

## York Hub

**In the centre of York, is the city's first workhub. A variety of freelance users co-work there, invited by the owner who wanted to share his commercial premises with a wider range of businesses**

### The building

The York Hub is in the basement of a medium-rise building within York's city walls. There are flats above. The space was bought by John Logan (below) at an auction in 2008, initially for his own company to use as a city centre office.

'This purchase was simply a valuable thing to do, a good investment in a prime city centre location,' says Logan. 'The spins offs – collaboration, skills and knowledge sharing – are harder to measure on the balance sheet. But that doesn't mean they aren't incredibly good for the business.' Logan's company Anglo Management UK Ltd, which specialises in making better use of under-used car parks in urban centres, had previously leased premises.



### What's special

'The hub is totally unique in York,' he says. 'Business centres here tend to be out of the city centre. Here we offer a more open plan and collaborative space. There is a community feel which you simply don't get in soulless office centres. People aren't coming in wearing suits – it's not that kind of place. That doesn't mean to say our users aren't business-like.'

Logan's company initially wanted an asset as well as its own office space in a central location. But it became clear quickly that there was plenty of spare space. 'I knew others would be looking for somewhere like this, just as we had been,' he says. 'I liked the idea of people sharing a space and helping each

### Alex Robertshaw

[www.discoverytravel.co.uk](http://www.discoverytravel.co.uk)

Alex Robertshaw is product manager for a family business offering adventure and activity holidays in Britain and across Europe. 'It's been going for 13 years and I've worked for them for about three, doing a bit of everything,' he says. Walking or cycling Hadrian's Wall is the most popular option but the selection is expanding.

'We're looking into mountain biking and I'm off to Lanzarote in a couple of weeks to recce a new trip.' Two full-time colleagues are based in Richmond while Alex and a colleague are based at York Hub. 'We've been here since October and in winter we'll be in the office a lot, checking the routes and hotels are all OK.' In summer, he says, it's unlikely they'll be at the hub more than one day a week.

'We'll be outdoors most of the time and it's one of the reasons I got this place instead of leasing an empty office.' Alex and his colleague both started out working from home together. Where the hub has the edge, he says, is human company. 'When it's just two of you it's easy to get in a rut. We've noticed a definite difference here.'

other with different skills. So we opened up a series of desks for everyday use or hotdesking. There has been huge demand and in no time at all we have created a thriving group of freelancers and small businesses.'

The hub business is run by Logan with help from Shereen Roe, who helps manage the space on a freelance basis as a subcontractor. She combines this task with separate varied work of her own from the same space.

Logan's core business is far from the creative sector typically associated with many urban workhubs. But he is very pleased with the benefits of being co-located with writers, photographers and IT specialists. Many of them, he says, have helped his own business – and each other. 'The hub gives all of us a chance to offer customers a wider range of services and products than any of us could have offered alone. Subcontracting and sharing work is very good for business if you are a micro. We expected the hub to appeal to mainly creatives and freelancers and it has done.' The next phase will be to investigate the growing number who use the space occasionally or virtually.

## Shereen Roe

### Live Music Solutions

Shereen wears many hats, among them office manager for the York Hub and administrator for manager John's car parking enterprise Anglo Management. 'I met John when I tried to flog him advertising space in a local magazine. I'd been there for years and if he hadn't offered me part-time hours here I'd never have been given the push to go self-employed. I enjoy life so much more now,' she says. Some work is done at home. 'I'm also a band promoter and agent and I do that at home but my dad's retired and needs conversation so I go into my bedroom if he gets too much!'

Shereen fits in 25 to 30 hours a week working for John but her workload is building up. 'I do admin, book-keeping and paperwork for John's parking business. And I also a few hours of admin for a lady who has space here. Another hub user wants a part-time PA too.' Shereen is keen to point out some of the many ways York Hub differs from a traditional office. 'We share things like printers, we don't have divided camps and it's fantastic how people interact in creative ways.' An unusual benefit recently was a free haircut. 'One of our members is a photographer and designer who happens to own a hairdressers. One of my haircuts featured in a "before and after" shot he did for a magazine.'

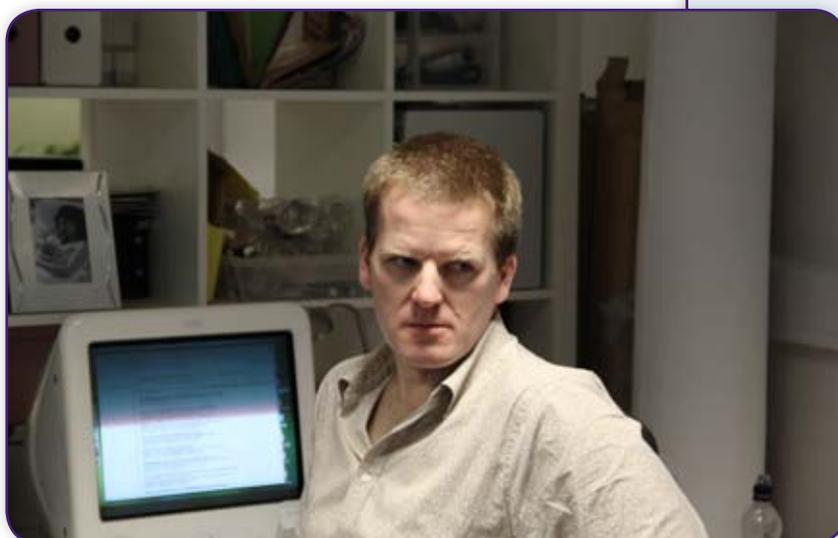


## Miles Salter

[wordswordswords.co.uk](http://wordswordswords.co.uk)

Miles Salter is a freelance journalist, author and copywriter. He's also dad to a two-year-old daughter and with that comes caring responsibilities. 'She's at nursery two days a week and with grandma one day but my partner and I juggle the rest of the week. I'm lucky if I get a full day a week at the hub but it's not intentional. We have an ongoing debate about whether I should work at home full-time. Helen says we'd save a lot of money but I'm reluctant to give my desk up. One of the benefits is you're near people with similar work and interests and more work comes from that.'

