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SUMMER 2026

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SUMMER EDITION

The online turnaround times

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Message from the CEO

Welcome to this Summer 2026 edition of Swift.

As ever our first two quarters saw an excuse to catch up with members, partners and stakeholders in the regions, with our North Conference - this year in Manchester - and Midlands, West & Wales Conferences, both sponsored by Valtus. You can read all about the excellent panels and presentations from page two onwards. We are not quite finished with our regular conferences with our Funding and IFT Conferences this week.

Our other events have been busy over the quarter, with our North West dinner, a London & South foodbank volunteering session, a net-walking session in Bath for the West & Wales region and the completion of our Next Level dinners across the regions. We also heard from acclaimed theatre producer Jude Kelly CBE for our recent Women in Turnaround breakfast at The Ivy. In terms of webinars, topics and sectors covered in recent weeks have included operational due diligence, automotive, digital reputation, raising debt finance and manufacturing.

It has also been an incredibly busy period in terms of IFT stakeholder engagement and advocacy, with the establishment and registration of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Turnaround and Business Improvement. The group aims to provide a parliamentary forum for discussion of business and sector distress and exploration of solutions and policy options.

Speaking of particular sectors, we have been active across different sectors in the past few months: we held a morning conference in partnership with Barclays, aimed at the Higher Education sector in April and building on this are planning webinars for our membership and in partnership with sector bodies. We have also held discussion sessions on the automotive sector and the challenges facing tier 2/3 smaller suppliers - thanks to Teneo for hosting - and an excellent panel session courtesy of DLA Piper comparing different European restructuring regimes.

On Restructuring Plans, we recently published IFT research looking at evolving approaches to Part 26A Restructuring Plans by smaller and mid-market businesses and future options. We are continuing to advocate for changes in this area for smaller businesses, so look our for further updates. We are also preparing a response to the Insolvency Service's consultation on Civil Enforcement Reform, as we have concerns regarding the impact of some of the proposals on independent turnaround directors. You can read in more detail about our IFT engagement and influencing towards the end of this edition of Swift.

Looking forward, tickets are now on sale for this year's National Conference on 18th September and for tables and tickets at our prestigious Annual Awards Dinner, held this year on 11th November at the InterContinental Hotel on Park Lane.

Awards submissions are open and you can find more information on the categories and deadlines later in this edition. We have updated some of the categories and processes this year to ensure the best representation of turnaround and transformation across the marketplace.

We have also commenced work on our annual Societal Impact Report, which will this year be looking at how the UK can manage instability and build on its strengths.

If you have case studies or would like to be interviewed for the report please get in touch, and if you have been sent the annual survey please do complete it.

With a packed schedule both for IFT Next and wider regional events (see the events calendar on p19), we hope to see you over the summer.

Kind regards,

Milly Camley
IFT CEO

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NORTH CONFERENCE 2026

Overview

We returned this year to The Studio in Manchester for our annual North Conference.

The day had a packed agenda, starting with our market overview panel of Allan Kelly of FRP, Mike Warbrick of HSBC, IFT Independent Josie Richardson and chaired by Nick Francis of Swan Partners. The panel highlighted the current context of multiple and concurrent pressures, resulting in complex challenges for businesses and their management teams. They discussed the possible multi-faceted impacts of the conflict in the Middle East, including on funding and refinancing. They also discussed how developments in AI are starting to be used to support areas including valuations and due diligence, financial analysis and forecasting. An overall theme focused on businesses needing to be clear and robust on their strategy and financials given increased selectiveness of capital.

We then moved into an in-depth presentation from Victoria Portman of Gateley Legal and Adrian Gladstone of Gateley Vinden on the Building Safety Act and the implications for the construction and housebuilding sector. They covered how the Act changes building regulations, statutory processes and management requirements for various building types across the construction industry, though primarily those involved with multi-occupancy residential properties. The presentation outlined what this means in practice and finished with a look at new routes by which developers may be liable for defects.

After a morning coffee break, we heard from Jack Whitaker and Sam Capper of KPMG, who spoke about building stronger foundations for cyber-resilience. They highlighted the potential loss and impact for businesses, how to think about cyber risk exposure and how to prepare and recover.

Steve Rutherford from our conference sponsor Valtus gave a short and entertaining presentation on how interim management is changing, with more emphasis on communication, stakeholder engagement and cultural alignment. He also stressed that more and more operational and financial turnaround go together to properly stabilise businesses.

Our second panel session of the day looked at Exceptionally Resistant Reluctant Turnarounds. Chaired by IFT Fellow Steve Benger, the panel included Oliver Colling (Kingsgate), Steve Chu (IFT Associate), Shân Wareing of Middlesex University, and Martin Jesper (IFT Independent). This was a great discussion of the different stakeholders involved and difficulty in obtaining turnaround buy-in across sectors including healthcare, higher education and charities. These included particular governance and regulatory issues depending on type of organisation.

Our final session before lunch was a presentation by Nicola Browne of Teneo on challenges with a group restructuring. Nicola gave a great and engaging overview of what can be quite a technical area of turnaround, including drivers of restructuring, review of options, key challenges and finally taking us through a case study of a food packaging plant with a loss-making subsidiary.

After lunch and a chance to catch up with colleagues (as well as for new headshots for those so inclined!) we kicked off the afternoon sessions with a panel on Private Equity Strategies in the Mid-Market. The panel included Rob Hanley of TDC, Elle Swire of BGF, Jim Fieldhouse of BDO and James Scholes of HSBC, chaired by Paul Jefferson of Gateley Legal. The panel highlighted that given macro-economic conditions, broader PE deal volumes were subdued in 2025 and so far continue to be in 2026, but buy and build is still happening, as is bolt-on activity. There is a lot of focus on AI in terms of how this will impact particular sectors and therefore whether funds want to invest, but also a greater operational focus from both private equity and private credit.

Our last but not least session of the day was a masterclass in Networking from Nick Davies of Really Great Training. It was a masterclass of a session itself, akin to stand-up with added useful takeaways about how to approach others at networking events, and how to follow up and build lasting relationships.

Thanks to all our speakers and all those who attended for such a useful and pleasant conference.

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MIDLANDS, WEST & WALES CONFERENCE 2026
Overview

Our 2026 Midlands Conference returned to The Studio in Birmingham, again on a delightfully warm April day, for another great day of updates, deep dives and catch ups.

To kick off, Christian Spence from Economic Analytics had the unenviable task of trying to capture the economic outlook in light of the ongoing uncertainty of the conflict in the Middle East. He highlighted the key issue for economic predictions was the haphazard nature of US decision-making and the uncertainty as to what the real objective was, as well as longer term impacts even with a quick resolution to the conflict. On the UK front, he discussed what feels like a continued lack of political direction, and persistent weakness in the UK's consumer facing economy. He finished with the concerning pronouncement that if the Strait of Hormuz is still closed in June then all bets are off.

We then moved straight into our Market Overview panel, chaired by Alan Meiklejohn of HCR Law, with Mike Barnes of HSBC, Glen Morgan of Credebt and Lee Causer of BDO. The panel discussed the impact of tax changes, such as to National Insurance and in relation to umbrella companies, working capital constraints, increasing levels of fraud and challenges from the wider market, such as oil prices.

The panel highlighted that particularly for owner-managed businesses there remains a reluctance to pay for advisers but also reassured that if management teams are switched on there are opportunities.

Omer Simjee of HCR Law then gave a presentation on the implications of the Employment Rights Act 2025 for businesses. He gave a great overview of key provisions, including changes to unfair dismissal, dismissal and re-engagement ("fire and rehire") and how businesses can prepare and comply with new requirements.

Before our first coffee break, Steve Rutherford of Valtus discussed trends for interim management, with a purple widget metaphor that felt particularly apt in the manufacturing heartlands.

Our next panel discussion covered dealing with Government as an owner, a lender or a customer in turnaround situations. The panel included members and partners with experience of working with governments and public bodies on a local, national and international level: IFT Member Lucy Corner, IFT Fellow Sean Sullivan, Allie Renison of SEC Newgate and was chaired by IFT Fellow and Board Member Nick Alexander. The panel covered both their war stories and lessons for interacting with government during turnarounds. The key messages from the panel were around understanding the culture of the organisations you work with and tailoring your messages and narrative.

William Marks of SEC Newgate then gave us a presentation on how to maintain stakeholder confidence in turnarounds. The presentation highlighted the importance of confidence to whether a turnaround fails or succeeds and how to manage the confidence deficit that most start with.

Our last presentation of the day was from IFT Independent David Bailey, who gave an AI masterclass including a (potentially never done before) live demonstration of an AI "Turnaround Director" assistant writing an initial draft of a business turnaround plan.

We ended the day on the high with an excellent panel session on Family Owned and Smaller Businesses. Chaired by our Regional Chair Dan French of Gateley, the panel consisted of IFT Fellow Ian Parker, John Playfair of Playfair Partnerships and Niki Lloyd of Lloyds. The panel highlighted that family businesses are the engines of the UK economy: according to the UK's Family Business Research Foundation, the UK had over 5 million family businesses in 2023, accounting for 93% of all firms in the private sector, generating almost half (49.5%) of private sector turnover and supporting 57% of total private sector employment nationally in 2023.

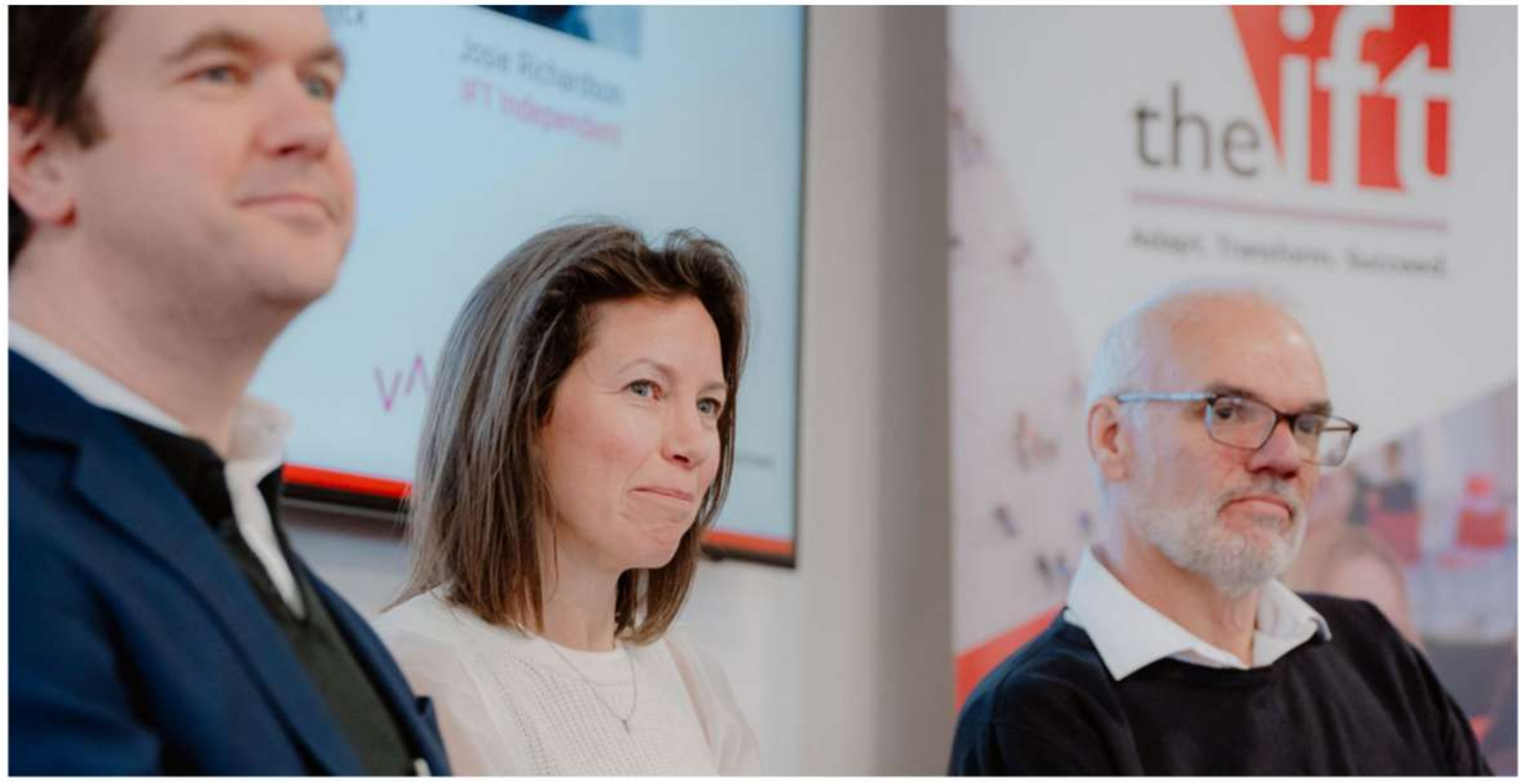
However, these firms often have limited cash buffers and bandwidth to deal with challenges and manage planning and succession issues, and the panel stressed the importance of trying to get these businesses to engage with external support.

