



Q&A with Sarah Kenny

Chief Executive, Sarah Kenny took the BMT helm on 1st August last year, with a brief to sharpen the company's competitive edge, while adding more value for customers. Top of her growth agenda has been unification of the various companies under one simple BMT name; not to dilute the group's identify as niche specialists, but to build and grow from this reputation. Focus caught up with Sarah to find out more about her vision for the organisation.

What has most surprised you about BMT since joining the company?

Having worked alongside BMT for almost my entire career, I have always admired the organisation's technical brilliance, the quality of its work, and the intimacy of its customer relationships; BMT truly takes ownership of customers' issues. Those factors were a big attraction before I joined, and it is brilliant to experience them from the inside. Our people are every bit as good as I thought they were.

Clearly, I knew that the business was made up of many individual operating companies, but I hadn't realised quite how much that was holding BMT back. The way we are organised means we find it difficult to collaborate meaningfully, to share best-in-class practices, and to ensure

we always put our best global resources at customers' disposal in order to solve problems. It also holds us back from giving employees better career development opportunities. We miss business and cross-selling opportunities too; with customers feeding back that they didn't realise we had complimentary services (to those we are already delivering to them) in areas where they need help.

Unifying our brand drives powerful collaboration, better serves our customers, and unlocks business benefits. We will remain specialists in our core markets, but as one company, not as many. Changing the way we go to market and support our customers is how we will grow.

"Our people are every bit as good as I thought they were."



“We will remain specialists in our core markets, but as one company, not as many.”

Where do you see the greatest business challenges?

Customers across our core markets are changing the way they do things, as they respond to and anticipate changes in their markets and customer bases. Whether this materialises in changes to technology and information use, or to acquisition and commercial strategies, we must be ready and on the front-foot.

Our skills, competencies, and reputation will get us so far, but we need to address the evolution of these markets in order to capitalise on their growth. That is about partnering better with industrial peers and our supply chain, focused investment on diversifying into other areas of future growth such as autonomy, environmental change management, cyber and digital rail/ports.

We are not necessarily going to retain our historical geographic strength in some of our markets, so we have got to look closely at, and understand the direction in which they are moving. These trends are challenging for our customers too, so we must stay close to them in order to help them navigate the changes. We should develop focused regional strategies towards sustainable growth.

Change might be challenging, but it is also the birthplace of opportunity. We must equip ourselves to grasp these opportunities proactively, not simply react to changes as they happen - and that requires an evolutionary shift within our business.

What are the strategic priorities?

As I look across BMT’s entire portfolio, it is clear there are three strategic priorities.

First, we must sustain our core business. That means we have to grow - because any business that is not growing is declining - and we do that by evolving into an organisation that can meet the changing demands of our customers.

Secondly, we must enable powerful collaboration right across our business. Wherever you find a pocket of great internal collaboration, you see even better customer relationships and the beginning of real growth. Improving internal collaboration is critical to our ability to forge ahead, but there is also much more potential for external collaboration with partners ranging from SMEs to large prime contractors and government agencies. The fact that we are independent of the supply chain means we are uniquely placed to collaborate highly effectively. Making more of these opportunities will help take us into emerging markets where currently we may not appear big enough to compete.

Thirdly, we must invest in order to capitalise on customers’ thirst for innovation. Our customers have the most demanding of challenges and recognise the value of being technologically ahead of the competition, so if we are on the front foot in terms of technology, practices, and processes, we can take advantage of this appetite for spending on innovation.

What does success look like for you?

Success is having inspired, engaged employees who feel that their career aspirations are recognised and supported, that they are doing meaningful work, and that they are well developed and properly rewarded. As an Employee Benefit Trust, all our employees are shareholders in the company.

In terms of our customers, success means they consider us an essential business partner who consistently exceeds their expectations. And of course, delighted customers sell on our behalf.

For BMT as a business, success is about achieving growth, and also being recognised and valued within the industry as a high-performance player.



FAQs

1. Why don't you hire an external team to run the change programme?

The best people to deliver change are the people who understand the company best: its workforce. Our people are being asked to volunteer for the various workstreams we have implemented as part of the change programme, using their expert knowledge of the business and our customers. This will help drive the direction of the business.

2. What does the unification of BMT companies under one brand mean for customers?

The same people will still be doing the same jobs, but customers will gain valuable access to BMT’s global skills and resources to help them succeed and meet their business challenges.

3. Why is BMT an Employee Benefit Trust?

There are three reasons why:

- Hire and keep the best people: We are a different type of business: a place where people employ capital, NOT where capital employs people.
- Relationship focus: When a business is held in trust for its employees, they are essentially the owners and owners act with a sense of responsibility and pride that makes a huge difference to customer service, with a focus on fostering long term relationships with partners and customers.
- Able to take the longer-term approach required to innovate: Without the shorter term demands of shareholders to answer to, we can look at building longer-term value. We can commit the resources necessary for innovation that may have longer payback horizons. That’s evident not only in our research and innovation programmes but our investment in training and development. There is a cultural point here too: EBTs also tend to be flatter, less hierarchical places where the sharing of ideas happens more readily.

