

# A Useful Guide to De-Stress You

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# A Useful Guide to De-Stress You

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## De-Stress You



Do you feel like this sometimes?

We all need to juggle our lives some of the time, but if you feel that your life is getting out of control and is getting you down, this Useful Guide could be just what you need.

Find out how small actions can make big differences to your approach to life and ease the feelings of pressure along the way.

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

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Illustrations by Andrew Willard

## Disclaimer

Please note: The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every situation. If in doubt, personal professional advice should be sought from a qualified therapist, counsellor or coach. Any action taken as a result of suggestions in this Useful Guide are done so at the readers own risk.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to James for his support.

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## Prologue

### So you think you are suffering from Stress?

This Useful Guide is aimed at you if you feel that you are suffering from worry, pressure, nervous tension, anxiety, fear or to put it another way.....Stress!

It will tell you about what stress really is, the symptoms that it can cause and how to manage them for yourself.

By the end of the Useful Guide, you will have a number of ideas about managing your own stress and getting it under control.

Please note however, if you believe that you are suffering from stress we always recommend that you TELL SOMEONE... be it a friend, doctor, colleague, counsellor or coach. It is your first step to getting your stress under control.

We will invite you to email us with what you have learnt during your journey and share your results.

And if you want any help along the way, you can arrange for a coach to talk you through some of the exercises or issues that arise.

Now it is time to take the first steps at De-Stressing You. The first thing you need to do is to get a pen. This Useful Guide is designed to be scribbled on if you have printed it out. If you don't want to do that, get yourself a notebook as well.

**If you agree with the following statement then tick the box:**

*(Only if you have printed the Useful Guide! If you are working through the Useful Guide on screen then write out the statement below in your notebook and sign and date it.)*

**I choose to get my stress levels under control, starting today.**

---

**Notes:**



## Section 1

### What is Stress?

Stress! The scourge of modern society. Or is it? Stress has been around for a long time and isn't something that has been invented just for us.

So what is it? Back in the days of our early ancestors we developed the ability to react to dangerous situations by either fighting or running away. The way that our bodies react in this situation is to release copious amounts of the hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline.



Initially they can have the effect of improving performance and they ensure that we have the best chance of surviving and living to fight another day. However, the excessive release of these hormones can then trigger adverse reactions, such as ...

- Heart rate increase
- Blood flow and pressure increase
- Excessive sweating
- Breathing speeding up
- Muscles tensing, ready for action

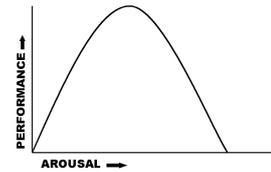
Whilst these symptoms can be acceptable in the short term, they can lead to serious problems when triggered at inappropriate times or if left to fester over time.

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### Notes:

## Stress is Good For You!

It's true! Some stress can be good for you. To perform at our best we need to have some pressure. The performance curve shows that as we go up the curve, additional pressure can lead us to our peak performance.



Go too far however, and we tip over the top and start on the slippery slope down the other side.

So our goal for this Useful Guide is to get you to stay on the upside and not on the downside of the slope.

## But it can also be Bad for You!

Stress is now known to contribute to a range of illnesses including: heart disease; high blood pressure, and IBS (irritable bowel syndrome), to name but a few. And stress significantly reduces brain functions such as memory, concentration, and learning, all of which are central to effective performance.

Some health effects caused by stress are reversible and the body and mind reverts to normal when the stress is relieved. Other health effects caused by stress are so serious that they are irreversible, and at worse are terminal.

## Find out your stress score.

If you would like to find out where you fit on the slope, go to [www.thecoachstop.co.uk](http://www.thecoachstop.co.uk) Here you can take a survey and get your score. Remember, your score may change over time, so go back as often as you wish.

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### Notes:

## The Anxious Event vs the Pressure Cooker

For some people certain events cause them to become very anxious and nervous. Making presentations, having to complain about something, going on a journey: all of these can affect people differently. The symptoms of stress that are felt in these circumstances are usually short term and pass over time.