NORTH CONFERENCE: MARKET OVERVIEW

At the IFT North Conference in Manchester earlier this year, I chaired the first session of the day to discuss the market overview with Michael Warbrick (HSBC), Allan Kelly (FRP Advisory) and Josie Richardson (Accomplish) and discuss the current restructuring landscape.

The discussion opened with a clear theme: market pressures are ongoing. CFOs and management teams are increasingly required to manage multiple, concurrent challenges, including geopolitical uncertainty, refinancing risk, cost inflation and operational underperformance. These factors are interconnected, and their combined effect is creating a more complex and demanding environment than has been seen in recent years. Management teams are showing signs of getting used to this ongoing uncertainty.

Geopolitical developments formed a key part of the discussion. At the time the ongoing conflict in the Middle East was already impacting oil and gas prices but there was significant uncertainty about how long the conflict would last. The panel emphasised that the secondary effects may be equally significant, including disruption to supply chains, increased manufacturing costs, shifts in consumer demand and increased inflationary pressure. In this context, there was a broad expectation that interest rates may remain elevated for a prolonged period, further tightening financial conditions for businesses.



Refinancing dynamics were also a central focus. Many businesses are now revisiting funding structures established during the pandemic, which were typically under more favourable conditions. In contrast, the current environment presents a more challenging backdrop, with capital still available but on more constrained terms and subject to increased scrutiny. As a result, refinancing processes are becoming more intricate, involving amend-and-extend discussions, more complex lender groups and a wider range of capital providers.

The influence of artificial intelligence was another prominent topic. In sectors such as software and SaaS, AI is already affecting valuations, transaction timing and investor sentiment. More broadly, the panel recognised the opportunity for advisers and independents to utilise AI to enhance the speed and quality of financial analysis, diligence and forecasting, provided that data is appropriately structured and governed.

A consistent theme throughout the session was that the market is becoming increasingly selective. With capital less readily available on favourable terms and margins for error reduced, there is a heightened focus from lenders and investors on clarity, credibility and execution. Businesses that are able to articulate a clear strategy, supported by timely and robust financial information, are better positioned to secure stakeholder support and maintain control of the process.

MIDLANDS, WEST & WALES CONFERENCE: MARKET OVERVIEW

Chair Alan Meiklejohn (HCR Law) was joined by Glen Morgan (Credebt), Lee Causer (BDO) and Mike Barnes (HSBC) for a panel discussion on the market outlook at the West Midlands conference 2026.
The session began with a review of the latest economic statistics and an overview of the current economic climate. Before the Iran conflict, the Treasury and OBR were expected to announce an economic growth forecast, however more recently, the IMF has downgraded both global and UK growth forecasts. The Bank of England also reported that inflation had increased to 3.3% in March, driven by higher oil and energy costs. We have still not seen the full impact the conflict has had on freight and shipping, it was generally recognised that any increase in business distress would be driven largely by how long the conflict lasts.

Lee noted that over the past year in his view he had seen too many liquidations and not enough administrations, indicating business owners were seeking advice and assistance later than it needed to be. For many manufacturing and engineering businesses there is a pipeline of work but a limited amount of cash. The overall observation was that we appear to be operating in a volatile market, made more difficult by conflict in the Middle East and the threat of US tariffs together with increases in National Insurance (NI) contributions and the minimum wage.

Mike noted a rise in fraud perpetrated against banks and the wider lender market. Glen also noted that there has been an increase in ledger manipulation and fraud, particularly among smaller and mid-market family-run businesses rather than larger corporates.

The panel also discussed the economic impact on different sectors with a regional focus on South West Wales and the Midlands. Mike discussed the challenges facing the recruitment sector including less graduate recruitment and on the other end of the spectrum they have seen retired people returning to the workforce. There have also been difficulties with the changes to umbrella companies. The manufacturing sector has recently been struggling with increases in minimum wage and NI, as well as rising energy costs. In fact, some panellists noted that 60% of the cases they are dealing with, from both trading and non-trading perspectives, are in the manufacturing sector, particularly FMCG and food. For example, Glen described the case of a food manufacturing company in Wales where notwithstanding 75% of the staff on minimum wage, the increases to the minimum wage represented a huge increase in costs for the company. For employees, their main concern is the businesses' survival and keeping their job, rather than a small increase in salary for 1-2 years. Similarly, in the independent schools sector, they too were feeling the effects of VAT (which was being passed on to the parents), NI increases together with weakened consumer confidence. Mike noted a lot of nervousness in the automotive sector in the Midlands, with the recent impact of the JLR cyber-attack and the impact on the supply chain following the resulting drop in manufacturing.

The real estate finance market also remains uncertain, with a downturn in residential instructions often seen as a precursor to softer commercial activity. However, Alan noted that it is not all doom and gloom, refinancing activity remains strong, the buy-to-let market remains buoyant despite the Renters' Rights Act coming into force on 1 May 2026, and auctions continue to see healthy levels of activity (certainly for now!).

Private equity is sitting on around £178 billion of dry powder, but deployment has been held back by a lack of quality investment opportunities, disappointment over valuation multiples, limited exits from existing investments, and competition from international trade buyers. While the year started positively, with real signs of movement, uncertainty around Iran and tariffs continues to weigh on sentiment. Even so, aside from the conflict in the Middle East, there is greater optimism in the market than there was in 2025.

Finally, in considering the longer-term impact of tariffs and the Iran conflict, the panel discussed what may lie ahead for businesses. It is expected that the Bank of England will hold the current interest rate, while lenders are expected to continue reducing their rates. In terms of new policy developments, the proposed (but still to actually come into effect following a recent consultation) 60-day hard cap on payment terms for larger businesses purchasing from smaller ones, the extension of the Small Business Commissioner's powers, and the proposed ban on retentions in construction contracts have the potential to offer some relief to SMEs.

VALTUS

Steve Rutherford of Valtus spoke at our North and Midlands, West and Wales' Conferences about the changing role of interim turnaround managers, including the growing importance of fractional leadership.

He highlighted how effective turnarounds increasingly depend on cultural alignment, strong stakeholder engagement and operational improvement, rather than financial restructuring alone. As businesses seek more agile, end-to-end support through complex transitions, interim managers with broad expertise are playing a growing role. In a challenging global environment, particularly post-Brexit, organisations are also prioritising partners with cross-border experience and the ability to navigate cultural differences.

Included below is a synopsis of Steve's recent article in which he explores in more detail the value of fractional interim roles.

Interim Management: In Defence of the Fractional Solution

Why fractional roles are often overlooked

Fractional assignments can be the unloved opportunity of the interim recruitment provider. They can be more difficult to deliver, as finding managers with the appetite and flexibility to commit on a part-time basis is not always easy. They are also typically less lucrative for providers, which is why many competitors do not prioritise them. The thinking is often: why work harder for less?

A different perspective on value

While others may see fractional roles as niche or uneconomic, we at Valtus see them as a valuable opportunity. They offer a flexible solution for businesses that may not be able to justify the cost of a full-time interim executive. SMEs, scale-ups and organisations facing specific strategic challenges can benefit from the expertise of a fractional interim manager without the cost of a full-time resource.

Where Fractional arrangements can deliver

Fractional arrangements can also be especially useful for project-based or outcome-focused work. Whether leading a product launch, supporting a refinancing or developing new sales strategies, fractional expertise can provide targeted delivery at a more manageable cost.

The growing appeal for interim executives

Fractional roles also appeal to a growing number of interim executives seeking greater flexibility. Many combine this work with Non-Executive Directorships, personal interests or more time with family, while still contributing their expertise at a senior level. For many, making a meaningful impact in business can sit comfortably alongside other professional and personal priorities.

Broadening the scope of fractional expertise

Our experience and network at Valtus allow us to draw on talent whose expertise extends well beyond the financial roles most commonly associated with fractional executives. We have recently delivered projects across business development, cyber risk, legal and company secretarial, as well as financial management. Our strength lies in matching the right solution to the right situation and supporting both client and interim manager to a successful outcome.

You can read the full article at: Fractional Interim Management: A Flexible Leadership Solution - Valtus UK

Author: Steve Rutherford Valtus

NORTH CONFERENCE: PRIVATE EQUITY STRATEGIES IN THE MID-MARKET

Our final panel session of the North Conference looked at Private Equity Strategies in the Mid-Market. The panel was chaired by Paul Jefferson of Gateley Legal, with the speakers consisting of Rob Hanley of TDC, Elle Swire of BGF, Jim Fieldhouse of BDO and James Scholes of HSBC.

The panel began by highlighting the broader macroeconomic context, noting that despite these headwinds there will be there are still opportunities and investment out there. Jim noted that for private equity, platform activity was down in 2025 and continues to be in 2026 but buy-and-build and bolt-on activity is still happening.

Paul noted that in light of ongoing uncertainty they have seen for about six to nine months a reluctance to deploy into wholly new investments versus shoring up balance sheets in the existing portfolio.

Rob Hanley noted that from their lender perspective when looking at deals they will be assessing the quality and experience of the PE sponsor, as well as the quality of the management team. He noted that TDC's approach has evolved and they are involved with sitting on Boards, supporting leadership teams and sponsors and bringing in interims if needed, as well as being innovative with debt structures to try and support businesses e.g. different loan note structures, debt for equity and so on.

In sector terms, the panel discussed the impact of AI, potentially dampening some PE demand in sectors like professional services, software technology as well as challenges in buy and build where there may be large groups which look successful but there is no integration, weak systems and governance and there may be a legacy of expensive debt.

They emphasised however that banks and funders were keen to engage and find a solution and the role of independent turnaround directors in supporting this and supporting sponsors, lenders and other stakeholders.

MIDLANDS, WEST & WALES CONFERENCE: GOVERNMENT AS OWNER, LENDER AND CUSTOMER IN TURNAROUNDS

An excellent and experienced panel discussed dealing with Government as a stakeholder in turnarounds, whether on a national or local level. Chaired by IFT Board Member and Fellow Nick Alexander, the panel included IFT Fellow Sean Sullivan, IFT Independent Lucy Corner and Allie Renison of SEC Newgate.

