillers:** These trailing plants cascade over the edges, softening the look and adding movement. Ivy geraniums, trailing lobelia, sweet potato vine (Ipomoea), and Dichondra 'Silver Falls' are excellent choices.

**Adding Texture and Colour Harmony**

While choosing individual beauties is important, the magic happens when they work together. Think about:

**Colour Palette:** Do you prefer a bold and contrasting scheme, a harmonious blend of similar hues, or a cool and calming white and green display? Consider your home's exterior and your personal style.

**Foliage Interest:** Don't underestimate the power



of foliage! Silvery leaves of dusty miller, the vibrant lime green of creeping Jenny, or the deep purple of Alternanthera add texture and visual interest even when flowers aren't in full bloom.

**Varying Forms and Textures:** Combine plants with different leaf shapes and flower forms for a more dynamic look. The delicate blooms of lobelia contrast beautifully with the bolder flowers of geraniums.

Once you've selected your plants, it's time to get your hands dirty:

**Good Drainage is Key:** Ensure your containers have adequate drainage holes. You can add a layer of gravel or broken pottery shards at the bottom,

although modern advice often suggests using a good quality potting mix alone is sufficient.

**Use Quality Potting Mix:** Avoid using garden soil, which can become compacted in containers. Opt for a lightweight, well-draining potting mix specifically formulated for containers.

**Planting Technique:** Gently remove plants from their nursery pots and loosen any circling roots. Arrange your "thrillers," "fillers," and "spillers" in the container, ensuring they have enough space to grow. The thrillers usually go in the center or back, fillers around them, and spillers towards the edges.

**Watering Wisely:** Water

thoroughly after planting until water drains from the bottom. During the summer months, you may need to water daily, especially for hanging baskets which dry out quickly. Check the soil moisture by sticking your finger about an inch deep – if it feels dry, it's time to water.

**Feeding Frenzy:** Container plants rely on you for nutrients. Use a balanced liquid fertilizer every 2-4 weeks to encourage continuous blooming. You can also use slow-release fertilizer granules at planting time.

**Deadheading Diligently:** Regularly remove spent flowers to encourage more blooms and keep your displays looking tidy.

# SUMMER 2025: THE DIY BOOM TRANSFORMING HOMES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

As the sun shines brighter and the days grow longer, homeowners are rolling up their sleeves and diving into DIY projects that enhance their living spaces.

This summer, the trend is all about targeted upgrades—small but impactful changes that breathe new life into homes without requiring a full-scale renovation.

According to recent reports, flooring installations are among the most popular projects this season. Homeowners are opting for luxury vinyl planks and engineered hardwood, which offer durability and a sleek aesthetic while being easier to maintain than traditional hardwood. Similarly, tile installations are gaining traction, with geometric and marble designs adding texture and personality to kitchens and living rooms.

Another standout trend is accent wall curation. Instead of repainting entire rooms, many DIYers are focusing

on a single wall, using wallpaper or bold paint colors to create a striking focal point. This simple yet effective approach allows homeowners to refresh their spaces without committing to a full redesign.

Bathroom remodeling remains a top priority, with many opting for cabinet and fixture enhancements or new flooring and tile installations. These updates not only improve functionality but also add a touch of luxury to everyday routines.

Outdoor spaces are also receiving plenty of attention. Landscaping updates, including tree planting and sprinkler system installations, are helping homeowners create lush, inviting gardens. Meanwhile,

deck and porch remodels, concrete patio installations, and gazebo additions are turning backyards into stylish retreats perfect for summer gatherings.

With homeowners increasingly investing in their current spaces rather than moving, these DIY projects are proving to be both practical and rewarding. Whether it's a fresh coat of paint, a new floor, or a revamped backyard, this summer's DIY boom is all about making homes more comfortable, functional, and visually appealing.

So, if you're looking for inspiration, now is the perfect time to pick up a paintbrush, lay down some tiles, or plant a tree. After all, nothing says summer like a home improvement project that brings lasting joy.

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# FIVE WATER SAVING TIPS FOR SURVIVING THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

School's out for summer and NI Water is reminding the public there's no better time to get water smart and learn about the simple things everyone can do to help save water at home.

A top tip to keep kids hydrated when they are off school and spending more time at home is to keep a jug of water in the fridge, instead of letting the tap run cold. Storing water in the fridge in a lidded jug and changing it every day is a great way to help all the family keep hydrated and save water at the same time.

It also helps reduce single use plastics and helps protect nature too.



Another tip is to use any leftover water to water plants. Plants love to have a drink of water that's been leftover in glasses or jugs around the home. Or use a bowl for washing vegetables and then reuse this water for plants.

It's also easy to begin thinking about other ways you can reduce your water usage indoors. Start with thinking how much water you are using each day - whether you are washing your hands, cleaning the dishes or tidying up the garden, you start to realise just how important water is and the sheer amount we use.