One of his collaborators is film maker Simon Collins. 'We started working together on a community arts project and talked about renting an office then. But Simon knew someone who knew John so we ended up here. I've also worked with Lee, a website designer based here.' The social aspect, Miles says, is a huge asset. 'The main thing really is just chatting to people. I'll say what I do if someone's a designer or photographer and I feel it's appropriate. I like the space, I like the contacts and I can have meetings here. The hub is just great.'



## Simon Collins

[yorkfilmingandediting.co.uk](http://yorkfilmingandediting.co.uk)

Simon is a film-maker and animator who went freelance six years ago after working as a graphic designer for a large company. 'I got fed up being in the same place and I'd always done a bit of film-making. I thought if it doesn't work out I could always get a proper job.'

After making a film for the Learning and Skills Council, and a few jobs done gratis, paid commissions began coming in. 'I mainly make short documentaries about particular projects. I also run an animation project with young people with medical conditions including diabetes and Aspergers.' A big advantage of the hub for him is cost. 'I did look around at a few other places, but for what I can afford I'd probably have been tucked away in the corner of a large building.'

It becomes apparent quickly upon visiting that this workhub could easily have been much bigger and still met local demand. 'In the centre of York there is no central shared workspace, no creative headquarters. So although we are a private business we are fulfilling a role that many cities deliver through large amounts of public sector investment.'

There is a business incubator at the college, but Logan believes few small businesses want a college setting. 'They prefer to learn from real businesses and pick up ideas and skills off each other.'

### Management

The model this workhub illustrates is a simple concept: a single company opening up its own space to other businesses to share, not only for revenue but for the benefits of a collaborative business environment.

The hub is managed entirely by John Logan's Anglo Management UK Ltd. However, he is considering a separate hub management company, possibly a not-for-profit, if demand continues rising. What does he get out of it? 'We didn't set this up to make a big profit. As long as it covers its costs, what we get is a completely different work atmosphere. The income is obviously beneficial to us because otherwise my company would cover the whole cost of the space. But what we get is the impact of collaboration, having people in the same building with the skills and experience we didn't have.'



### The finances

The building cost £125k on a 999 year lease. Aside from the loan to repay this, running costs are just under £15k per year. This covers business rates, fuel, telecoms etc.

Income sources break down as follows: 10% of revenue is from membership (occasional users), 80% from regulars and 10% from one-off fees such as meeting/event hire. As other services expand, the proportion of income coming from regular users is gradually becoming less dominant.

The hub is self financing, but only on a bare bones basis – and because the building also houses its core business – the owner's company. Expanding its user base and facilities would need more investment.



'We are keen to avoid the hoops and red tape of public sector support,' says Logan. 'We may however look to up our number of users and see if we can get some kind of sponsorship or partnership with a service such as a bank, insurer or law practice.'

### Staff

John Logan's approach to staffing is typical of many hub users – a preference for subcontractors over employees and for flexible use of workspace. 'This has worked well for companies in the downturn,' he says. 'You can expand and contract what you pay your team and your office overheads very quickly.'

It is this flexibility, he believes, that gives places like the York Hub a unique offer to users. 'Our tenants don't want to be tied in to long-term office costs. Here they can increase or reduce their presence very easily. That lowers the risk to their business.'

### Businesses and members

The hub has 40 users. Half are full-time tenants and the rest are virtual users – a mix of home-based and others who use the city centre address to help brand their business and to pick up mail etc.

The businesses are very varied, from designers and IT based businesses to travel and holiday operators and even a hairdresser. Most are sole traders, several businesses employ one or two people and a few are larger companies with regional representatives at the hub.

The hub could easily fill more space if it expanded. In the meantime, Logan is in a position to choose who

uses it. 'We are not only going for creatives. That's not what my own company does for example. But we only want people here who are willing to collaborate and share the space in a friendly way.'

'Users are often those who have insufficient space at home or who have come from places like London and want to plug in to York quickly by doing business with others.'

### The challenges

'This works as a model only on the basis of my company being here, because space is limited,' says Logan. 'We could go larger scale but would have to find the place to do this. If we did I am confident there would be demand.'

In retrospect, he believes he could have been more ambitious in his choice of premises. 'I wish we had got somewhere bigger! But there wasn't and isn't much available at a good price. Considering we set up York Hub in the teeth of a downturn and demand has been high ever since, this suggests that many smaller cities and towns have hidden demand for workhubs like this.'

Was there really no impact on demand in the downturn? 'We may have lost a couple of users because of the recession, but they have been easy to replace. We have actually found we've benefited from the hard times. Many people were looking to downsize from separate premises to a cheaper shared space. One of the most appealing aspects is adaptability. If you want to see a truly flexible labour market, visit a workhub!'