Each panellist had their own war stories of dealing with government in difficult situations. Sean had been working on infrastructure projects and discussed the complications of ministers being reluctant to make any job reductions and the challenge of public scrutiny of your role and package. He also highlighted the difficulties of investment where there are government funding constraints and ensuring confidentiality.

Allie also highlighted slow processes for government at a national level, and the need to really focus on ensuring that government is committed to meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Lucy's experience focused on turning round healthcare, so she had been closely involved with local authorities and the Local Government Association – noting the need to gently steer local authorities towards doing things differently, particularly in light of concerns on procurement, funding and staffing and licensing issues for services like health and social care.

Overall, the panel noted that different stakeholders across government need different messages when you are seeking to progress a turnaround.

Nick noted that we are seeing increasing demand for turnaround support in cases where there may be a government interest or ownership stake, and the key difference is in culture. He noted that you should always be aware that what you do in these cases may end up in the public domain e.g. before Select Committees and you will be engaging with advisers, so try to push to make these useful to you.

Lucy agreed that looking at the culture of the organisation is key, for instance in the NHS staff have no idea about commercial viability or insolvency so a large focus is on educating them. Sean noted that you need to be fair but firm when dealing with government and explain everything.

Allie commented that you should always consider the narrative with government – be a solutions provider and think creatively about where you take your messages and what messages you take to government.

NORTH CONFERENCE: EXCEPTIONALLY RESISTANT: RELUCTANT TURNAROUNDS

At the IFT's North Conference, chair Steve Benger (IFT Fellow) was joined by Oliver Colling (Kingsgate), Steve Chu (IFT Associate), Shân Wareing (Middlesex University) and Martin Jesper (IFT Independent) for a panel discussion on reluctant turnarounds. The session explored the challenges faced by turnaround professionals when entering businesses across a range of sectors.

Barriers to Turnaround Engagement Across Sectors
One key theme was the difficulty of initiating turnaround engagement. Across sectors, organisations often resist acknowledging problems until a catalyst forces action. In family-owned businesses in particular, this can take the form of denial or delay, with leaders reluctant to confront underperformance until a crisis emerges.

Similarly, in charities and higher education institutions, governance structures can slow or complicate decision-making, particularly where there is a strong emotional attachment to the organisation's mission or an established culture that shapes choices.

Governance Challenges in the Charities Sector
Steve highlighted that in the charities sector, volunteer trustees were mentioned as a key factor affecting reluctance to engage in turnaround. While trustees are committed to their organisations, they may lack operational visibility, leading to delayed intervention or decisions taken too late. There is also often reluctance towards mergers, even where they may be beneficial, driven in some cases by a sense of competition rather than collaboration.

Resistance to Change in Higher Education
Shân explained that in higher education, despite increasing financial pressures, there remains limited collective appetite for structural change. Institutions operate in a competitive environment and lack incentives to pursue collaboration, which means mergers and meaningful change are rare.

The Role of Human Factors and Cost Concerns
Beyond structural barriers, the panel emphasised the importance of human factors. Cost concerns frequently deter organisations from engaging external turnaround professionals, with some opting for internal or less experienced teams. Deeper psychological factors, including fear of failure, concerns about personal reputation and reluctance to relinquish control, can also contribute to resistance.

Importance of Language and Framing in Turnaround Engagement
The panel also discussed how the terminology used, such as 'turnaround' versus 'value protection' or 'financial sustainability', can significantly affect stakeholder receptiveness. The negative connotations of 'turnaround' can hinder engagement, particularly in private equity and owner-managed businesses.

Adapting Communication to Gain Engagement
Adapting terminology and communication style can therefore play a vital role in gaining access to organisations and establishing trust. Softer, more collaborative language can help overcome initial resistance and enable turnaround professionals to engage stakeholders more effectively.

Catalysts and Stakeholder Roles in Initiating Turnaround:
The discussion also underscored the importance of catalysts and stakeholder roles in initiating turnaround processes. External advisors, including lawyers, accountants, and consultancies, often act as intermediaries, recognising the need for intervention and facilitating introductions.

Mandate Clarity and Evolving Scope
Even when engagement begins, mandates are not always clearly defined. As issues become more apparent, attempts to expand the scope of a turnaround can meet further resistance, underlining the need for clarity from the outset.

Sectoral Differences and Commonalities in Turnaround:
Steve, Shân, Oliver and Martin compared experiences across sectors, including charity, higher education, healthcare, sport and SMEs, identifying both distinct challenges and shared themes such as resistance to change, the importance of mission and the role of governance structures.

Conclusion: Shared Challenges Across Sectors.
Despite clear differences across sectors, the panel identified common themes underpinning many reluctant turnarounds, including resistance to change, delayed recognition of problems and the need for a triggering event. Overall, the discussion reinforced that successful turnarounds depend not only on technical expertise, but also on understanding human psychology, managing stakeholder dynamics, and aligning solutions with organisational values through clear and effective communication.

MIDLANDS, WEST & WALES CONFERENCE: STAKEHOLDER CONFIDENCE: THE INTANGIBLE ASSET THAT CAN MAKE OR BREAK TURNAROUNDS

SECNewgate

Before HMV went into administration in January 2013 following a protracted turnaround attempt, the moment that defined the collapse was not a financial filing or a press statement. It was a sequence of unplanned tweets from inside the company's marketing department, broadcasting in real time the chaos of the redundancies that were being announced. The financial story had been carefully curated for months in the trade press. However, the real story was written in seven minutes by stakeholders the management team had stopped paying attention to.

And yet, there is a real gap between how seriously stakeholder communications is taken in principle and how systematically it is managed in practice.

The challenge is that trust and confidence rarely start from zero - they start in a deficit. Lenders, employees, customers and suppliers almost always know something is wrong before management has said anything formal. The vacuum is filled quickly: by rumour, by trade press, by hushed conversations between advisers. Four instincts make this worse, and all of them feel right at the time. The first is waiting for perfect information before communicating, because while management waits, the narrative forms without them.

The second is treating stakeholders as a single audience. A message designed for a lender will land very differently with an employee, and management should assume that whatever is said to one group will reach the others. A single coherent narrative, expressed differently for different audiences, is non-negotiable.
The third is over-reassurance: sophisticated stakeholders see through a bluff, and credibility lost in a crisis is extraordinarily difficult to recover.

The fourth is assuming silence is neutral. It is not. In a distress situation, the baseline assumption is always negative, and silence becomes speculation.

The instinct to start with the numbers is hard to shake. Many start by getting the financial story straight. Often only a minority would begin by asking what stakeholders already know and believe, which, in practice, is where stakeholder communications should always start.

The discipline that follows is uncomfortable but consistent. Map stakeholders before acting; know who holds influence, whose confidence is wavering, where the business is most exposed. Build one narrative on four critical ingredients: an honest diagnosis, a clear turning point, a credible outcome, and evidence of capability. Then, communicate actively on a cadence stakeholders can rely on.

When asked which stakeholder group was hardest to handle in a distress situation, many point clearly to employees and the media, with lenders seen as easiest by some distance. This is unsurprising as lenders are familiar territory, considered sophisticated, contractually engaged and used to bad news delivered in structured forums. Employees and media are messier audiences, with less predictable channels and more public consequences when communications fail. They are also the audiences where behaviour, not language, does most of the work.

Because behaviour is the most powerful form of communication available to a business in distress. In low-trust environments, what management does will carry far more weight than what it says. Confidence cannot be bought, but it can be defended, and the turnarounds that succeed treat it as the asset it is.

NORTH CONFERENCE : NAVIGATING THE BUILDING SAFETY ACT: CHALLENGES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION AND HOUSEBUILDING INDUSTRY

Victoria Portman, Adrian Gladstone

Gateley /LEGAL

The Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA) marks a decisive shift in how building safety is regulated across the UK. Introduced in response to Grenfell and the Hackitt Review, the Act is driving a fundamental cultural reset, placing accountability, competence and compliance at the heart of project delivery.

At its core, the BSA significantly raises the bar on Building Regulations compliance. Clear duty holder roles, clients, designers and contractors — now carry defined legal responsibilities throughout the lifecycle of a project.

Competence is mandatory, the "golden thread" of information must be maintained, and formal sign-off is required at completion. The message is clear: failures in compliance are no longer commercially tolerable, they carry serious, potentially criminal consequences.

For higher-risk buildings, the new gateway regime introduces strict regulatory checkpoints at planning, pre-construction and completion. These "hard stops" are reshaping project programmes, increasing lead-in times and driving up costs through additional fees, oversight and the Building Safety Levy. The compliance burden is heavier, but so too is the expectation of safer outcomes.

Perhaps the most significant shift lies in the expanded routes to recovery. The Act introduces powerful statutory mechanisms - Remediation Contribution Orders (RCOs) and Building Liability Orders (BLOs) designed to overcome the limitations of traditional litigation. These tools allow liability to extend beyond original project vehicles to associated corporate entities, ensuring those who control and benefit from developments can be held financially accountable.

Early tribunal decisions underline the breadth of these powers, including retrospective application and joint liability across corporate groups. Combined with existing claims in contract, negligence, the Defective Premises Act 1972 (now with its 30 year extended limitation period) and insurance, the BSA creates a far more robust and effective framework for funding remediation.

In short, the BSA is not just regulatory reform, it is a reallocation of risk across the industry.

NORTH CONFERENCE: CHALLENGES WITH A GROUP RESTRUCTURING

Teneo
The Global CEO Advisory Firm

Speaking at the IFT North conference, Nicola Browne of Teneo explored the realities of group restructuring, highlighting the strategic, financial and operational pressures that can make these situations especially complex.

What drives a group restructuring?
Nicola outlined a broad range of drivers behind group restructurings, from strategy, operational efficiency and internal organisational change to tax, regulation, compliance, investment pressures, and geographical or market challenges. Whatever the trigger, she argued that decisive action can help refocus leadership attention and strengthen the wider group.

Keeping options open
One of Nicola's key messages was the importance of carrying out an options review early. At that stage, businesses typically have a wider range of possible routes available, whereas intra-group dependencies can later narrow the field and make some options less attractive.

Those routes may include fixing and holding the business to create a more stable platform for future growth, pursuing a sale to maximise exit value, winding down operations to reduce closure costs and risk, or entering insolvency as a means of returning value to creditors.

In assessing which route is most appropriate, Nicola highlighted a number of fundamental questions:

1. How should a non-core business be managed?
2. If the business is non-core, is a turnaround the best use of capital?
3. A sale may be the most attractive option, but how feasible is it?
4. Closure can be a high-cost, high-risk strategy that may affect the wider brand and reputation.
5. Is the entity solvent?

The practical challenges
Nicola pointed to a number of recurring challenges in group restructurings. Financially, these can include the cash cost of exit, significant intercompany loan balances, the difficulty of establishing a clear entity-level picture, group lending facilities, limited visibility of results, pension liabilities and employee retention. Shared services add a further layer of complexity, with turnaround professionals often needing to unravel group dependencies, contracts, relationships and - where there is a sale or divestment of part of the business - put in place transitional service agreements (TSAs).

Legal and structural issues can be just as demanding, including cross-border legal differences, ambiguity over contract ownership, guarantees, security arrangements, jurisdictional processes, asset ownership and the divide between employing entities and operational functions.