Another form of stress is the long term build-up of pressure, like in a pressure cooker, which if not allowed to escape will eventually explode. This form of stress can be much more harmful and can lead to long term patterns of changes in behaviour and eventually to illness.

Approaches to relieving both sorts of stress are discussed later, but it is important to be able to distinguish between the two.

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### Notes:

## What Can Stress Do To You?

Stress causes a wide range of symptoms. There are three ways people can be affected by stress: Psychological, Physical, and Behavioural.

Here are some of the main ones to watch out for, both in yourself and in others ...

- Easily angered
- Lack of sleep
- Lack of concentration
- Panic attacks
- Pains in the stomach
- Feeling sick
- Tension across the neck and shoulders
- Loss of sex drive
- Migraine
- Tearfulness
- Apathy
- Frenetic activity
- Bingeing on food or drink
- Loss of appetite
- Not wanting to go to work



If this sounds like you, then please read on! However, if you are suffering from any of these, please ensure that you talk to someone as well, such as a friend, doctor, colleague, counsellor or coach. **Don't bottle it up!**

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### Notes:

## Learning to Recognise the Symptoms

So what can you do about managing your own stress levels?

The first thing to consider is how to recognise your levels of stress and what causes them.

Imagine you are writing a letter to an old and trusted friend, or that you are writing a diary entry. You can say anything, and it doesn't matter. Now is your opportunity to describe how you are feeling, right now. Record your thoughts, physical feelings, aches and pains, irritations, frustrations.

---

Dear...

I am currently feeling...

At work.....

At home.....

My health is.....

I wish I could.....

Best Wishes

Signed

T: 0845 260 2820

[www.pansophix.com](http://www.pansophix.com)

Well done! How did that make you feel? Very often, just writing things down can help clarify what you are feeling and highlight some thoughts that lurk at the back of your mind but are never allowed to see the light of day.



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**Notes:**

Now make a list of all of the things that are currently winding you up, big and small. Go through the list and sort them into groups. This might be big vs small or home vs work vs other activities.

For each item, give it a score out of five where 5 is very stress making and 1 is low.

What have you found out? Is there one thing that is really making your life hell or many small things that you do not feel you have control over? Are the problems really at home or is work making problems tip over or vice versa?

Big Problems	Small Problems

**Notes:**

Now identify 3 things that you feel that you can change today.

1.

2.

3.

List what you are going to do about them.

1.

2.

3.

Commit to taking action by signing the following:

I ..... have committed to taking action on the three issues identified above and will tackle them today (date) .....

Signed .....

Well done! You have taken a major step forward by addressing some of the issues that are bothering you. Give yourself a treat.

Why not send this commitment to us. Visit [www.thecoachstop.co.uk](http://www.thecoachstop.co.uk) and send us an email or email [change@thecoachstop.co.uk](mailto:change@thecoachstop.co.uk)



## Stay Calm at Home

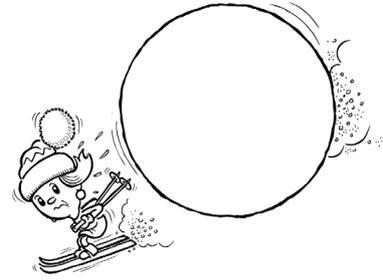
- Try massaging your temples in small circles and then work along the brow line. Or get someone else to do it!
- Have a cuddle with a partner, or pet or whatever takes your fancy!
- Meditation encourages positive thinking, and helps clear the mind. Shut your eyes and concentrate on your favourite colour. If your mind strays talking bring it slowly back. Practice at home, on the train, at the office until you can do this quickly and easily.
- Try to be in bed 30mins earlier than usual at least twice a week.
- Use lavender oil on your pillow, on a tissue, for massage, or in an aromatherapy oil burner. Lavender slows your reaction to things and helps you to relax.
- Tackle any medical problems that you have to ensure that you have the best chance of enjoying life.
- Stop Smoking: it stimulates the production of adrenaline in the body.