Strategic appointments



Guy Tomlinson

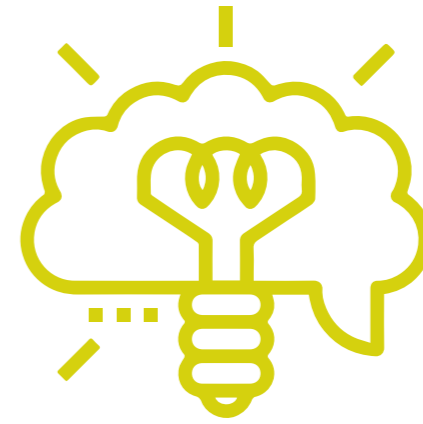
Group Capability and Strategic Director - Guy joins BMT from QinetiQ where he led a 35-strong business development team as UK Sales Director. He has a wealth of experience across the maritime, defence, cyber and information and training domains, as well as leading on several sales and business development transformation programmes. Guy comments: "A big part of my role is to harness this technical excellence and focus our efforts on helping to make a real difference to some of the global, engineering challenges that our customers face today."



David Bright

The Group Operations Director is a member of BMT’s Executive Committee with responsibility for the oversight and delivery of transformational change across BMT to ensure the business continues to deliver high quality project outcomes for its customers.

What you didn't know about Sarah....



We all have a responsibility to inspire others to go into our amazing field. Today I see that same negative peer pressure with my own children, especially my daughter, which is why I became a STEM ambassador. It's about stepping up and showing people that when you choose engineering, science and technology, far from spending your time waving spanners around, you're solving real-world issues and helping people to survive and work in incredible and challenging environments.

I'm an accidental engineer. My background is Marine Environmental Science but since that's all about trying to fix real-world problems, it led inevitably to engineering. I had so much passion for going out to sea and doing scientific things with mud and fish and water, my girlfriends thought I was insane. In fact, the peer pressure not to do the things I loved was quite considerable, but my father is an engineer and my mother ran a production line for avionics equipment so it all seemed normal to me.

Diversity in the workplace is essential.

Everyone gets hung up on diversity being about women. It's not. It's about difference: difference in attitude, thinking, social background, academic background, ethnicity, gender, and more. As a senior woman in this industry, you have to be very careful not to come across either as wanting to pull up the ladder behind you and deny other women the same opportunities, or as wanting to put women in charge of everything at the expense of men. I don't want women to take over the world, but I do want to achieve true diversity.

There are really simple ways to overcome unconscious bias. Put women on interview boards for example.

IT pioneer Dame Stephanie Shirley is one of my heroes. She broke the glass ceiling in the 1960s and set up an all-female software company which programmed the black box flight recorder for Concorde. In that male-dominated era, she changed the name on her letterhead from Stephanie Shirley to Steve Shirley so that people she approached seeking business meetings would agree to see her.

TED talks are a powerful source of inspiration and ideas.

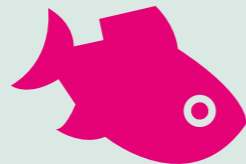
If I have a spare few minutes at lunchtime, I'll usually find one to watch. You can learn a lot.

I wouldn't ban any buzzwords or business jargon – but I would mandate the playing of buzzword bingo at every meeting.

Building relationships isn't about having business meetings. It's about getting to know what makes people tick. What are their priorities? What is on their mind that they may not have connected to something you can do? The best industry events are good for having these slightly different conversations. Plus, it would take months to get together with all the people you can talk to at, say, Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI).

Self-belief is critical for success. The best piece of advice I ever heard was at a women's Royal Navy vs Royal Air Force rugby match. It was a mud bath, the RAF side was winning, and you could feel the mood dropping in the predominantly naval crowd. Then a young Navy player got the ball under her arm and started running

so fast and so hard that nobody could keep up. But part way down the pitch she seemed to lose her nerve a bit and started looking left and right to see who was coming up behind her. Suddenly, a spectator stood up, cupped his hands round his mouth, and yelled: "Believe!" The effect on the girl was incredible. She put her head down, belted for the line, and got the try. It's a simple piece of advice but very powerful: believe, and you will get there.



My first Saturday job was an early lesson in running a business. Working in a small high street chemist's, I got to do a bit of everything: cashing-up, ordering, stock-taking, and of course dealing with all sorts of weird and wonderful customers.

A perfect work day doesn't mean one without problems. Problems are part of life. I enjoy seeing people take ownership of a situation and strive to fix it, with my help or support if they need it. It's a good day when customers tell me our teams have just done something incredible and made a real difference.

Most emails don't need an immediate response. I never turn my phone off but that doesn't mean I'm obsessed with it. We run an international business, so I have to check in last thing at night and first thing every morning, but while I read most emails, I don't feel compelled to reply straightaway. On holiday I have a deal with my husband that I can do stuff on my phone for an hour a day.

I find work-life balance a slightly bizarre concept. When you have trained hard for a career you're passionate about, to think of 'work' as somehow different from 'life' seems a bit odd to me.

Friday night bliss is eating fish and chips in my pyjamas watching rubbish telly. And having cake; I'm a big fan of cake!