She also highlighted implementation capacity and expertise as significant constraints, particularly given the time-intensive nature of restructurings, the specialist knowledge required and the need to plan for contingencies. Other pressures can include VAT and tax, liquidity, directors' duties, leadership demands and wider disruption across the group, from reputational issues and negative press to employee communications, customer confidence and market impact.

Case study: managing the exit
To illustrate these issues in practice, Nicola shared a case study of a perishable food packaging plant . The business was loss-making, and the subsidiary was absorbing management time while drawing liquidity away from capital projects that would have supported the wider group. Following an options assessment, administrators were appointed, ultimately delivering a 100 percent return to secured lenders.

The exit itself presented a number of group-related complications. A water treatment plant, although owned by the company, was still required by the wider group. This had been marketed as part of a wider sale process, and was eventually sold back to the group through a pre-pack sale. Shared services from Group required to support the company during the administration, including security, utilities and central functions such as HR, payroll and finance, were managed through a TSA. Tax losses, which represented lost value to the group, were sold back to the Group, while a settlement for value to the administration estate was made in respect of pre-appointment debt.

Brands owned by the company but used by the wider group were purchased or re-registered, and a TUPE transfer was implemented to align the employing entity more closely with the operating structure of the remaining group.

Key lessons
Among Nicola's closing points was a warning not to underestimate the time and cost involved in putting a TSA in place. She also stressed the value of careful planning to save time and money later, as well as the importance of keeping multiple options alive in parallel. Ultimately, she noted, the underlying drivers of a restructuring will often determine which paths remain open.

AI Masterclass

David Bailey (IFT Independent) delivered a masterclass on using AI at the IFT's 2026 Midlands Conference.

What is AI?

David discussed what AI actually is and, importantly, what it is not. He explained that AI is a reasoning engine, a drafting tool, a thinking partner and a force multiplier, but it is not a search engine, connected to client data, a decision-maker or a replacement for employees. At its core, AI predicts the next most plausible step in a sequence.

David also explained the practitioner model for using AI:

1. Brief: give it the instruction.
2. Review: apply your judgement.
3. Own: sign-off is yours.

How can it be used to help turnaround work?

David gave the Midlands conference a live demonstration of how he has created his own "Turnaround Director assistant" using Claude. By feeding it precise rules, it could produce an initial turnaround plan for an example business.

Two inputs were used:

1. Companies House: last filed accounts, balance sheet position and creditor profile at the year end. This information is publicly available.
2. Board current position: 200–300 words from the director on what is happening now and the key creditor pressures facing the business.

From this information, the AI can produce a director risk matrix, immediate stabilisation actions for the next 13 weeks, and strategic options such as a CVA, pre-pack administration or a wind-down.

For CROs AI can help with the following phases:

1. Assess: diagnostic narrative, director's risk matrix and due diligence list.
2. Stabilise: creditor letters, bank memos and cash flow narrative.
3. Plan: options comparison, 90-day framework and directors' duties note.
4. Execute: progress reports, handover notes and MI packs.

For independent practitioners, AI can supply the structure and the speed, while the practitioner supplies the judgement.

The opportunity for independents to use AI for leverage is significant. Used well, it can act as a force multiplier.

How to get the best out of your AI

David noted that we should treat AI like an intern. That means giving it sufficient context, clear instructions (prompts) and checking its output carefully. AI is very good at summarising and extracting information. Good prompts and good data substantially improve the quality of its answers.

Fee models

AI may also have implications for fee models. If administrative work can be completed more quickly, practitioners may need to think differently about how work is priced, for example through flat-fee arrangements or fees linked to outcomes and success.

Warnings

David emphasised that you should not send AI output directly to a client without first carrying out a series of checks.

He also advised against putting confidential information into any AI tool, including Copilot. For example, you should not name clients and should anonymise information before prompting. It is also sensible to check the platform's data retention policy. NDAs and IFT standards still apply, and enterprise-tier tools generally offer stronger protections.

Hallucinations are structural, and some areas are higher risk than others. High-risk examples include case law citations, section numbers, HMRC thresholds and regulatory deadlines. Lower-risk uses include structuring and drafting, framing options, creditor communications and using AI as a general checklist. An important point to note is that your PI is unchanged: if AI generated the draft, you reviewed it and sent it, then you own it and remain responsible for it.

David encouraged participants to pick two document types over the following week, write a prompt template, test it and refine it.

He ended the session by stressing that AI is a practice multiplier, not a practice replacement: solicitors did not stop being solicitors when word processors arrived.

MIDLANDS, WEST & WALES CONFERENCE

Employment Rights Act Update
Omer Simjee

Omer Simjee of HCR Law delivered a practical and timely overview of the Employment Rights Act 2025, setting out the scale of the forthcoming changes and what they are likely to mean for employers. The Act received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025 and is being implemented in phases across 2026 and 2027, making preparation an immediate priority rather than a future concern.

The session began by outlining early changes to trade union and industrial action rules, including the removal of minimum service level requirements, simplified ballot and industrial action notices, and stronger protections for trade union activity. Further reforms will increase trade union visibility and access to workplaces, alongside the introduction of electronic balloting for statutory trade union ballots.

A significant part of the presentation focused on the implications for workforce management. Omer highlighted important practical changes that took effect in April 2026 to how collective redundancy might be triggered, how this could affect deals led by the delegates and the greater risks posed to employers by significantly increased penalties for failing to consult.

Looking ahead to 2027, Simjee emphasised the potential impact of changes to unfair dismissal rights, including the reduction of the qualifying service period from two years to six months and the removal of the compensation cap. He noted that this could increase the volume and value of claims, making robust contracts, clear policies, probation management and consistent disciplinary and capability processes even more important.

The session also explored restrictions on dismissal and re-engagement, or "fire and rehire". While limited exemptions will remain, the reforms are intended to strengthen employees' negotiating position and make it harder for employers to impose changes to terms and conditions.

Overall, the message was, employers should use the implementation period to review contracts, update policies, train managers and strengthen processes before the new rights take full effect.

MIDLANDS, WEST & WALES CONFERENCE: FAMILY OWNED AND SMALLER BUSINESS UPDATE

A recent panel discussion brought together senior practitioners from law, turnaround consultancy and distressed lending to examine the pressures facing family-owned and smaller businesses in the UK, with particular reference to manufacturing, automotive and industrial sectors.

While rising costs and regulatory change formed the backdrop, the discussion focused on deeper structural and behavioural issues that often determine outcomes for family enterprises.

A central theme was the challenge of inter-generational dynamics. Many family businesses are operating at a strategic crossroads, with founders and senior owner-managers keen to preserve long-standing business models, while younger generations advocate diversification, technological change or new markets.

The panel noted that these disagreements are rarely confined to commercial logic alone; they often touch on legacy, identity and control. In periods of stress, unresolved tension can result in delayed decision-making, diluted strategies or contradictory priorities, precisely when clarity and pace are most critical.

The panel also highlighted the frequent blurring of corporate and personal finances in family-owned businesses. It is common for company funds to be used, formally or informally, to support individual family members' lifestyles or external investments. While often tolerated during periods of strong trading, this practice materially weakens resilience when cash becomes constrained. Continued drawings during distress not only erode liquidity but can undermine alignment with lenders and other stakeholders, who increasingly expect owners to share the financial burden when support is sought. The discussion emphasised that addressing this issue early is often essential to stabilising a business and restoring confidence.

A further vulnerability identified was over-reliance on a limited customer base. This is particularly pronounced in Midlands manufacturing and automotive supply chains, where many businesses depend heavily on a small number of key customers, sometimes a single OEM or Tier 1 supplier. Long-standing relationships can provide stability, but they also expose businesses to sudden shocks if volumes fall, programmes end or terms change. The panel observed that customer concentration risk is often poorly understood internally, and that attempts at diversification are frequently reactive, adding complexity without strengthening underlying performance.

Closely linked to this was the lack of investment in scalable infrastructure and management capability. As family businesses grow, finance functions, systems and governance often fail to keep pace. Owner-managers may retain too much operational control, relying on informal processes rather than robust management information and delegated authority. Weak cash forecasting, limited insight into product or customer profitability, and poor inventory control were all cited as common warning signs. Crucially, the panel agreed that these issues are usually capable of being addressed, but only if recognised before stakeholder confidence is lost.

Despite these structural challenges, the panel noted that family businesses retain inherent strengths. Decision-making can be faster, commitment deeper and willingness to adapt greater than in many larger organisations. However, agility alone is not sufficient. The consistent message was that speed must be matched by discipline: clear governance, credible financial information and a willingness to professionalise management. The discussion concluded that distress in family-owned businesses is rarely caused by external pressures alone. More often, it arises from the interaction between economic challenge and internal fragility. Early recognition, decisive action and investment in resilience remain the key factors that separate successful reinvention from avoidable failure.

Daniel French (Gateley Legal), John Playfair (Playfair Partnerships), Ian Parker (IFT Fellow) Niki Lloyd (Lloyds Banking)

Supporting Family Businesses

PLAYFAIR partnerships **By John Playfair**

As highlighted elsewhere in the Swift magazine, family owned and SME businesses make up a significant proportion of UK businesses, generating half of the private sector turnover and more than half of the private sector employment - many of these in micro family businesses. Hence the economic health, preservation and future growth of these businesses is not only important to the owners but is also important to the UK overall.

However, according to the latest Global Family Business Survey 2025, growth is slowing and attention is turning to preservation and legacy - the latter now also coming under attack. So, what are the challenges and how can we as a profession help these businesses?

Leaving aside the geopolitical issues (which we hope will ease) affecting costs and supply chain reliability, the recent changes in employment law and increases in national insurance, minimum wage and business rates, have hit all businesses, but smaller businesses disproportionately more, and unfortunately, they have less resources – both cash and management – to deal with these. Hence, this is a time when they will often reach out for help – it always needs a trigger!

At Playfair under such a request, we would encourage a thorough strategic and financial review of the business, past, present and future – more so now than ever before because of technological changes already in place and which will only accelerate in the coming years.

Questions that should be asked include:

- Is the business model still fit for purpose?
- Is our market changing – are we overly reliant on a few customers – do we understand their onward supply chain and how it might impact us?
- Are our products/services still aligned to the market needs and cost competitive?
- Do we have a robust financial plan in place – do we know where our profitable and less profitable products/services/markets are, and have we got a 3D (P&L, Balance Sheet, Cashflow) forward forecast, and is it reliable and/or what are the sensitive areas?
- Is there a robust management team in place, or are we overly reliant on the owner or a few family members….. and if so, is there a succession plan in place?

Owner-managers probably know the answers to many of these questions, but we have found that unless asked by someone outside of the current structure (i.e. a consultant) they rarely ask it themselves. Furthermore, PwC's research also highlighted that the pace of reinvention is slow…. only 3% are looking to reinvent their business…….chillingly low for today's challenging and changing business environment!
We as advisors can bring this questioning and challenge…. remembering in doing so the comment from Wayne Gretzky, the retired Canadian ice hockey legend, who said that he skated to where the puck would be in the next play, not where it is now!

The above will need encouragement and patience to work through, but will produce great benefits if properly embraced.

However, as was noted in Birmingham, as an SME grows, it often outgrows its financial systems and we have seen this on many occasions. Hence, our assistance will often be needed to answer some of the financial questions and ensure that there is a robust financial plan in place.

Finally, we come to the issue of management. Is there an over-reliance on one or a few? Is there what we call an 'energy gap' – maturing business and owner not prepared/able to continue to inject time and energy needed to manage the business? With any of these, is there a succession plan? Are there next generation family members in the business being groomed for succession? Are they good enough? Do they want to do it? If not, is there an exit strategy?