## Notes:

## Section 2

### The Anxious Event

Anxiety can often be related to short-term events. For many people for example, getting up and speaking in public causes them to feel very uncomfortable. Their blood pressure rises, their hands beginning to sweat and their heart begins to pound.



They are getting ready to fight or run away!

This is short term stress. It is something that comes with an event, but passes once the event is passed.

Sometimes the body can start to react before you are consciously aware of any concern. This anticipatory anxiety is a sub-conscious reaction to similar events in the past that have caused you to be apprehensive or nervous. Your body has created a “memory” which can be triggered just by the knowledge that an event will be happening at some point in the future.

For some of us these short term anxiety attacks can be quite severe and lead to panic attacks. For many of us however, they just make us feel very uncomfortable for a while.

---

#### Notes:

Here are some techniques for helping to overcome these short term concerns ...

- Start by thinking about a time when you had an attack of anxiety, related to a specific event. Now write it down. Include all the things that you can think of. What was the event? Where was it? Who was involved? How did you feel?

- Next, think about the outcome of the event. Was it as bad as you had imagined?

If the answer is **No**, then think about the feeling of relief that you felt when everything went well. Hold onto that feeling. Make it real in your head. Make the colours bright. As you are thinking, press your thumb and little finger together.

Practise this exercise a few times and next time you have to approach an event about which you are nervous, put your little finger and thumb together and recall your sense of relief again. Allow the sense of relief to overwhelm your anxiety.

If the answer is **Yes**, then think of the event and turn the picture into shades of grey so that the picture is not quite so vivid.

Now find an occasion when something did go well. Feel the sense of satisfaction that you received. Hold onto that feeling. Make it real in your head. Make the colours bright. As you are thinking, press your thumb and little finger together.

Practise this exercise a few times and next time you have to approach an event about which you are nervous, put your little finger and thumb together and recall your sense of satisfaction again. Allow the sense of satisfaction to overwhelm your anxiety.

Think about a future event. Write down a list of all the things that you are worried may happen during this event that could possibly go wrong. What is the worst scenario?

---

**Notes:**

Now divide them into two groups:

<b>Those within your control</b>	<b>Those outside your control</b>

For those things that are within your control, do everything in your power to ensure that they go as well as possible.

For those things outside your control, stop worrying, there is nothing that you can do!

Remember, 80% of what we worry about never happens!

### Choose to do things differently

Next time you want to do something but are uncertain about it try saying, "I choose to ....." Making a statement out loud can make it seem less daunting and more realistic. Go on, try it!



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### Notes:

## Stress in the Office

- Make a priority list each morning and be realistic about what you can achieve. Tick things off as you achieve them and congratulate yourself on a job well done.
- Keep a phial of Rescue Remedy to hand – a natural remedy made from flower essence which is reputed to help with stress or trauma.
- Before a difficult meeting rehearse a list of positive things about yourself and your point of view.
- Keep track of what you are doing during the day and note how much of your time is spent on doing other people's jobs. Find a way of politely handing them back to their owner.
- Burn frankincense oil – it is soothing to the nervous system and will help calm those around you as well.
- Try massaging your ears and your hands. They have links to other parts of your body and help to release tension.

## Notes:

## Section 3

### Dealing with Change

For many people, dealing with change can be very stressful. Change happens all the time, all around us, but for many of us, change has become synonymous with something bad.



Common negative reactions to change include ...

- Feelings of insecurity and uncertainty
- Concerns about financial risks
- The loss of or change of role
- Lack of confidence in self or others
- A feeling of being powerless or at the mercy of others
- Expectations of gain or loss in influence, autonomy or territory
- Clashes with personal values

---

### Notes:

## SWOT Yourself

If you are going through a period of change that is making you feel stressed, carry out a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) exercise.

Using the grid below, or create one for your self, consider your situation and all of the things that are affecting you right now.

**Strengths** are all those things that make you good at what you do. Don't forget to include those things that you do outside work. Not sure what they are? Go and ask someone else. You might be surprised.

**Weaknesses** are those areas where you could improve. Be honest, this is for your benefit remember.

**Opportunities** are those areas where given the chance you could really flourish, or options you hadn't considered before.