NI Water education offer Anna Killen, explains how we can save water by looking at everyday habits:

"It's amazing to think that every day each person uses around 170 litres of water. The good news is there are some simple things we can all do that can make a huge difference to help us all save

water, especially over the warm summer months when we should all be more water efficient.

"Staying hydrated is important, especially for children who are at home more over the summer months. With the weather being unpredictable, small changes to the ways we use our water indoors can go a long way.

"Did you know that 36% of people in Northern Ireland spend between five and 10 minutes in the shower and over 50% of people still overfill the kettle. With rising energy costs, it might be time to think about ways to save money such as reducing the time spent in the shower or trying the 4-minute shower challenge by putting on your favourite 4-minute song and seeing if you can finish before the end.

"Overfilling your kettle can use twice as much energy each time you boil so just fill it with as much water as you need."

To help you kick start these new habits and 'Get Water Fit', complete the online water audit at <https://www.getwaterfit.co.uk> or take part in water saving challenges and receive your free water saving items including a 4 minute shower timer, toothy timers and swell gel bags for the garden.

Some water saving tips from NI Water:

1. Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth - A running tap can use 6 litres of water per minute.
2. Use a bowl for washing vegetables - Then you can reuse this water for plants. Also use leftover water in glasses to water plants.
3. Make full use of your

washing machine - Half load programmes on washing machines use more than half the water and energy of a full load, so wait until the machine is full before switching it on.

4. Fix leaking taps - A dripping tap can waste more than 60 litres of water per week.
5. Keep a jug of water in the fridge, instead of letting the tap run cold. NI Water recommends water in the fridge needs to be changed every day, or used within 24 hours.

NI Water is also encouraging customers to sign up to its free text alert service which keeps them updated about anything that may impact on their water supply or any of our other services in the area. Sign up here <https://www.niwater.com/register-for-keeping-you-informed/>

# Back-to-School Shopping Tips

As the summer holidays swing into full gear, parents are already beginning to turn their thoughts to the inevitable "Back to School" dash.

Recent reports indicate that UK families are expected to spend an average of £337 on back-to-school shopping this year – a significant increase from 2024, reflecting both rising costs and a shift towards more targeted purchases. What's more, children are increasingly involved in the decision-making process, with a whopping 84% of UK parents reporting their kids co-decide or even lead back-to-school purchases.

So, what should families be looking out for, and how can they kit out their youngsters without breaking the bank?

**Durable & Quality Uniforms:** With costs rising, parents are prioritising uniforms that can withstand the rigours of school life. Look for features like "growth-proof hems," adjustable waistbands, stain-repellent finishes, and permanent pleats in skirts. Check with your school for details of

specialist local suppliers for school-specific items, including compulsory PE kit.

**Smart & Sustainable Stationery:** There's a growing demand for eco-friendly stationery. Recycled paper notebooks, refillable pens, and even plantable pencils are gaining popularity. Consider investing in items made from recycled materials or those designed for longevity to reduce waste. Tinted exercise books are also gaining traction to support neurodivergent students.

**Tech with a Twist:** AI integration in tech devices is a new consideration, with over half of parents more likely to buy devices with AI. However, there's a balanced view, with some concern about over-reliance on AI reducing the need for traditional supplies. Laptops, tablets, and scientific calculators (for older students) remain

key tech purchases.

**Expressive Backpacks & Lunchboxes:** As children play a bigger role in selecting their school items, backpacks and lunchboxes are becoming an opportunity for self-expression. Expect to see a variety of designs, colours, and even character themes. Metal water bottles are also a popular choice for their durability and ability to keep drinks cool.

**PE Kits Built to Last:** Compulsory PE kit is a significant expense, so parents are seeking durable options. Look for breathable, hard-wearing fabrics that can withstand frequent washing.

With spending expected to increase, being savvy with your back-to-school budget is more important than ever.

**Audit Before You Shop:** Before stepping foot in a shop, conduct a thorough inventory of last year's supplies. Many items, from half-used notebooks

to functional pencil cases, can be reused. Involve your children in this process to teach them about resourcefulness.

**Make a Master List and Stick to It:** Once you know what's needed, create a detailed shopping list and be disciplined. This prevents impulse buys, especially when children are influencing decisions.

**Embrace Second-Hand:** This is arguably the biggest money-saver, particularly for school uniforms. Check with your child's school for any pre-loved uniform sales or community groups. Local charity shops as well as online platforms like Facebook Marketplace, can be treasure troves for good quality, affordable items.

A well-planned and strategic approach to back-to-school shopping can ensure children are well-equipped for learning, without placing undue strain on family finances.

Happy Back to School shopping!

# Unveiling the Wonders of a Rock Pool

Rock pools are miniature marine worlds, teeming with fascinating life just waiting to be discovered.

Investigating them is a rewarding adventure, but remember to be gentle and respectful of their delicate ecosystems.