Both succession and exit routes take time and planning to prepare and execute. At Playfair, for example, we started the process 10 years before executing the final plays, allowing time to gain knowledge, experience and contacts – it doesn't happen overnight!

In summary, the challenges and changes facing SMEs and Family Businesses are more severe and faster moving than I have seen before, and these businesses will need help to manage them, and those of us in this sector have the skills, understanding and empathy to help, and hopefully we are asked to do so before it is too late!

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EVENTS CALENDAR

To register for any of the events listed here, please email **info@the-ift.com**.

2 **July** 18:00-21:30
London & South Summer Drinks
Teneo, London
Complimentary
In partnership with

8 **July** 08:30-10:00
IFT Next London & South Networking Breakfast
Dishoom Covent Garden, London
Complimentary

9 **July** 17:30-22:00
NE Rugby Tour
York Stadium
Complimentary

9 **July** 13:30-17:00
IFT London & South Netwalking
Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park
Complimentary

15 **July** 16:00-17:00
Mediation Webinar
Webinar - Zoom
Complimentary
In partnership with

16 **July** 17:30-21:00
IFT Next West & Wales Summer Drinks
Bambalan, Bristol
Complimentary
Sponsored by

16 **July** 16:00-17:00
IFT UK Special Situations M&A Market
Webinar - Zoom
Complimentary
In partnership with

10 September 17:00-19:30
IFT Midlands Speed Networking Event
Gateley, Birmingham
Complimentary
In partnership with

10 **September** 16:00-17:00
Reputational Impact of Generative AI
Webinar - Zoom
Complimentary
In partnership with

18 **September** 09:00-17:00
National Conference
20 Cavendish Square
Fellow £275 + VAT
Member £375 + VAT
Associate £450 + VAT
Non-Member £495 + VAT

22 **September** 17:00-21:00
25th Anniversary
Apothecaries Hall, London
Complimentary

11 **November** 18:00-00:00
Annual Awards Dinner
InterContinental Park Lane, London
Fellow £320 + VAT
Member 395 + VAT
Associate £435 + VAT
Non-Member £465 + VAT

Corporate Partner News - BTG and Katten join The IFT as Corporate Partners

We're excited to announce that BTG has joined The IFT as a Corporate Partner.

BTG has a strong track record of helping organisations navigate financial and operational challenges, providing restructuring, financial advisory and turnaround support across a wide range of sectors. Their experience working with businesses in critical situations, including innovation in areas such as Part 26A Restructuring Plans makes them a fantastic addition to our corporate partners.

We're looking forward to collaborating with the BTG team and to the expertise they'll bring to our networks.

Following a series of successful mandates for the firm's recently established European Restructuring team, including advising on the sale of Radley's global brand and related IP assets, the acquisition of a Malaysian green steel producer (subject to the target's scheme of arrangement being sanctioned) and the acquisition of The Real Greek restaurant group, we are delighted to welcome Katten as a Corporate Partner and look forward to working together to support our members and the wider turnaround and restructuring profession.

Katten's collaborative and commercially-focused approach makes them a valued addition to our partner community, supporting our mission to promote excellence in turnaround, transformation and restructuring.

Food Production Case Study - Sushi manufacturing facility– Ichiban UK Ltd

By Mark Cooper, IFT Accredited Member

Background
A successful career in the food sector helping to get manufacturers and producers on track has enabled IFT Member Mark Cooper to bring situational and sector insights to a range of assignments. And so it is with Ichiban UK, one of the country's key sushi manufacturers. As Mark comments, food is something that we will always need, but the nature of producing a product with fresh ingredients and a short shelf life has implications for its production and its place in the supply chain.

With sushi, it is not practical to produce in France, for example, and ship to the UK fresh seven days per week, and you can see a number of food production facilities being brought back to the UK after the previous trend for 'off-shoring'. There are also opportunities and constraints specific to the product. Sushi is an option for those with gluten intolerances as opposed to sandwiches and have become a feature of supermarket meal deals thus requiring volume and demand pressures. Against this, sushi is very seasonal, with the busiest time in the summer, and supermarkets sometimes treat it as a loss leader, though vertical integration helps.

In terms of the business itself, the company was an unusual asset for a successful farmer. He had bought the factory c.12 years earlier from a Japanese owner that wished to exit the UK market. The business had been unprofitable over the last three years and was having to do a lot of last-minute negotiations with retailers.

However, it had a good viable product and was the biggest employer in the area, factors which had driven the acquisition in the first place.

How did Mark come to be introduced to the business?
Mark had previously worked with another retailer and was initially brought in to Ichiban to carry out due diligence pre-purchase – he advised to continue with the sale but that there was a lack of leadership and energy. He then separately met with Ichiban's owner about what needed to be done; the owner had been trying to sell since Covid.

He was with the business for 16 months from July 24 to November 25. The Managing Director left abruptly, and the company was missing key roles - there was no Technical manager or Commercial manager. The business' relationship with their key customer was the lowest it had been for five years.

Process and actions
Bringing people on the journey
Mark worked onsite at the business at least four days per week as the Interim Transformation Director. It was a process of bringing everyone on the journey, emphasising communication and being calm, organised and communicative. He carried out one-to-ones with his team every two weeks to talk about the improvement plan, as well as personal development and having that communication should mean there are no surprises.

He committed to regular six-monthly staff briefings and a newsletter every two months, recognising that where you have a 'burning platform' you have to get everyone facing the same way and aligned (this can be more difficult when the business is making money!). There were also monthly management meetings and notice board updates for staff on a more frequent basis.

He also emphasised honesty with the teams about sales, strategy and where the business was. It is all about people, being open, welcoming and non-hierarchical, which enthuses people.

The National Insurance changes in April 25 hit the business hard, with only half of staff initially got a pay rise on minimum wage, but the reasons and context were explained to staff and all of the remaining staff had received a pay-rise by the summer of 25.

The Board relationship is key, and Mark ensured that the Board were engaged in the strategy and team successes were well communicated. Before Mark arrived, there were no Board meetings, no communication with the shareholders. Now they are having regular meetings and thinking about succession.

Product specific improvements
Food production is often automated, but the sushi industry is the least automated and is a high care product: the rice is cooked in-house; rice and nori (seaweed) is then placed on a conveyor belt and rolled; there is semi-automation, but it still requires a lot of people and is not something you could easily use robots for instead. On the buying side there are different considerations with opportunities related to economies of scale and the need to manage supply chains, i.e. they source their sushi rice from Australia. (Overall, this means a high labour element, which is becoming more expensive).

So what did this mean for the approach?

They changed the range of products and focused on supplier relationships, which are central.

This was building on previous investments in machinery, for instance a new industrial rice cooker installed four years previously to simplify and improve the rice cooking process and product consistency and quality.

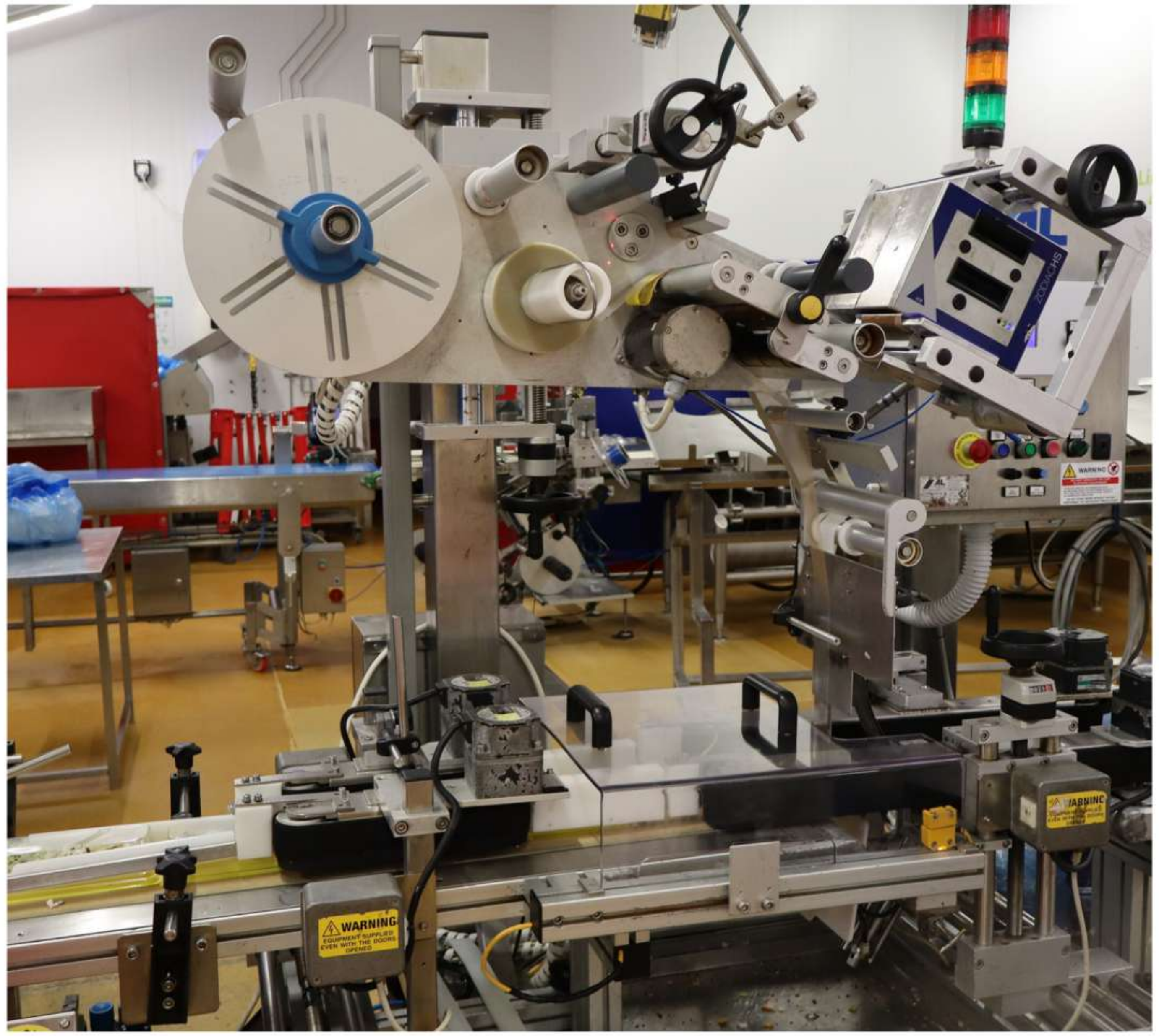
They also looked at the sustainability of client relationships with last minute changes and price decreases from retailers on short one-year contracts. The requirements of different retailers presents challenges as they have to understand the different values and brands and this feeds into operations. For instance, with one retailer they worked very hard training staff for six months so that they understood the product and Mark did a lot of work engaging with the different retailer clients. Production staff need to be able to switch seamlessly between the different requirements – ingredients, presentation and packaging and so forth of the different customers.

Given that orders are made on a daily basis they have to forecast likely orders and start production before they actually receive so this forecasting is also crucial and is something that they are always on top of.

Outcomes

- Strong customer relationships with new customers and new products. Ichiban now have a new relationship with Sainsburys, and successfully launched itsu branded sushi in Tesco in October 2024.
- 40% increase in orders since 2024; the business has been profitable in the lead up to Christmas 25, and this has continued after Christmas. (December is always a loss-making month in the world of sushi!)
- Continues to provide quality employment as the biggest employer in the local area, with the team built into a bright future
- They are well-advanced in the process of a multi-million-pound sale
- In Mark's view, it is the best sushi factory and quality in the UK!