**Threats** are those things that hold you back, both internal and external.

You may find that some things fit into more than one category. That's OK.

Have fun with this exercise. Use your imagination to come up with new opportunities and really get to understand your strengths.

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### Notes:

## Your Personal SWOT Analysis

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>

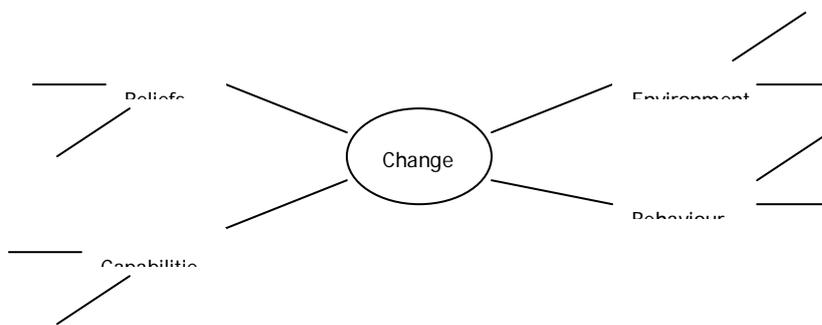
## Map your worries

An alternative approach is to make a mind map of those things that are particularly worrying you or particularly exciting you.

Start in the centre of the page and work outwards. Attach your thoughts to each arm as they arise. See example below.

Break them into groups relating to your ...

- Environment – where and when
- Behaviour – performance and actions
- Capabilities – what could you do given the chance
- Beliefs and values – what you hold to be right or wrong



---

### Notes:

**Draw Your Map Here:**

Use this exercise and the one above to understand how you might be able to benefit from any changes taking place. By viewing things positively, you will help to reduce your worries.

### **Make a difference**

Having identified those things that are worrying you, identify those that are within your power to resolve.

Pick three things that will make the most difference, that you have some influence over and devise a plan to tackle them over the next week.

Find a friend and go and tell them and ask them to ask you whether you have completed these tasks by the end of the time allowed.

---

### **Notes:**

## Get more Sleep!

- Give your brain time to switch off! Turn off the TV or the computer at least 30 mins before going to bed.
- Try reading a book. It makes you eyes tired so you feel sleepy.
- Make a note of any thing that you want to remember before you go to bed. Keep a notebook by the bed.
- Make sure you bedroom is somewhere that you want to be. It should be quiet, dark and cool and preferably tidy!
- Have a shower or bath before you retire. Warm water can help us to relax.
- Top up your sleep with power-naps. 20 mins can make a big difference.
- Don't rely on lie-ins to catch up. These can make sleep patterns difficult to establish.
- Go to bed 30 mins earlier.

## Notes:

## Section 4

### I am So Angry.....!

Stress can have a number of effects on us. One of these is to make us feel more anxious and often this anxiety turns into anger. The anger spills over and affects us and others around us and can often lead to more stress.

Anger can be one of the most destructive emotions. It is often at the root of interpersonal problems, and can ruin relationships. It can also ruin your health, increasing your heart rate, blood pressure and if a regular state of mind, potentially leading to debilitating illness.



Anger often arises because we believe that ...

- someone has violated our personal boundaries; such as, questioning our integrity;
- we are not getting what we want and are therefore subjected to frustration if we feel a sense of injustice

Our sense of anger is often to do with our personal view of the world. If you are highly competitive, are unsure where your boundaries should stop, or have over ambitious rules of right and wrong, you may be more likely to become angry more easily.

---

### Notes:

## Breaking the Anger Habit

If you are in the habit of getting angry at apparently trivial things, here are a few ideas to help you to break out of the anger spiral.

- **Put yourself in the other person's shoes**

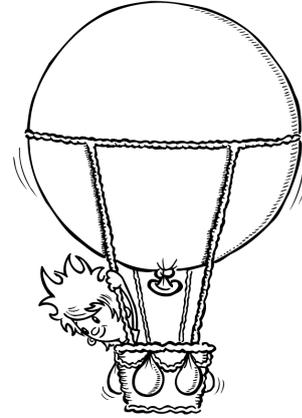
Think of your situation where you got angry. Write down the key points of your argument from your own perspective.