Before you begin, check the tide times and only explore during low tide. Equip yourself with a clear bucket or a magnifying glass for a closer look. Approach the pool slowly and quietly to avoid startling its inhabitants.

Begin by observing from a distance. What larger movements do you notice? You might spot small fish darting amongst the seaweed or scuttling crabs hiding under rocky overhangs.

Next, gently peer

into the water. Look for anemones, often resembling colourful jelly blobs, that will retract their tentacles if disturbed. Keep an eye out for limpets and periwinkles clinging to the rocks, and common

starfish, sometimes nestled in crevices. If you're lucky, you might even spot a tiny, translucent prawn or a camouflaged blenny.

Remember to touch as little as possible. If you pick something up

for a closer look, return it carefully to exactly where you found it. After your exploration, leave the rock pool as undisturbed as possible, ensuring these vibrant habitats continue to thrive for others to enjoy.

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# HANNON Coach & Sail is perfect for a city break in Glasgow!

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A shopper's paradise, Glasgow is recognised as having the best retail therapy in the UK outside of London. Consistently voted 'top of the shops', the city is Scotland's premier shopping destination.

Not just shopping, Glasgow is also famous for its fantastic nightlife, and great choice of restaurants and bars. Glasgow is the perfect choice for your next city break away.

With a simple flat fare of £47 which includes the cost of the ferry and your bag, the Belfast – Glasgow Express offers a really attractive, convenient and low-cost alternative to flying.



The service is operated by HANNON Coach and leaves twice a day from Belfast, Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops visitors right in the heart of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'. The simple flat fare allows passengers to pick and mix dates and times of travel to suit and with no luggage charges it makes a perfect travel option for a shopping trip. There are also a great range of hotels just minutes from Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station.

Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience

of the service as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"People love the fact that it's so hassle-free compared to flying, no airport transfers and with no extra charge for luggage it is a massive help with keeping the cost of a break down," said Mr Hannon.

The service can be booked online at [www.hannoncoach.com](http://www.hannoncoach.com) up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking service.

Call 028 9265 0700 (Mon – Fri) or visit [www.hannoncoach.com](http://www.hannoncoach.com)

# Robinson Goldsmiths: A Jewel in Northern Ireland's Crown

**In an era where mass-produced items often overshadow craftsmanship, Robinson Goldsmiths stands as a beacon of creativity and family tradition.**

Founded in the 1980s, this remarkable family business has evolved from humble beginnings to become a premier destination for bespoke jewellery in Northern Ireland.

Starting their journey as dental technicians, Rosemary and (the late) Eric Robinson discovered that their true passion lay not in the dental arts but in creating exquisite jewellery. With just a modest sum of money and a heartfelt commitment to their craft, they melted their own wedding rings to launch a business that would ultimately define their family's legacy. This leap of faith transformed their lives, turning a home-based endeavour into a flourishing enterprise.

Now the gallery shop is located where once stood the family's old Hay loft. It beautifully showcases their unique designs, each piece inspired by the rich stories and landmarks of Northern Ireland. This connection to local heritage sets Robinson Goldsmiths apart, making their jewellery not just adornments, but narratives of culture and history.

These days daughters, Gillian and Jennifer, bring a new generation and their own inspiration into the fold, blending traditional craftsmanship with modern technology. Their use of computer-aided design and wax printing highlights a commitment to innovation, ensuring that each piece is both contemporary and rooted in tradition.

Robinson Goldsmiths has also garnered attention on a national stage, creating stunning pieces for notable figures such as Princess Anne during a visit to Bangor in recent years and the talented team behind the Oscar-winning film "An Irish Goodbye." Such achievements not only elevate their brand but also showcase Northern Ireland's rich artistic talent to the world.

For those seeking the perfect gift or a unique statement piece, Robinson Goldsmiths offers a seamless shopping experience, including a click-and-collect service through their website. Visitors are warmly welcomed at their refurbished gallery, where they can explore the



artistry and dedication that go into every creation.

As we celebrate Robinson Goldsmiths, we honour not just their beautiful jewellery but also their inspiring story of resilience, creativity, and familial bonds. In a world that often prioritizes speed over quality, they remind us of the value of artistry and the stories that lie

behind each piece.

To explore their exquisite collections or take a virtual tour, visit [www.robinsongoldsmiths.com](http://www.robinsongoldsmiths.com) or scan the QR code in their advertisement. For enquiries, don't hesitate to call 02891 270766. We encourage everyone to support this local treasure and witness firsthand the magic that unfolds in every piece of jewellery.

# Starting Fresh: Tips for Making New Friends in the New School Year

**As the long summer days wind down, the excitement – and perhaps a touch of nervousness – of a new school year begins to bubble up for children.**

Whether it's moving up a year, transitioning to a new primary school, or making the big jump to secondary school, a fresh start often means new faces. And with new faces comes the opportunity to make new friends!