Mark's work with Ichiban UK has been recognised with a Best Business Transformation Award in the New Street Consulting Group Interim Awards, 2025.



IFT Next

A series of engaging IFT Next events has taken place across the regions over recent months, bringing together emerging and established professionals from across the turnaround community. These have included the IFT Next Northeast Breakfast Social in Leeds, Next Level Dinners in Manchester, Leeds and London, and a cider and cheese pairing event in Bristol.

As part of the wider IFT Next programme, these events are designed to support networking, peer engagement and high-quality discussion for professionals who see turnaround and business support as a long-term career pathway. They provide a forum for advisers, lawyers, bankers, investors and others working in the sector to build their profile, strengthen their networks and connect with peers across the regions.

Thank you to everyone who attended our recent events. If you are looking to network with a focused community and develop your career in turnaround, please contact info@the-ift.com to join our distribution list.

Next Level Dinner in London

Cheese and Cider Pairing

Northeast Breakfast Social

IFT Academy Update

Module 2 of the IFT Academy in Bristol brought together sector insights, case studies, and interactive exercises across aerospace, defence, and automotive to build participants' confidence in managing stakeholders, leadership, and organisational performance in turnaround situations.

Module 3 of The IFT Academy Learning Programme took place in May in the Midlands, hosted at Morgan Motor Company and Jaguar Land Rover. Alongside venue tours, participants heard from Ian Parker, Kelly Jones and Ian Morgan, who shared practical insights on operational transformation, turnaround strategy, resilience and the challenges facing the automotive sector.

The module also included sessions led by Shaun O'Callaghan and Andrew Dixon, with participants completing the Tetramap exercise before taking part in a refinancing simulation and presenting proposals to an internal ABL credit committee. We now look forward to Module 4 as the cohort continues through the programme.

Module 3

Module 2

HMRC, Tax Losses and the Limits of Dissent: What the Waldorf Judgment Means for Restructuring Plans

By Kevin Coates, Grant Thornton.

The below provides a summary of the article. The full version can be accessed here:
https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/insights/hmrc-tax-losses-and-the-limits-of-dissent-what-the-waldorf-judgment-means-for-restructuring-plans/

Grant Thornton recently published an article on the High Court's decision to sanction the (second) restructuring plan of Waldorf Production UK Plc. This marks a significant development in the treatment of HMRC within Part 26A restructuring plans. The ruling provides important guidance on how the courts are likely to approach tax liabilities, tax losses and creditor dissent in future restructuring cases.

Seven issues resolved by the judgment

1. No jurisdictional bar to cramming down HMRC
2. The "no worse off" test is confined to rights compromised by the plan
3. Tax losses are nonetheless relevant to the court's discretion
4. Genuine engagement is now a two-way obligation – and the court is watching
5. No abuse of process – and the "floodgates" concern was dismissed
6. The court will not rewrite a negotiated plan at the sanction hearing

The terminal versus rescue distinction remains unresolved.

What this means for restructuring plans

The judgment advances the law in several important respects. For practitioners, the key implications are as follows.

- Watch for an appeal: HMRC may seek permission to appeal direct to the Supreme Court on the constitutional jurisdiction point. If granted, the position could shift materially.
- The "no worse off" test remains narrow: Following Petrofac and Waldorf, attempts to broaden section 901G (3) to capture wider economic consequences will face a high hurdle.
- Tax losses as a deal driver require expert analysis: Where an acquirer's interest is materially driven by acquired tax losses, plan companies should anticipate the point being raised on discretion. Credible, independent evidence on realistic utilisation rates, accounting for ring-fence mechanics, Part 14 CTA10, anti-avoidance rules and the relevant alternative will be essential.
- Mediation is now expected – and non-participation carries real risk: Lenders, institutional creditors and other sophisticated parties should treat participation in structured engagement as effectively essential if they wish to preserve their strongest grounds of opposition.
- Antecedent conduct remains relevant: The court's criticism of the October 2022 dividend is a reminder that the circumstances giving rise to financial difficulties will remain part of the fairness assessment.

- Extinguishing a tax liability is not, of itself, an abuse: Green J's rejection of the "won't pay" abuse argument, and of the wider floodgates concern, confirms that Part 26A can legitimately be used to compromise tax liabilities, provided the plan satisfies the jurisdictional conditions and is fair. HMRC retains its own tools under Part 14 CTA10, TAARs and the GAAR to challenge the use of acquired tax losses separately.
- Negotiate before lock-up, not at the hearing: Green J's refusal to modify the plan confirms that the sanction hearing is not a second bite at the negotiating cherry.

HMRC's evolving posture: Waldorf in context

The Waldorf confrontation should be viewed against a more nuanced recent backdrop. In Re Enzen Global Limited [2025] EWHC 852 (Ch) and Re OutsideClinic Limited [2025] EWHC 875 (Ch), both sanctioned in March 2025, HMRC not only voted in favour of the plans but also appeared in court to actively support them — a notable departure from its previous approach:

- In Enzen, HMRC agreed, following negotiation, to accept £350,000 per company (up from £250,000), achieving a recovery of around 4–6 pence in the pound compared to nil in the relevant alternative. The court expressly welcomed its "increased engagement".
- In OutsideClinic, HMRC improved its return from 5 pence to 15 pence in the pound and attended the sanction hearing to confirm its support.

These cases suggested a shift towards pragmatic engagement — early negotiation, agreement on quantum, and support where outcomes are fair. That is precisely the approach sought in Waldorf, but one HMRC ultimately declined to adopt.

From Early Warning Signs to Workable Solutions - Navigating Financial Stress before it leads to Insolvency

By Liam Mills and Alex Marks

Gateley / LEGAL

For many UK businesses, financial headroom remains tight. Higher borrowing costs, persistent cost inflation and a wave of maturing Covid-era facilities are combining to create a more fragile operating environment.

Although once routine, refinancing is now slower and less certain. Lenders are more selective, credit processes are more forensic, and execution risk is higher. Where refinancing timelines slip, the consequences are immediate - liquidity tightens and stakeholder confidence can erode quickly.

That said, financial distress rarely arrives overnight. In most situations, there is a window (often measurable in months rather than weeks) where early structured action can materially improve outcomes and avoid a formal insolvency process altogether.

The early warning signs boards should not ignore

The most effective boards treat financial stress as a developing issue, not a tipping point. In practice, warning signs often emerge across four key areas.

- **Financial covenant indicators.** Tightening covenant headroom, increased volatility in Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortisation (EBITDA) and rising interest costs are often the earliest signals. Businesses that find themselves relying repeatedly on lender waivers or equity cures are already on a trajectory that requires intervention.

- **Liquidity pressure.** Deferring creditor payments, increasingly delayed customer receipts and a cash flow forecast with limited headroom (or evident volatility) should all be treated as early and clear warning signs of distress.

- **Refinancing (or repayment) risk.** A maturity within the next 12 to 24 months without a credible refinancing (or repayment) pathway is a material issue in the current market.

- **Operational and stakeholder pressure.** This can surface through suppliers tightening terms or moving to cash on delivery, alongside pressure for dividends or value extraction despite a constrained balance sheet. At the same time, management focus may shift away from trading performance towards short-term liquidity management, which is often a clear signal that underlying pressures are beginning to impact day-to-day operations.

Taken individually, these issues may be manageable. In combination, they demand a coordinated response.

A practical playbook for early action

Where early warning signs emerge, the immediate priority is clarity. A short-term cash framework is a good starting point. A disciplined and realistic weekly cash flow often becomes the central tool for decision-making. It should identify critical outflows (e.g. payroll, tax, rent, debt service), highlight pinch points and test how much flexibility exists in creditor payments.

Alongside this, a targeted review of key contracts will frequently deliver immediate value. Many trading arrangements contain cross-default provisions, notification triggers or termination rights linked to financing events. Understanding these provisions early reduces the risk of inadvertent defaults and allows management to control the narrative with counterparties.

Equally important is a practical reading of the financing documents. Questions to answer include:

- Is there capacity to raise additional debt? If so, can security be offered?
- Is it possible to sell certain assets to generate liquidity?
- At what stage do defaults arise?
- What consents are required and from whom?

Answering these questions early defines the range of realistic options available to the company before the business is negotiating under pressure.

Why timing changes outcomes

Once a default occurs, the dynamic almost always shifts. Even supportive lenders become more focused on protecting their position than backing a turnaround. Standstills shorten, conditions tighten and execution risk increases.

Meanwhile, value erosion can accelerate. Suppliers may move to cash-on-delivery, key employees may leave and customers may begin contingency planning. What was previously a manageable situation can quickly become reactive.

There is also a governance dimension. As financial distress deepens, directors must keep solvency under active review, take appropriate advice and document decision-making carefully. Acting early is not just commercially advantageous, but fundamental to maintaining control of the process.

Using capital solutions to create breathing space

Where the underlying business remains viable, a range of funding solutions can be deployed to stabilise the position.

New money (whether from existing shareholders or new investors) can bridge liquidity gaps and buy time for a broader solution.

Alternative funding (including asset-based lending or receivables finance) can unlock liquidity tied up in the balance sheet, often more quickly than a full refinancing.

Accelerated disposals of non-core assets can generate cash and sharpen operational focus, although the application of proceeds will depend on the financing terms in place.

In more complex situations, businesses may also consider liability management exercises (LMEs).

LMEs (including drop-down and uptiering style solutions) are mainly relevant where there is a complex capital structure and sufficient flexibility within existing financing documents. Their primary objectives are to create liquidity, extend maturities or adjust creditor priorities. These tools can be powerful, but they are highly fact sensitive. Success depends on detailed document analysis, careful stakeholder management and disciplined execution. Poorly handled, they can increase friction and give rise to litigation risk.

The bottom line

The consistent message is clear - early, structured engagement drives better outcomes.

Businesses that combine a credible cash plan with a clear understanding of their contractual and financing position (and engage proactively with stakeholders) retain significantly more flexibility.

In many cases, that is the difference between controlling the solution and being forced into one.

Gateley / LEGAL

Procurement’s Role in Turnaround: Balancing Control, Cash and Cost

By David Kendall , ATP

Procurement in Turnaround: *Control, Credibility and Cost*

In a turnaround environment, procurement is often pulled into the spotlight as a means of reducing cost or easing short-term pressure. That focus is understandable, but it risks narrowing the role procurement actually plays when a business is under stress.

In practice, procurement in a turnaround is less about price and more about control. It sits at the intersection of operational continuity, commercial credibility, and financial discipline. When handled poorly, procurement activity can destabilise supply and undermine confidence. When handled well, it helps management teams stabilise operations, maintain options, and create the conditions for recovery.

That distinction is often overlooked.

Procurement behaviour sets the tone

Suppliers are rarely surprised by a turnaround. They see the indicators early through changes in payment behaviour, volatility in demand, and organisational disruption. By the time a formal turnaround process is underway, many suppliers have already formed a view on risk.

In that context, procurement behaviour sends a strong signal. Renegotiations, tenders, and changes in ordering patterns are interpreted not just commercially, but strategically. A rushed or overly aggressive approach can quickly erode trust and reduce optionality. A measured and structured approach, by contrast, reassures suppliers that the business remains in control, even if performance is under pressure.

This is why procurement in distress is never neutral. It either reinforces confidence or accelerates uncertainty.