Now think of the situation from the point of your "opponents" and write down the key points from their argument.

---

**Notes:**

Now think of the situation as though you were a fly on the wall. What do you observe? Try to be impartial.



If you find this exercise difficult try getting three chairs and making each one represent the different points of view. Now sit in each in turn and imagine what it is like being that person sitting in that chair. What are they feeling and thinking, what are they scared about, what concerns them.

Looking at a problem from several different perspectives can help to overcome fixed positions and help people move on.

---

### Notes:

- **Take positive action!**

Write a list of five things you have to be thankful about. It will make you feel more positive about your life as a whole.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Go for a walk and try to spot five things that make you feel good.

- **Volunteer!**

Volunteer your time to work with a charity. There is nothing like working with people who have to overcome the odds to help put your own life into perspective.

- **Get more sleep**

Try and make sure you get enough sleep. Lack of sleep reduces our ability to function effectively and helps shorten fuses.



---

## Notes:

## Get out of the House!

- Go to the gym or play some sport. Exercise helps disperse the adrenaline in your body. It also releases endorphins, the natural feel good chemicals into the body and can help you sleep better.
- Try yoga, tai chi or just stretching. By concentrating on breath, posture and a stillness of body and mind they engender calm.
- Take a walk – a twenty minute walk is a natural energiser and daylight increases your sense of well-being.
- Go for a massage – it helps the body to relax and improves circulation.
- Review which newspaper you read and TV programmes you watch. Do they always present the downside of life?
- Try other alternative therapies such as reflexology, reiki, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) or aromatherapy.
- Have a good chuckle – call someone or watch an old funny film. Anything to make you

## Notes:

## Section 5

### Time Management Please...!

We are increasingly trying to cram more and more into our days and it's not surprising that something has to give.

Whilst some of us are naturally good at managing and organising, others find it more difficult. Good time management is a skill that can be learnt, however, so here are a few ideas that you can do today to make you more time efficient.



### Understand where your time goes

- What do you spend significant portions of time on – what are your time absorbers – make a list
- What are your personal time wasters – score out of four where 1 = important, 4 = not important
- Now consider solutions to these time wasters ...
  - A. Stop doing them
  - B. Delegate them
  - C. Allocate a set amount of time to them and no more
  - D. Find a way of making them more useful to you

---

### Notes:

## Lark or Owl?

- Are you a Lark or an Owl?
- When are you most productive? ...
  - Before 10am
  - Between 10am and 4pm
  - After 4pm
- Use the time when you are most productive to tackle the difficult tasks and most difficult decisions

## Plan your time

Give yourself more time, by taking a little time to plan. Planning can help you to be more organised and hence reduce time wastage. And remember the following rules ...

- Do the worst thing first – don't put it off, get it out of the way.
- Establish priorities – focus on what is important
- Establish routines – routines can make life easier as long as they don't become too rigid
- Learn to say "No!"
- Don't rely on your memory – write it down
- Plan meetings and telephone calls in advance – why are you there, what are your objectives, and what do you need to have with you? After all you wouldn't expect to turn up at the doctor's to find he's forgotten his stethoscope!

---

## Notes:

## Time Out!

Remember to plan time for yourself and take a break regularly to recharge the batteries. Ensure that you allow time for ...

- Relaxation
- Family commitments
- Your hobby
- Doing nothing!

Make a list of three things you are going to do this week for yourself!

1.

2.

3.