Here are some friendly tips to help your child navigate the social landscape of the new school year and build lasting friendships:

**The Building Blocks of Friendship:**

**Be Approachable:** The Power of a Smile! This sounds simple, but a friendly, open expression can make a huge difference. Encourage your child to smile and make eye contact with

other children. It signals that they are open to interaction.

**Say Hello and Introduce Themselves:** Practice simple greetings at home. "Hi, my name is [Your Child's Name], what's yours?" is a great start. Encourage them to ask a follow-up question, like "What class are you in?" or "Did you have a good summer?"

**Find Common Ground:** What do other children like? Is someone wearing a t-shirt with a favourite band or game? Do they seem interested in the same activity during break time? Pointing out shared interests can be a fantastic conversation starter. "I like that game too!" or "Are



you in the school football club?"

**Join In:** The playground, lunch hall, and extracurricular activities

are prime friendship-making zones. Encourage your child to observe what others are doing and ask if they can join. "Can I play too?" or "Is there room for one more?" are great phrases to use.

**Be a Good Listener:** Friendship is a two-way street. Teach your child the importance of listening when others are speaking, asking questions, and showing genuine interest in what their new acquaintances have to say.

**Offer Help:** If someone drops their books, needs help with a tricky word, or looks lost, offering assistance is a kind and easy way to connect. "Can I help you pick that up?" or "Are you looking for something?" can open doors.

**Be Patient:** Friendships don't always form instantly. Remind your

child that it takes time to get to know people. Encourage them to keep trying and not to get discouraged if it doesn't happen on the first day.

**Be Themselves:** The most important tip! Authenticity is key. Encourage your child to let their true personality shine through. The best friendships are built on genuine connection, not pretending to be someone they're not.

Remember, as parents, your role is to offer encouragement, practical advice, and a listening ear. Acknowledge their feelings, celebrate small successes, and reassure them that finding their "tribe" is a natural process that takes time. With these tips, children can approach the new school year with confidence, ready to forge exciting new friendships.

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IMAGO OASIS Caring in Action provide a mental health and befriending service. This service helps adults who have mild to moderate mental ill health to understand and cope with life by offering practical one to one structured weekly support.

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**EARLY YEARS**  
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# Smooth Sailing: Making the Back-to-School Transition Easy for the Whole Family

The back-to-school transition can sometimes feel less like a gentle slide and more like a jarring jolt.

For families, navigating this shift successfully means more than just having the right uniform and stationery; it's about preparing everyone – parents and children alike – for the change in routine, pace, and energy.

Here are some practical tips to help your family glide smoothly from summer freedom to academic structure, making the transition easier for everyone:

1. Re-Establish Routines Gradually (Starting Now!)

The biggest shock to the system is often the sudden return to early mornings and structured days. Don't wait until the night before school starts.

**Sleep Schedules:** Begin adjusting bedtime and wake-up times gradually, starting a week or two before school reopens. Shift them by 15-20 minutes earlier each day until you hit the school-day schedule. This helps regulate circadian rhythms.

**Morning Practice:** Simulate a school morning a few days before term starts. Get everyone up, dressed, have breakfast, and even pack a bag. This iron outs any kinks and reduces first-day chaos.

**Evening Wind-Down:** Reintroduce a calm evening routine. This might include quiet reading time, limited screen time, and a warm bath to signal the body it's time to prepare for sleep.

2. Create a "Back-to-School" Hub

Designate a specific area in your home as the school command centre.

**Organisation Station:** This could be a shelf, a corner of a room, or even a dedicated box. It's where school bags, lunchboxes, uniform items for the next day, and important notices are kept.

**Homework Zone:** For older children, ensure they have a quiet, clutter-free space for homework, free from distractions.

**Calendar Clarity:** Display a family calendar prominently. Mark important dates like school start days, PE days, after-school clubs, and early finishes. Involve children in populating it.

3. Get Organised, Early and Together

Procrastination is the enemy of a smooth transition.

**Uniform Check:** Dig out uniforms well in advance. Check for growth spurts, missing buttons, or stains. Make a list of what needs replacing or mending.

**Label Everything:** Prevent lost property headaches by labelling uniforms, PE kits, lunchboxes, water bottles, and stationery. Permanent markers and iron-on labels are your friends!

4. Talk About It: Address Anxieties and Build Excitement

Open communication is key to understanding and alleviating family anxieties.

**Listen Actively:** Ask your children how they feel about going back to school. Are they excited? Nervous? Worried about friendships or new teachers? Validate their feelings and offer reassurance.

**Positive Framing:** Focus on the positives: seeing friends, learning new things, exciting clubs, or new challenges. Share your own positive school memories.

**Address Concerns:** If there are specific worries (e.g., a new teacher, a bigger school), try to address them proactively. Could you visit the school beforehand? Talk to a current student?

**New School Prep:** For children transitioning to a new school (e.g., Year 7), organise a visit if possible, discuss the layout, and talk about the differences they



might encounter.

5. Plan for Lunch & Snacks

A well-fed child is a happy child, and stress-free packing helps parents.