Control before optimisation

One of the most common mistakes in turnaround situations is to pursue optimisation before control has been re-established.

There is typically a small group of suppliers without whom the business cannot operate effectively. These tend to be unglamorous but essential categories: logistics, IT and connectivity, facilities and maintenance, utilities, and core outsourced services. Disruption in these areas consumes management time, undermines customer confidence, and can quickly create knock-on issues elsewhere in the organisation.

Logistics is a useful illustration. While it may appear competitive, many businesses rely on a limited pool of carriers capable of meeting their operational requirements. It is a relatively small market in practice, and reputations travel quickly. Poorly handled procurement activity can narrow the field of viable suppliers at precisely the moment resilience is most important.

Establishing control over these critical relationships is therefore a priority. It creates stability, preserves optionality, and reduces the risk of operational distraction.

Flexibility reflects reality

Most operating cost contracts run for relatively short periods, typically one to five years. In a turnaround, that horizon matters because the future operating model is often uncertain.

Volumes may change. Site footprints may evolve. Service requirements may be reshaped as the business simplifies. Against that backdrop, rigid procurement commitments can become constraints rather than solutions.

Flexibility in contract structure, scale, and exit rights is therefore not a weakness. It is a recognition of uncertainty. Suppliers often understand this, particularly when discussions are transparent and grounded in operational reality.

From stabilisation to value creation

As a business moves out of acute distress and into a more stable transformation phase, the emphasis within procurement naturally shifts.

Once control has been re-established and supplier relationships stabilised, optimisation becomes more appropriate. At that point, longer-term contracting, supplier rationalisation, and performance management can deliver sustainable cost reductions. Those reductions translate into EBIT and, over time, into enterprise value.
The sequencing matters. Optimisation pursued before stability is established often proves fragile. Optimisation pursued once control and credibility are restored is more likely to endure.

A discipline defined by judgement

Procurement rarely features prominently in turnaround narratives. When it works well, it is largely invisible. Suppliers continue to deliver. Operations stabilise. Management attention remains focused on rebuilding the business rather than resolving supply issues.
When it fails, however, the impact is immediate and obvious. For that reason, procurement in a turnaround is less about tactical execution and more about judgement. Knowing when to hold steady, when to negotiate, and when to optimise matters more than the mechanics of any individual deal.

The most effective turnaround leaders recognise this balance. They treat procurement as a control discipline first, a commercial lever second, and a cost optimisation tool only when the timing is right. In doing so, procurement supports recovery rather than becoming another source of risk.

What private credit's "public reckoning" tells us about communication in a restructuring

By Noémie de Andia, Senior Counsel, SEC Newgate

SECNewgate

The recent widespread media coverage of the woes of the private credit industry serves as a good reminder that negative market sentiment can spread incredibly fast with severe, and sometimes self-fulfilling, financial consequences and that communication can no longer be treated as an afterthought in periods of intense business stress.

Recent reporting from The Financial Times describing how the private credit industry is entering a "public reckoning", after years of rapid expansion, highlights the level of scrutiny that companies and lenders are under today and the financial media obsession with not "missing" the next financial crisis. The ever-evolving story has swiftly moved on from reporting on individual and possibly isolated corporate default situations, including Tricolor and First Brands, to trying to assess any potential systemic risk emanating from underperforming portfolios and rapidly rising redemption calls from investors. Questions around performance, transparency and liquidity constraints are intensifying and have seemingly caught the industry off guard.

Recent media comments have also described the increasing role and importance of direct lending funds in the financing ecosystem today and highlighted how, as a relatively new segment of the corporate lending landscape, private credit is both poorly understood and seen with a high degree of suspicion.

As we have seen in previous macro-economic cycles, such periods of intense scrutiny tend to reshape disclosure expectations and communications best practice more broadly. In this case, the implications extend beyond the private credit sector to any company navigating financial stress, regardless of whether they have a fund in their capital structure. However, it is important to note that the ones who do can expect even greater scrutiny.

Looking specifically at restructuring situations, we believe that timely and effective communication is a central part of how trust is maintained and optionality preserved throughout the process to ultimately protect value for all stakeholders. By contrast, limited disclosure and fragmented messaging can and will have significant lasting negative impact on a company's situation and financial outcome, as the ongoing private credit industry meltdown has shown.

One of the recurring criticisms of private credit funds in recent weeks has been opacity, leading to calls from the UK regulator for firms to share more data on their investments. This is seen as particularly important for nds that have attracted a new type of largely non-institutional investors, with less experience in investing in private credit products. This matters a great deal in communications terms, as such new entrants require arguably more handholding through downcycles.

Transposing this to restructuring situations, for a long time, borrowers operated within relatively contained lender groups, where information could be shared selectively and relationships carried weight. Today, companies have to address larger and more complex lender groups with varying priorities, bringing that model under strain. A broader set of stakeholders need to understand not only that performance has deteriorated, but why, what is being done and what comes next. In an environment where lender caution is already high, clear, regular updates are critical to help reduce uncertainty and demonstrate that management remains in control.

This is a matter of credibility, which is built as much on consistency of messaging as it is on frequency of communication. Situations involving stressed credits have shown how quickly confidence can weaken when messaging starts to drift between management, lenders and sponsors. Even relatively minor inconsistencies can raise broader questions about alignment and once doubt sets in, it is difficult to contain to potentially devastating effect.

This is why companies need a clear, coherent narrative early on which sets out, in straightforward terms, what has gone wrong, what can realistically be fixed and how management intends to move forward. It should not avoid difficult points, but nor should it leave room for others, including competitors looking to take advantage of a weakened position or the media, to define the company's story.

In addition and as mentioned, the composition of creditor groups has become more complex and they often have different expectations and risk tolerances. This means that while the core narrative must remain consistent it must be tailored to each audience following a careful stakeholder mapping process. Specifically, senior lenders tend to focus on downside protection and liquidity whilst junior creditors and sponsors are interested in value and upside and employees on operational stability and future direction. Recognising these differences and adapting a communications plan accordingly is essential to create alignment around a viable outcome.

There is also a longer-term consideration that cannot be underestimated when it comes to protecting a company's reputation. How a business communicates in a restructuring will have considerable impact on its future. Lenders and investors remember which company and management team were open and transparent throughout the process, and which were not. The consequences can extend to future financing, future partnerships and, in some cases, the standing of the management team itself.

Finally, external credibility is difficult to sustain without internal alignment. Mixed messages within the leadership team or inconsistent briefings can quickly undermine a carefully constructed position. In stressed situations, internal and external communication are closely linked and must be carefully aligned. This often requires a dedicated team which understands the internal dynamics and is experienced at using internal communications channels to craft appropriate bespoke messaging and carefully plan internal dissemination. It also requires a careful escalation process to bring any rising internal issue to the management team and communications group, including external advisers, in a timely fashion.

To conclude, it is clear that businesses operate under heightened scrutiny and a far less forgiving environment today, and that firms with private credit funds in their capital structures have been particularly exposed recently. In that context, effective communication should be seen as a central lever to preserve value and protect credibility in a restructuring process. Companies that approach it with discipline and secure the right support from experienced advisers will be in a much stronger position to withstand such a period of intense stress and recover from it.

SEC Newgate is a global strategic communications firm helping organisations navigate critical moments. From restructuring and insolvency to turnaround, our experienced team of senior advisers counsels and supports leadership teams in protecting value, stabilising operations and maintaining confidence when it matters most. Our insight and expertise in responding to media scrutiny and managing reputation risk throughout complex situations and challenging macro-environments is invaluable for turnaround professionals.

SECNewgate

FRP: The Decision Economy and Manufacturing Update

FRP

FRP's recent Decision Economy and Manufacturing reports, alongside its latest webinar on the manufacturing sector, highlight the pressures facing UK businesses and the importance of acting decisively in a more volatile environment. Taken together, they suggest that while many firms remain resilient and ambitious, delayed decision-making, funding constraints and stacked external pressures are making it harder to protect performance and deliver growth.

Decision Economy: why speed matters in the mid-market

FRP's Decision Economy report focuses on the UK mid-market, defined as businesses employing 50 to 499 people, and argues that delayed decision-making can lead to missed opportunities and deepen existing pressures. The report describes the mid-market as the backbone of the UK economy, generating just over one fifth of private sector Gross Value Added (GVA) and employing more than 5.26 million people. It also notes that despite outperforming the wider economy on key metrics, mid-market businesses face structural challenges, including a lack of unified representation and limited support from lenders and government initiatives.

As these businesses grow, leadership becomes more stretched and it becomes harder to navigate new markets and a more complex risk environment. FRP's research found that almost 70% of mid-market leaders experience frequent delays in major decisions, with many reporting delays of one to two weeks on average. The reasons include decision paralysis, complex approval processes and caution around uncertainty.

Delays also tend to increase with organisational size, meaning larger mid-market firms can find it harder to move quickly even though they generate a disproportionate share of revenue and GVA. The report links slower decision-making to external pressures including skills shortages, rising wage costs, energy bills and post-Brexit uncertainty, with manufacturing and construction leaders among those most likely to say decision-making has become harder.

FRP also found that 40% of leaders reported missing out on opportunities that could have delivered double-digit revenue growth or savings by waiting too long, while acting sooner on revenue decisions could have improved outcomes by around 10%.

The overall message is that firms able to combine entrepreneurial agility with scale are better placed to respond quickly and secure a lasting performance edge.

Manufacturing: resilience under pressure

FRP's Manufacturing Agenda report and follow-up webinar with Alan Kelly, Raj Mittal and Lincoln Coutts present a picture of a sector that remains important to the UK economy but is under growing strain. The report and webinar highlight a disconnect between boards and lenders. Board-level concerns are often centred on regulatory pressures, geopolitical risk, supply chain disruption and margin squeeze, while lenders are more likely to intervene when they see short-term cost, cashflow and working capital pressures. This difference in focus can create distrust and makes it harder for businesses and stakeholders to align around the right response. This is where an advisory firm like FRP can help bridge the gap between the two perspectives, aligning board priorities with lender concerns.

Manufacturers have not been passive in responding to distress. Common actions include cost reduction programmes, headcount reductions, procurement reviews, site consolidation and the closure of low-margin production lines. In some cases, particularly in private equity-backed businesses, leadership changes have also been made and external advisers brought in to validate strategy, stress-test business plans and support operational restructuring.

However, the effectiveness of these actions has been mixed. Only 28% said the actions taken resulted in the expected outcome, suggesting that while these measures may buy time, they do not always resolve deeper structural issues.

Access to funding remains one of the clearest pressure points for the sector. The report notes that 99% of respondents experienced difficulties accessing funding over the previous nine months, while Raj Mittal said most boards reported some form of funding friction.

Barriers include increased borrowing costs, tighter lender appetite, business performance volatility, covenant pressure and HMRC-related issues such as needing Time-to-Pay arrangements or delays in tax credit payments. Borrowers also reported stricter covenants, earlier intervention triggers and more due diligence, all of which add pressure at a time when businesses are already trying to manage uncertainty and protect performance.

The webinar also explored what has changed since the start of 2026. The panel said pressures have accelerated and are now arriving at the same time, including geopolitical instability, energy volatility, rising shipping and material costs, labour shortages, regulatory and compliance burdens and weakening demand. These pressures are being felt across manufacturing, but some subsectors are particularly exposed. Breweries, for example, are facing lower consumer spending, energy inflation, duty fees and higher packaging and logistics costs, while smaller operators are especially vulnerable because they lack the purchasing power to absorb or pass on rising costs. In automotive and metals, uncertainty around EV investment, tariffs, reduced demand and fixed overheads is creating further strain, particularly for smaller suppliers with limited flexibility.