---

## Notes:

## You Are What You Eat

- Fill your larder and fridge with food that is good for you. If you give your body what it needs, it will stop craving junk food and leave you better equipped to deal with stress.
- Cut down on fatty foods. They make it difficult for your body to absorb other foods and make you feel low.
- Chew your food more slowly.
- Eat breakfast.
- Eat snacks such as fruit, hummus, raw vegetables, oatcakes which have slow release sugars to keep your blood sugar levels steady.
- Cut down on caffeine, it exacerbates the production of adrenalin.
- Invest in multivitamins and minerals: stress reduces the body's ability to absorb many nutrients making it more difficult to fight off colds, flu and other bugs.
- Cut down on alcohol. It will limit your intake of vitamins and minerals and interfere with your sleep patterns.
- Drink more water. Being dehydrated by even a small amount can impair your mental faculties, thus worsening the stress you already feel.
- Eat earlier in the evening to give your body a chance to digest before you go to bed.

### Notes:

## Section 6

### Onwards and Upwards

If you really want to change your levels of stress, then you will need to work at it. Change doesn't happen over night. To maximise your chances of getting on top of stress and going forward with a positive approach, here are some thoughts on where to go next.



### Don't try to transform yourself overnight!

Keep a diary and notice when patterns of behaviour emerge or change. Find out what works for you and what doesn't. All of us are different, so what works for Jo may not work for Billy.

Unless a big step can be justified, take small steps to start with and tackle things in an order that you can manage.

---

### Notes:

## Get a support network

One of the most important aspects you need to consider is who is going to support you as you deal with your stressful life.

Start by assessing what you want from your support. Do you want a good listener who will hear you out on a bad day? Or do you need physical support to help you on your way? It might even be financial support. List all of the ways in which you feel that you might need support and then try to identify who you know who might be able to provide that support. Don't be afraid to ask. Many people are flattered at being asked. Just ensure that any support you ask for is within their power to give. Don't over load them as well!

Aim to have 3-4 people in your main support team although you may want others for specific issues.

Make sure your support team can give you what you want. Make sure they are positive and will not hold you back.



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### Notes:

## Build your self-esteem.

When we are under stress, our self-esteem often suffers. One of the best ways of beating stress is to ensure that our self esteem is buoyant.

Over the next few days I want you to repeat the following regularly to yourself:

- I like myself
- I am good enough
- I deserve to have some fun/success
- I approve of myself completely
- I look amazing
- I am responsible for my life
- My future is full of potential

Keep repeating them until they are second nature.

---

### Notes:

## Epilogue

### You're a Winner!

Overcoming periods of stress can take time. Take a few steps at a time and enjoy the process.

Don't try and work out if you are feeling more or less stressed than you were, focus on the process and the rest will follow.

People who tend to win in life believe themselves to be winners. Remember, don't play the victim. A victim is never a winner!

### Life is full of possibilities. Make sure that you can enjoy them!



### What to do next!

If there are any issues in this Useful Guide that you would like to discuss with someone, or to find out more, please visit [www.thecoachstop.co.uk](http://www.thecoachstop.co.uk) or email

[info@thecoachstop.co.uk](mailto:info@thecoachstop.co.uk).

### Feedback

As we are always trying to improve our Useful Guides we would appreciate any feedback you can give us on A Useful Guide to De-Stress You. Please click on the link below to access our online feedback form ...

<http://www.pansophix.com/useful-guide-feedback.html>

If we use your feedback to improve A Useful Guide to De-Stress You we will email you a copy of the updated version.

You can access lots of free tips and tools at [247freetips.com](http://247freetips.com).

## About the Author



Berry Winter, author of [A Useful Guide to Create a New You](#), [A Useful Guide to De-Stress You](#) and co-author of [A Useful Guide to Dealing with Difficult Behaviour](#), has extensive knowledge in creating learning and development programmes.

Having previously worked in a corporate environment, including BT and a number of marketing related consultancies, Berry has considerable experience of businesses, both large and small.

Berry specialises in providing performance training and coaching for people in business. She runs courses in areas such as ...

- Interpersonal Skills
- Communication Skills
- Team Building
- Leadership
- Change Management
- Customer Care
- Presentation Skills

Berry also provides 1:1 coaching at all levels of business. Working 1:1 gives much greater flexibility to meet the development needs of individuals and can increase their effectiveness dramatically in a short space of time.

Berry is able to work at a variety of management levels and across a range of projects from concept and strategy to delivery.