**Meal Planning:** Get ahead by planning school lunches for the first week. Batch cook items if possible (e.g., muffins, pasta salad base).

**Healthy Choices:** Discuss healthy lunchbox options with your children and involve them in the packing process to ensure they'll actually eat it.

**Hydration:** Invest in good quality, reusable water bottles.

6. Schedule Some Family Fun

Don't let the end of

summer be all about preparations.

**One Last Hurrah:** Plan a final fun family activity before school starts – a trip to the local park, a picnic, or a movie night. This creates a positive end-of-holiday memory.

**Connect & Recharge:** Ensure everyone gets some downtime and connection before the busier school schedule kicks in.

By adopting these proactive strategies, families can transform the back-to-school period from a source of stress into a manageable and even exciting transition, setting the stage for a successful academic year for everyone.

# WELCOME TO CAVEHILL TENNIS CLUB

Established in 1914, Cavehill Tennis Club, is located at 20 North Circular Road, against an inviting backdrop of Cavehill.

Founded just two years after the Cavehill Bowling Club, the tennis club became part of the Cavehill Bowling & Lawn Tennis Club Ltd. The original pavilion, rebuilt in 1915 after an arson attack, stands as a testament to its enduring spirit. Operated entirely by dedicated volunteers, the club has served the local community for over a century, fostering a cross-community ethos and providing affordable access to tennis. Recent funding of £71,000 from Belfast City Council has further enhanced its facilities, including new floodlights for extended play. The club now boasts over 300 members, particularly among younger age groups, highlighting its

growing appeal.

Cavehill Tennis Club features six high-quality polymeric rubber courts, three of which are floodlit, allowing for year-round play. Additionally, there are three hard courts available for overflow use. Floodlights are easily activated and are free for members. The clubhouse, a shared facility with the bowling club, includes a dedicated tennis section with its own club room, a small kitchen area upstairs, and changing rooms, toilet facilities, and showers on the ground floor. The club is accessible via two entry points, North Circular Road and Cavehill Drive, with fob access for members. For safety, a defibrillator is located in the entrance hall.

The club prides itself on offering comprehensive coaching for all ages and skill levels, from complete beginners to advanced players. Head Coach Will Boyd, a Tennis Ireland Level 2 qualified coach, leads the coaching programs.

Cavehill Tennis Club welcomes new members year-round, with its membership year running until May 31st. Various membership packages are available, including discounts for families and young adults, with some offering rolling monthly subscriptions. Adult membership can cost less than £1 per day, making tennis accessible and affordable.

Beyond its regular

programs, Cavehill Tennis Club actively engages with the wider community. Coach Will Boyd provides coaching to local primary schools and the club runs community-funded coaching programs in partnership with organizations like WISPA and Carafriend, aiming to open up tennis to a broader audience. The club also hosts competitive tennis ladders and participates in the local Belfast and District Tennis Leagues, offering opportunities for competitive play.

For further information on membership, programs, or to join this friendly and inclusive club, you can visit the official website at cavehilltennis.com or email info@cavehilltennis.com.



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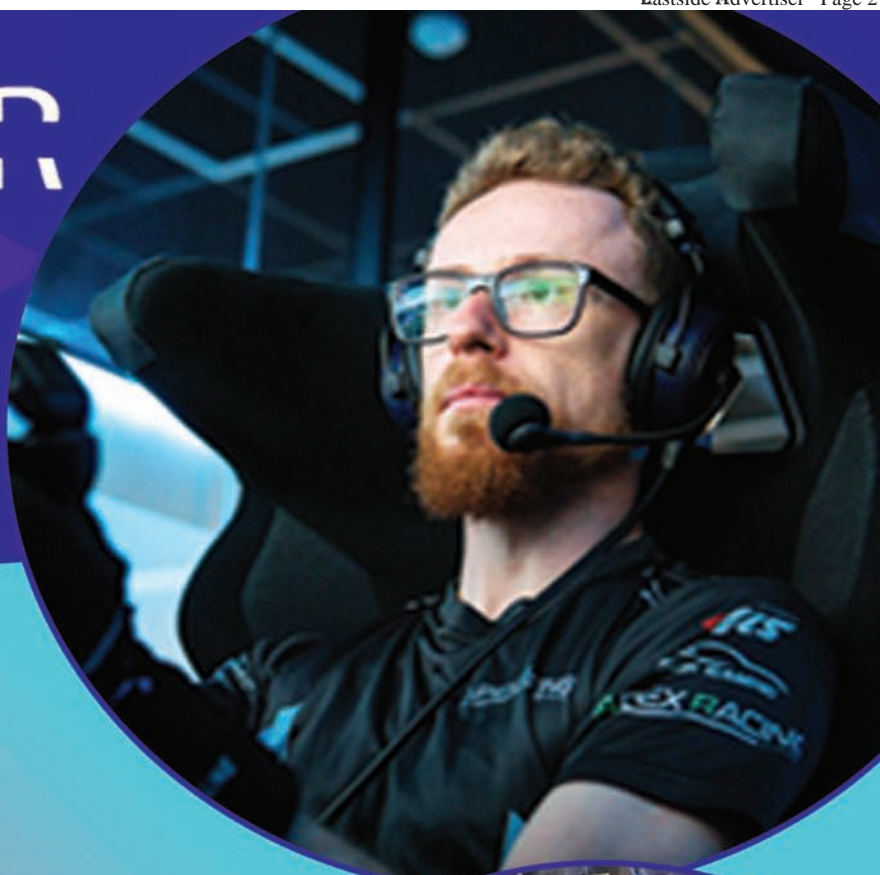
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# AC NOT BLOWING COLD? TROUBLESHOOTING CAR AIR CONDITIONING ISSUES