Despite these pressures, the overall picture was not entirely negative. The panel noted that manufacturing has shown resilience and innovation, and that management teams are continuing to adapt. There is also still a sense that the UK remains investable, even as businesses face constant change. Across both the Decision Economy and Manufacturing Agenda work, the central message is businesses are better placed to manage pressure and protect performance when they act early, communicate clearly and make decisions with confidence rather than delay difficult choices.

You can access the FRP's full manufacturing report and Decision Economy report via the following links

- https://www.frpadvisory.com/app/uploads/static/FRP%20-%20The%20Manufacturing%20Agenda.pdf
- The Decision Economy | FRP Advisory

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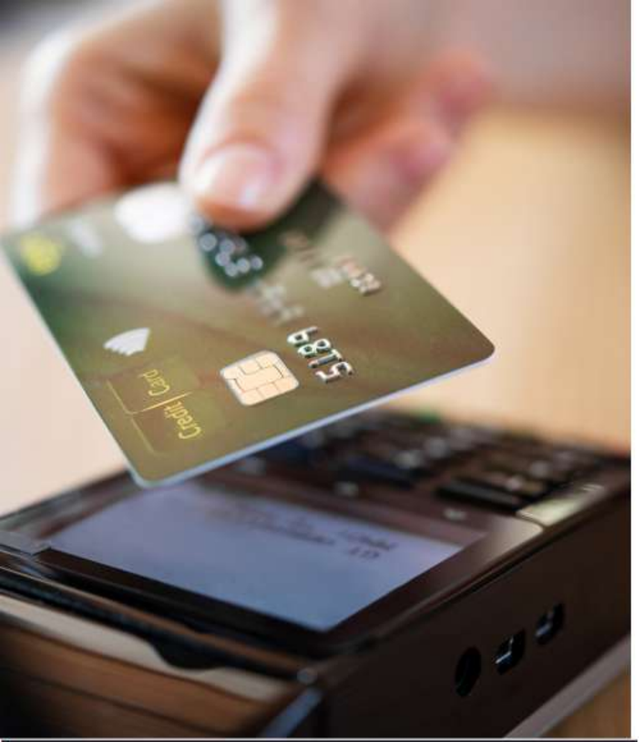

The Commercial Cost of External Perception

Lightbulb

For businesses navigating periods of change, the gap between operational reality and external credit perception is often where the most damaging commercial pressure quietly develops.

A refinancing may materially improve a business's long-term position while external agencies continue reflecting historic stress. A restructuring event may stabilise operations internally while suppliers and insurers remain cautious. A delayed filing or qualified audit opinion can shape market perception long after the underlying issue has been resolved.

By the time management teams become aware of the actions a business has taken or is taking, then the credit consequences are often already in motion: supplier terms tightening, insurer appetite reducing, funding becoming harder to secure, working capital pressure building. This "timing issue" or data in the public domain through filing accounts and the reality of operational and financial restructuring work is a real challenge.

"You should never hear about changes to your credit position from your suppliers, you should always be the first to know. The difference in managing this message is vital," says James Piper, CEO & Founder of Lightbulb Credit.

Seeing the full picture
Lightbulb was created to address specific and recurring problems: most businesses, and many advisers, only ever see part of the picture.

Monitoring a single credit reference agency rarely reflects how lenders, suppliers and trade credit insurers are viewing a business more broadly. Lightbulb provides a "whole market view", real-time updates across the major credit agencies and trade credit insurers in one place, giving businesses and their advisers earlier visibility of shifts in external perception that are often difficult to spot elsewhere.

"The issue was rarely just business performance," says Piper. "It was visibility. Businesses and advisers often couldn't see how the market was interpreting them externally until commercial pressure had already started building."

From visibility to action
Visibility, however, is only part of the solution.

In many cases, the challenge is not that a business is fundamentally weak, but that external interpretation can and often does become disconnected from commercial reality. Insurers are often reacting to breaks in companies providing data, and incomplete or historic information. Agencies may reflect a picture that the business itself has already moved beyond.

Increasingly, Lightbulb's work extends to helping businesses and their advisers address that disconnect directly, providing insight, strengthening external positioning, improving insurer confidence and supporting better commercial outcomes during periods of change.

That can mean helping businesses prepare ahead of filings, supporting conversations with insurers, or identifying where agency interpretation may be overly conservative relative to current trading reality. Lightbulb can also provide scenarios and "sandbox" scenarios.

"Once businesses could see how they were being viewed externally, the next question became whether that perception could be influenced or improved," says Piper.

For turnaround professionals, that question, and the ability to act on it early, is often the difference between managing a situation and being managed by it.

A natural extension of this for Lightbulb is our work supporting The IFT, restructuring teams and professional advisory firms. The knowledge and ability to run scenarios and give boards, investors, funders and the business itself credit outcomes and certainty of cover ahead of account filings and potential recapitalisation projects has added real value.

Lightbulb is currently offering IFT members a 90-day complimentary monitoring period. For those who want to understand how the businesses they work with are being viewed externally, it's a practical starting point. Further information is available HERE

Public Affairs and Influencing at The IFT: 2026 Update

Members and corporate partners consistently tell us they want turnaround to be better understood, more widely used, and supported by the right policy environment. Strengthening our public affairs and influencing work is central to delivering that. Our aim is to ensure that the impact of turnaround is clearly understood by government, business and stakeholders, and that the conditions are in place for successful outcomes for stressed and distressed organisations. We have been increasingly active in relation to policy, thought leadership and cross-sector engagement in recent years, and this article provides an update on our key activities and areas of focus so far in 2026.

Our approach
Our work is built on three areas:

Evidence and insight
We continue to build a robust evidence base, including longitudinal data on jobs saved and value protected, alongside qualitative insight into what drives successful turnaround and research on key themes such as credit and equity provision.

Content and thought leadership
We publish regular, accessible content linking turnaround expertise to current economic challenges. This includes Swift, our quarterly updates, annual Impact Reports and weekly Turna-Round Up, alongside one-off articles, webinars, reports and guidance. Beyond our own communication channels, we seek to secure mature coverage in mainstream, regional and trade media to share ideas and promote our fundamental message: adapt, transform, succeed.

Engagement and advocacy
We maintain active relationships with government, parliamentarians, regulators and industry bodies, enabling ongoing dialogue and the ability to step up engagement where policy developments affect turnaround practice.

Recent activity
<u>Part 26A Restructuring Plans (RPs)</u>
We continue a focused programme of work on Restructuring Plans.

Our work includes:

- Research and engagement to build the evidence base for their use
- Sharing best practice across the membership
- Developing policy proposals to expand access, particularly for smaller and mid-market businesses
- Engagement with government departments, regulators and the judiciary
- Briefing and engagement with parliamentary stakeholders

This activity is designed to support greater use of restructuring plans by a wider range of businesses. In terms of influencing, we are keen to stress the impact of Restructuring Plans in supporting the UK's profile in the world, building on the excellence of financial and legal services. For smaller companies we are keen to encourage government to look at legislative adaptations to provide a route for companies with a simpler debt structure and thus increase turnaround activity for smaller companies.xt

We are engaging actively with members and partners currently to shape proposals and feedback for government in relation to restructuring for smaller businesses.

Consultations and policy engagement
We seek to respond to consultations where there are widespread implications for turnaround practice. Currently this includes an Insolvency Service consultation on reforms to corporate civil enforcement. Our engagement has included direct engagement with the Insolvency Service, coordination with partners and a formal response.

Our key concerns with their current proposals include:

- A proposed director restrictions regime that risks capturing turnaround directors through blunt criteria such as multiple insolvencies within a set period
- The potential impact on D&O insurance availability and cost
- A shift away from court-based safeguards towards administrative decision-making

APPG for Turnaround and Business Improvement
We have supported the establishment of the APPG, providing a platform for engagement with Parliament and a route to raise awareness of turnaround's role in protecting jobs and value. The IFT acts as Secretariat and is supporting its work programme and engagement activity.

Sector engagement
We increasingly engage directly with sectors where there are widespread challenges or high levels of distress, via our Special Interest Groups and more broadly. Recently this has included Higher Education, and this year we have delivered – in partnership with Barclays – a morning conference for higher education leaders, advisers and lenders on how to manage change in a challenging environment. We are also preparing webinars for IFT members on working in higher education and for the sector. We have also held discussions on challenges for independent schools, law firms and the automotive sector – in particular smaller suppliers – and this is supporting engagement with government and regulators in these sectors.

Thought leadership
We focus on publishing reports and guides on key areas of turnaround practice, to both inform and support the work of our members and partners and highlight the benefits of turnaround. So far this year we have published a report reviewing approaches to small and mid-market Restructuring Plans, as part of the evidence base for supporting amendments to law and practice, and will shortly be publishing some short reports on the use of AI in turnaround and transformation, as well as a briefing on automotive suppliers. Later this year, in addition to our annual Impact Report we will also be publishing research on business engagement with turnaround.

Looking ahead
We will continue to build our evidence base, deepen engagement with policymakers and promote greater understanding and use of turnaround across sectors. This work is shaped by member and partner insight, and we welcome your continued contributions and insights.

Turna-Rounded Interview: Ranjit Dhindsa, Fieldfisher

Sitting on the board of the Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre, can you tell us how this came about and what this involves?

I had previously been a member of Council of Aston University and sat on its Risk and Audit committee. As a result of this, I applied for the role of a trustee at Birmingham Hippodrome.
I was appointed a trustee in January 2025. I joined at an exciting time for the venue that enjoys a 125-year history in Birmingham. The board share a vision to create a distinctive world-class Birmingham cultural scene with Birmingham Hippodrome at its heart. This means the board is dealing with ambitious plans to transform the theatre and extend its reach in every aspect of work. I sit on the People and Inclusion Committee which discusses issue relating to employees, contractors, visitors and a number of other third parties.

What have been some of the highlights of your involvement with Birmingham Hippodrome?

It is a privilege and pleasure to support the variety of shows that Birmingham Hippodrome puts on for its guests. Many of the acts have played in the West End. The quality of the performance is second to none. One highlight of the past 16 months was the board away day in October 2025 where the Executive and Trustee Board were able to discuss the vision and strategy. Another highlight was completing the Charity Commissions Trustee Safeguarding and Protection training. The role involves attending board meetings, strategy days and corporate events.

What do you think have been the key learning points from this experience and has this fed back into your turnaround practice?

A key learning point was understanding the role of the executive and the role of the non-executives. The trustees are effectively non-executive directors. However, the buck stops with them. This has undoubtedly helped with my transformation and turnaround work. It is vital to understand who the internal stakeholders are and how to leverage their support for any transformation or turnaround project.

How do you balance turnaround life and your interests outside of work?

I am fortunate that my family have grown up and I have more time to spend in a full-time role as a manager and leader in Fieldfisher, which is a European law firm, as well as contribute to the charity and voluntary sectors. As well as being a Trustee of Birmingham Hippodrome, I am a Special Adviser for Miss Macaroon (a social enterprise business), an Ambassador for Nurole (formerly Women on Boards) and I'm helping Access Sport set up a steering group in the West Midlands

What advice would you give other turnaround professionals about balancing turnaround and life?

Organisational skills and early preparation for meetings are absolutely key to balancing turnaround work and outside interests.

If you would like to share some interesting and rewarding outside hobbies with The IFT, please get in touch with nstickland@the-ift.com

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