

Top Track 250 regional press release

Thursday 24 September

TWENTY-FOUR COMPANIES IN THE NORTHWEST FEATURE IN THE LEAGUE TABLE OF BRITAIN'S LEADING MID-MARKET PRIVATE COMPANIES

Published this weekend, the 16th annual **Sunday Times PwC Top Track 250** league table ranks Britain's leading mid-market private companies with the biggest sales – before the pandemic struck.

Although some are making job cuts as a result of the crisis, it highlights their continuing contribution to the economy at this difficult time. It also gives examples of how they have stepped up to support their communities and the NHS.

The 24 companies headquartered in the **northwest** of England (compared to 29 in 2019) increased their combined sales by 16% to £5.1bn and operating profits 39% to £332m, and employed more than 37,000 people.

Examples of their positive responses to the crisis include **Timpson** (No 58), which spent £500,000 per week topping up the wages of its furloughed staff to their usual full pay. Others include **Warburtons** (No 22), which donated more than half a million pounds to local community groups, and **Travel Counsellors** (No 48), which supported its self-employed advisers via a digital information hub and an expansion of its welfare fund.

The companies in the northwest appear alongside businesses from around the UK, including **Barbour**, **BrewDog** and **Gymshark**, which was valued at more than £1bn in August.

The Top Track 250 is sponsored by **PwC** and **Lloyds Bank**, and compiled by **Fast Track**, the Oxford-based research and networking events firm.

Arif Ahmad, a Private Business Partner at PwC UK, the title sponsor of the league table, commented:

“There’s no doubt that 2020 has posed unprecedented challenges. But time and again, we’ve seen business leaders rising to that challenge, adapting their plans and taking the opportunity to innovate. This year, it’s more important than ever to recognise and congratulate the companies featured in the Top Track 250. They are the backbone of the UK economy and it’s our pleasure to work with them, at every stage of their journeys.”

Northwest mid-market private companies, ordered by county and rank

HQ location and county	Rank [2019 rank]	Company Activity	Sales £m	Profit £m [^]	Staff	Year end	Main shareholders
Helsby Cheshire	99	RSK <i>Environmental consultancy</i>	†213	†6	2,896	Mar 19	Management, including Alan Ryder (93%), BGF (7%)
Macclesfield Cheshire	223	Kinaxia <i>Haulage and warehousing</i>	115	4	1,539	Dec 18	Peter Fields (32%), Graham Norfolk (28%), management (40%)
Carlisle Cumbria	201	Story Contracting <i>Construction and civil engineering contractor</i>	127	5	718	Mar 19	Story family (100%)
Manchester Greater Manchester	43 [61]	LWC Drinks <i>Drinks distributor</i>	347	15	992	Sep 19	Robin Gray (88%), Ebrahim Mukadam (12%)
Manchester Greater Manchester	48 [85]	Travel Counsellors <i>Travel services provider</i>	*310	*18	397	Oct 19	Vitruvian Partners (80.1%), management (19.9%)
Manchester Greater Manchester	52 [79]	Peninsula <i>Employment law consultancy</i>	*300	*52	3,040	Mar 20	Fred and Peter Done (100%)

