

Thursday 2 July 2020

## THREE COMPANIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND WIN PLACES ON SPECIAL COVID-19 EDITION OF LEAGUE TABLE OF THE UK'S BIGGEST PRIVATE COMPANIES

Published this weekend, the **19th annual Sunday Times HSBC Top Track 100** league table ranks the UK's 100 private companies with the biggest sales, and before Covid-19 struck. Although some are planning to make substantial job cuts as a result of coronavirus, 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 three companies headquartered in Northern Ireland have together achieved sales of £3.3bn and profits of £139m in their latest financial year, and employ 5,700 people.

Examples of positive responses to the Covid-19 crisis include grocery giant **Henderson Group** (No 84), which supplied food to the more than 480 Spar, Eurospar and Vivo franchises across Northern Ireland that stayed open as essential retailers. **LCC Group** (No 74), based in Cookstown in County Tyrone, operates the GO chain of petrol stations, some of which are unmanned, helping provide fuel to key workers and other essential transport.

Belfast-based **W&R Barnett** (No 48) is Northern Ireland's top-ranked company. Founded in 1896 as a grain merchant, it now also has interests in oils and molasses as well as packaging, animal feeds, storage and horse breeding. Sales grew to a record £1.4bn in 2019.

The companies in Northern Ireland appear alongside well-known British names, including **bet365, Dyson, Iceland, JCB, John Lewis Partnership, Nando's** and **Specsavers**.

This year, the 100 companies reached a record £237bn in total sales, up 8% on the prior year, with total profits of £28.2bn, up by 7%. Three in four companies (74) increased sales in their latest financial year.

The league table programme is sponsored by **HSBC** and **Linklaters**, and compiled by **Fast Track**, the Oxford-based research and networking events firm.

Amanda Murphy, Head of Commercial Banking, HSBC UK, commented:

*"Uncertainty and volatility remain watchwords in the current climate but we at HSBC UK are confident that UK business leaders, such as those at the helm of the companies in Northern Ireland on this year's Top Track 100, will rise to the challenge. The country has found new reserves of energy in the face of adversity and the businesses that can harness that energy and pace of change will thrive in the 'new normal'."*

### Biggest private companies in the Northern Ireland, by county and rank

HQ location County	Rank [2019 rank]	Company Activity	Sales £m	Profits £m ‡	Staff	Year end	Main shareholders
Belfast County Antrim	<b>48</b> [48]	<b>W&amp;R Barnett</b> Conglomerate	1,355	69	1,613	Jul 19	Robert Barnett and family (100%)
Newtownabbey, Co Antrim County Antrim	<b>84</b> [83]	<b>Henderson Group</b> Food wholesaler and retailer	*918	*48	3,872	Dec 19	Geoffrey Agnew (12%), Martin Agnew (12%), Ardbarron Trust (76%)

HQ location County	Rank [2019 rank]	Company Activity	Sales £m	Profits £m ‡	Staff	Year end	Main shareholders
Cookstown, Co Tyrone County Tyrone	<b>74</b> [63]	<b>LCC Group</b> Energy distributor	991	23	256	Sep 18	Loughran family (100%)

‡ Profits = EBITDA (Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation)

\* Supplied by the company

### The national picture

This year's Top Track 100 achieved combined sales growth of 8% to a record total of £237bn compared with last year's 14% growth and total sales of £220bn. Profits grew 7% to a total of £28bn, also a record for the table. The companies employed 980,000 staff, having added 35,000 employees to their combined work force in their latest year. However, some, like **Arcadia, Clarks, Harrods, Heathrow, JCB, McLaren** and **Wates**, have recently announced significant job cuts as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.

The dominant region for company HQs is London (32), followed by the southeast (17) and the Midlands (13). Of the remainder, 12 companies are based in the northwest, nine in Scotland, eight in the southwest, three in Northern Ireland, three in Yorkshire and the northeast, two in the East of England, and one in Wales.

The full league table is published as a 6-page supplement with the business section of **The Sunday Times** on 5 July, both in print and in the digital edition, and on [www.fasttrack.co.uk](http://www.fasttrack.co.uk).

**ENDS**

**PLEASE CREDIT IN FULL: "SUNDAY TIMES HSBC TOP TRACK 100"**

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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 have to be registered in the UK, unquoted, and not subsidiaries. Companies may have their ultimate holding company offshore.

Companies are ranked by sales as reported in their latest available accounts, or by more up-to-date figures as reported directly to Fast Track by the companies.

Companies with fewer than 100 employees are excluded, as are not-for-profit companies, cooperative societies, member-owned buying groups, mutual societies, provident associations, and partnerships such as lawyers and accountants. The research was carried out by Fast Track between 1 April and 1 July 2020; more than one third (35) of the companies provided up-to-date figures not yet publically available.

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