There’s nothing quite like the blissful relief of a perfectly functioning air conditioner on a sweltering summer day.

Conversely, there are few motoring frustrations quite as immediate as flipping on your AC, only to be met with warm, stale air. If your car’s air conditioning isn’t blowing cold, don’t sweat it just yet. Often, the issue might be simpler than you think.

Before you book a costly garage visit, let’s go through some common culprits and troubleshooting steps.

First, The Basics: Check These Simple Things

Sometimes, the fix is literally at your fingertips.

Check Your Settings: It sounds obvious, but ensure your AC is actually switched “on” and the temperature control is set to its coldest setting. Many cars have a separate AC button (often with an “AC” or snowflake symbol) that needs to be engaged. Also, confirm the fan speed is up.

Recirculation Mode: Ensure your recirculation (or “recirc”) button is engaged. This mode cools the air already inside the cabin, making it much more efficient than constantly

trying to cool hot outside air.

Cabin Air Filter: A clogged cabin air filter can severely restrict airflow, making your AC feel weak even if it’s producing cold air. This is a common maintenance item and relatively easy to replace yourself in many vehicles. Check your owner’s manual for its location and replacement instructions. If it’s dirty, swap it out and see if that improves airflow and cooling.

Common Issues and What They Might Mean

If the basics are covered, let’s delve a little deeper into more specific problems:

1. The Air is Only Slightly Cool, Not Cold

This is often the classic sign of low refrigerant (also known as Freon or R-134a). Refrigerant is the lifeblood of your AC system, responsible for absorbing heat from the cabin and releasing it outside. Over time, small leaks can occur, leading to a gradual loss of refrigerant.

Troubleshooting: You

can buy DIY AC recharge kits from most automotive stores. These kits often include a pressure gauge, allowing you to check the system’s pressure and add refrigerant if it’s low. Follow the instructions carefully.

Important Note: While a DIY recharge might offer a temporary fix, a professional will investigate why the refrigerant is low, which usually points to a leak. Simply topping it up without addressing the leak means the problem will return.

2. The AC Blows Cold for a While, Then Gets Warm

This intermittent issue can be frustrating and might indicate a few different problems:

Overheating Compressor: Your AC compressor is the heart of the system. If it’s working too hard or starting to fail, it might cycle on and off, leading to inconsistent cooling. This can sometimes be due to low refrigerant as well, as the compressor struggles.

Clutch Issues: The



compressor has an electromagnetic clutch that engages and disengages it. If this clutch is faulty, it might not be engaging consistently. You might hear a “clunk” when the AC button is pressed, indicating the clutch engaging. If you don’t hear it, or it’s an inconsistent sound, that could be a clue.

Electrical Problems: A loose wire, a blown fuse (check your fuse box diagram in the owner’s manual), or a faulty relay

could be causing the system to lose power intermittently.

3. No Air (or Very Weak Airflow) from the Vents

If the air isn’t blowing at all, or is barely trickling out, even with the fan on high, the problem likely lies with the fan system itself.

4. Strange Noises or Smells When the AC is On  
Hissing/Gurgling: This often points to air or moisture in the AC system, or a very low refrigerant level.  
Clicking/Clunking (Loud/

Repeated): This could be a failing compressor clutch or the compressor itself.

Musty/Mouldy Smell: This is usually due to mildew growth on the evaporator coil, which gets damp when the AC is running. Specialist cleaning sprays can help, or a professional “AC refresh” service might be needed.

Sweet Smell (like antifreeze): This is serious and could indicate a leaking heater core or coolant leak. Stop driving and seek

immediate professional help.

When to Seek Professional Help

While some issues can be DIY-ed, many AC problems require specialist tools, diagnostic equipment, and the safe handling of refrigerants. Here’s when it’s definitely time to visit a qualified mechanic:

Repeated Refrigerant Loss: If you’ve recharged your system and it goes warm again within a few weeks or months, you have a leak that needs to be found and repaired.

Professionals use leak detection dyes and equipment to pinpoint these.

Compressor Issues: Replacing a compressor is a complex and expensive job that requires professional expertise and specific tools for evacuating and recharging the system correctly.