HQ location and county	Rank [2019 rank]	Company Activity	Sales £m	Profit £m [^]	Staff	Year end	Main shareholders
Manchester Greater Manchester	58 [76]	Timpson <i>Retail services provider</i>	287	20	4,832	Sep 19	John Timpson's settlements (100%)
Bury Greater Manchester	71 [133]	Crown Oil <i>Fuel and lubricant distributor</i>	244	8	329	Jul 19	Greensmith family & trusts (100%)
Warrington Greater Manchester	81	Wain Group <i>Housebuilder</i>	233	51	294	Jun 19	Bill & Will Ainscough (100%)
Manchester Greater Manchester	110 [212]	O'Connor Group <i>Utility contractor</i>	*202	*17	818	Apr 20	O'Connor family (100%)
Salford Greater Manchester	115	Network Plus <i>Utility and infrastructure provider</i>	*193	*11	1,032	Mar 20	Dan Holland (50%), Stuart Fraser (50%)
Manchester Greater Manchester	204	BluJay <i>Transportation software provider</i>	123	‡40	1,145	Mar 19	Francisco Partners (49%), Temasek (37%), management (14%)
Heywood Greater Manchester	231	Avonside Group Services <i>Construction</i>	113	5	325	Dec 18	Management (69%), Core Capital (31%)
Bolton Lancashire	22	Warburtons <i>Baker</i>	506	22	4,742	Sep 19	Warburton family (100%)
Wigan Lancashire	125	NRL <i>Recruitment & contracting services</i>	186	3	117	Dec 19	Redmayne family (100%)
Blackburn Lancashire	155	BBF <i>Cake manufacturer</i>	156	7	1,676	Jun 19	Endless Private Equity (73%), management (19%), NBGI Private Equity (8%)
Bolton Lancashire	193 [219]	Scan Computers International <i>IT hardware supplier</i>	130	3	247	Jun 19	Raja family (100%)
Blackburn Lancashire	202	The Kay Group <i>Fuel forecourt retailer</i>	126	6	308	Oct 19	Kenneth Kay (51%), Jean Kay (49%)
Liverpool Merseyside	41	The Billington Group <i>Food manufacturer</i>	362	10	1,814	Sep 19	Billington family and others (100%)
Liverpool Merseyside	45 [84]	Halewood Artisanal Spirits <i>Alcoholic drinks maker</i>	335	17	907	Jun 19	Halewood family (73.73%), others (26.27%)
Formby Merseyside	162 [246]	Victorian Plumbing <i>Online bathroom retailer</i>	152	10	298	Sep 19	Mark Radcliffe and family (95%), Martin Stewart (5%)
Prescot Merseyside	176	CRG <i>Recruitment consultancy</i>	140	6	5,860	Mar 19	Ian Munro (53%), Twenty 20 Capital (42%), Jamie Webb (5%)
Liverpool Merseyside	212	Thomas Hardie Commercials <i>Truck dealer</i>	121	5	344	Dec 18	James Murray (23%), Mark Cunnew (23%), Steven Wilson (23%), other management (31%)
Knowsley Merseyside	230	Alfred H Knight <i>Commodity assayer</i>	114	10	2,970	Dec 18	David Knight (52%), Richard Knight (40%), Gillian Gillett (8%)

[^] Profit = operating profit

* Supplied by company

† Annualised figure

‡ EBITDA

The national picture

Top Track 250 complements our **Top Track 100**, published in July, which features Britain's private companies with the biggest sales. It ranks the next 250-biggest companies by sales, provided they meet our criteria of min. 5% growth in sales or profits (see below). The 250 companies grew combined sales by 17% to £59.7bn, operating profits by 25% to £5.1bn and employees by 15% to 405,000, prior to the pandemic.

The 250 companies are headquartered across the country. London is home to the highest number of companies, with 60 businesses, followed by the southeast with 44. Of the remainder, 36 are based in the Midlands, 33 in the northeast and Yorkshire, 24 in the northwest of England, 24 in Scotland, 8 each in the southwest and the East of England, 7 in Northern Ireland and 6 in Wales.

16 years of Top Track 250

Over the 16 years, the **Top Track 250** league table has featured many of Britain's most successful mid-market private companies. Past stars include appliance maker **Dyson**, which first featured in 2005 with sales of just £277m, and this year featured on our Top Track 100 with sales of £4.4bn. **Ocado**, which last appeared in 2008 with sales of £273m, listed in 2010 and has since seen its value increase more than 20 times to £20bn. **The Hut Group** first featured in 2013 with sales of £157m, and floated this month valued at £5.4bn.

The full league table is published as a 10-page broadsheet supplement within the business section of **The Sunday Times** on 27 September, both in print and in the digital edition, and on www.fasttrack.co.uk.

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Notes for editors

Fast Track has published league tables of the UK's top-performing private companies with **The Sunday Times** for the past 23 years. The company was founded and is run by Dr Hamish Stevenson, who also holds an associate fellowship at Green Templeton College, Oxford University.

League table criteria

Companies are ranked by sales in their latest available accounts.

Companies are required to have operating margins that exceed 2%. Sales in the latest year must have grown by 5% or more for companies with the highest sales, graduated to 10% or more for those with lower sales; or profit growth must have been more 5% or more.

Companies have to be limited and registered in the UK, unquoted, and not subsidiaries. Companies may have their ultimate holding company offshore. Companies where the majority of turnover is generated by a quoted subsidiary are excluded, as are not-for-profit companies, cooperative societies, member-owned buying groups,

mutual societies, provident associations, betting exchanges, and partnerships such as lawyers and accountants. Some exceptions were made to the qualification criteria.

The research was carried out by Fast Track and accounts filed later than 17 July 2020 may not have been considered in compiling the league table.

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