Electrical Diagnostics: Tracing complex electrical faults (beyond a simple fuse) is best left to technicians with diagnostic tools.

Any Sign of Major Leakage: If you see puddles under your car that aren’t water condensation from the AC, or smell unusual odours, get it checked immediately.

You’re Uncomfortable Doing It Yourself: AC systems operate under high pressure and contain chemicals that need to be handled carefully. If you’re unsure, it’s always safer to let a professional handle it.

No Obvious Solution: If you’ve checked the basics and still have no cold air, a deeper diagnostic is needed.

A properly functioning air conditioning system isn’t just about comfort; it contributes to driver alertness by preventing fatigue and heat-induced sluggishness. By understanding these common issues, you can often diagnose the problem yourself, saving time and money. But remember, for complex or persistent issues, a trip to a trusted mechanic will ensure your car’s AC is blowing perfectly cold for many summers to come.

## Polestar innovates audio experience

Polestar innovates audio experience

Abbey Road Studios Mode, available exclusively for the Bowers & Wilkins audio system, offers a listening experience inspired by the iconic London recording studio while on the move in the Swedish brand’s flagship SUV.

Abbey Road Studios Mode provides four entirely new sound presets, as well as an additional Producer mode, to users of the Bowers & Wilkins audio system in Polestar 3. Each preset draws on

the sound of the control rooms and live spaces whilst taking inspiration from the studios’ original EMI-era equipment, used in the recording, mixing and mastering process on countless era-defining recordings. All have been curated and designed by the studios’ expert engineers, many of whom have worked with some of the biggest artists in the world. Producer mode allows for even greater personalisation, enabling users to tailor the sound to

their personal preference.

The four presets in Abbey Road Studios Mode include Intimate, Open, Energised and Expansive, providing Polestar 3 with a distinct audio experience inspired by the studio’s spaces and equipment. Each preset is complimented by a bespoke image from the studio, displayed in high definition on the sophisticated 14.5-inch touch screen inside the Polestar 3, showing some of the most iconic instruments and equipment from the Abbey Road collection.

Intimate: The Intimate preset evokes the intimacy of sitting in the producer’s chair in the studio control room, bringing the listener closer to the performance. Offering a warm, pristine and detailed experience, inspired by vintage sounds, the mode creates an intimate atmosphere, allowing the listener to immerse themselves in the music with an unparalleled

sense of closeness and authenticity.

Open: The Open preset creates an immersive experience inspired by the studio environment where the music is performed. Allowing the listener to hear the music as if alongside the artists, with the rich, authentic sound of the live studio space.

Energised: The Energised preset combines vivid detail with vintage warmth, inspired by the energy and excitement of a performance in the studio’s live room. Offering a lively, vibrant acoustic with pristine detail, the sound is broad, energetic, and engaging.

The optional Bowers & Wilkins audio system in the Polestar 3 features 25 strategically placed speakers, including the proprietary Continuum™ cone and is complete with a 1,610 watt power output, 3D surround sound, Dolby Atmos capability, and active road noise cancellation.

## KIA EV3 NAMED AUTOTRADER’S CAR OF THE YEAR FOR 2025

The Kia EV3 has collected two major award wins at the Autotrader Drivers’ Choice Awards 2025: ‘Best Mainstream Electric Car’ and overall ‘Car of the Year’.

The awards, formerly known as the Autotrader New Car Awards, feature 25 categories. Finalists and overall winners are determined by the real-world opinions of more than 225,000 UK car owners, who completed an online survey sharing exactly what they think of their car. Every vehicle is rated across 16 different criteria, from reliability and performance to appearance and running costs. Owners were also asked about their overall satisfaction with their car and how likely they would be to recommend it to others.

The EV3 impressed UK customers for offering great value and a complete, refined package, with owners naming the model both the EV that represents the best of the best in terms of ‘mainstream’ vehicles, and the best car overall of 2025. The Kia EV3 is priced from £33,005 and offers up to 375 miles on a single charge\* on the WLTP ‘combined’ cycle, a range of three competitively equipped trim levels, and space for five occupants.



Erin Baker, Autotrader’s Editorial Director, said: “It may be Kia’s most affordable current EV on sale, but the EV3 still manages to pack a premium punch. It scored top marks for the quality of its features which, combined with eye-catching looks and a great driving experience, has made the EV3 a massive hit with its owners. One told us: ‘This was my first ever electric car, and it really stood out among all

the other EVs, particularly within my price bracket. It’s quirky, futuristic, packed full of brilliant features, and it’s really easy to drive. Plus, I can get the whole family in it with room to spare. We absolutely love it.’ Congratulations Kia on a very well-deserved win.”

Kia is no stranger to success at the Autotrader Drivers’ Choice Awards. Last year, the Kia EV6 was named ‘Best Car for

Families’ and ‘Best Car for Dog Owners’, whilst in 2023 the Soul EV collected ‘Best Value Electric Car’, and EV6 was named ‘New Car of the Year’.

The EV3 is soon to be joined by the EV4 and EV5. Both models will embark on a nationwide tour of ‘Kia Electric Experience’ events across the Kia UK dealer network, starting 8 July, and showcasing the latest of Kia’s electric offerings to customers.

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# ESSENTIAL HOME MAINTENANCE

In summer our attention often turns to enjoying the outdoors.

However, these months also present the perfect opportunity to tackle essential home maintenance tasks, ensuring our properties remain in top condition and ready for whatever the season – and beyond – throws our way.

Don't let the allure of barbecues and beach trips distract you entirely. Investing a little time and effort now can save you significant headaches and expenses down the line. Here's a run-down of the most popular and crucial home maintenance tasks to add to your summer to-do list:

Embrace the Great Outdoors (and Maintain It!):

The exterior of your home bears the brunt of the elements year-round, so summer is the ideal time for a thorough check-up:

**Guard Your Gutters:** Clogged gutters are a silent menace. Overflowing rainwater can damage your roof, fascia boards, and even your foundation. Take a ladder and scoop out any accumulated leaves, twigs, and debris. A good clear-out at the start of summer is a smart move.

**Roof Review:** While you're up high (exercise caution!), take a good look

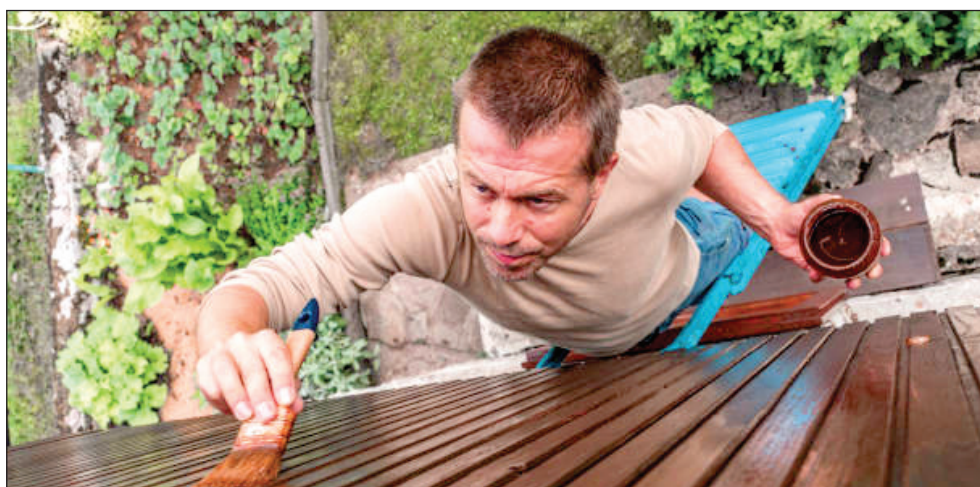
at your roof. Are there any missing, loose, or cracked tiles or slates? Check the flashing around chimneys, vents, and skylights for any signs of damage or gaps. Addressing these small issues now can prevent costly leaks. If you're unsure, a professional inspection is always a wise investment.

**Wash Away Winter's Grime:** Winter can leave your home's exterior looking dull. A good power wash can revitalize siding, walkways, driveways, and patios, removing dirt, mildew, and algae. This not only improves aesthetics but also prevents potential damage.

**Window and Door Wisdom:** Give your windows a sparkle inside and out to maximize natural light. Inspect frames for any rot or damage and ensure seals and weather stripping are intact to maintain energy efficiency.

**Paint and Protect:** Summer's warmer and drier conditions are perfect for tackling any peeling, cracking, or fading paint on exterior walls, fences, gates, and sheds. A fresh coat not only enhances curb appeal but also protects the underlying materials from the elements.

**Deck and Patio TLC:**



Your outdoor living spaces deserve some attention too. Clean decks and patios to remove slippery algae and dirt. Inspect for any signs of damage and apply sealant or stain to wooden decks for lasting protection.

**Green Thumb, Safe Home:** Keep trees and shrubs trimmed, especially those close to your house, to prevent potential damage from strong winds or overgrown branches. Ensure proper drainage in your garden to avoid water pooling near your foundation.

**Fortify Your Fences:**

Check fences for any damage, loose posts, or broken panels. Summer is a good time for repairs or a fresh coat of paint or stain to keep your boundaries secure and looking their best.

**Don't Forget the Details:** Outdoor Play Safety: If you have a playset, inspect it for any signs of wear or damage and ensure it's safe for children to use.

**Water Wise:** Check outdoor taps and hoses for leaks and make any necessary repairs to conserve water.

**Pest Patrol:** Be vigilant for

signs of pests both inside and outside your home and take appropriate measures to prevent infestations.

Insurance Insight: Sum-

mer can bring different risks, so it's a good time to review your home insurance policy to ensure you have adequate coverage.

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