

NEC Group's Paul Thandi CBE, DL, to become Chairman after 16 years leading the business

2 years ago



The UK's leading live events business, NEC Group ("Group"), has announced that Paul Thandi CBE, DL, is to step into the position of Chairman as current Chairman, Peter Phillipson, steps down from the board in September.

Thandi was appointed Group CEO in late 2006, bringing over 20 years' experience in the media and events industries. Since then, he has completely transformed the business, secured record levels of growth and turned it into a customer-centric and data-led organisation. Having increased its portfolio of businesses and venues during this period, the Group now annually connects around seven million people through shared experiences of business, live entertainment, sport and leisure at more than 750 events. It has hosted a wealth of world-class events during Thandi's tenure, from the G7 Summit and Conservative Party Conferences, to Crufts, Concert for Ukraine, Wireless Festival and last summer's Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Under Thandi's stewardship the Group has made multi-million-pound investments, redeveloping both arenas, introducing greater digital and ticketing technology and enhancing its business intelligence capabilities to name but a few. He has also agreed major commercial partnerships with internationally renowned organisations such as Genting and Merlin Entertainments, creating strong destination credentials by adding to the existing leisure and entertainment facilities on offer in Birmingham city centre and on the NEC Campus.

Thandi has rebuilt the company's brands and reputation, created a new operating board, led the drive to

commit to greater ESG practices, and overseen a change in business culture. In recent years he has also spearheaded an ambitious NEC Masterplan initiative and successfully steered the Group from public sector ownership to private ownership through two management buyouts. The first was backed by LDC in 2015, and then a sale of the business in 2018 to the world's largest private equity business, Blackstone.

As of 4th September, Melanie Smith CBE will take on the role of NEC Group CEO. Melanie has a wealth of leadership experience, most recently as the CEO of Ocado.com, and in prior roles as Strategy and Services Director for Marks & Spencer, Global Strategy and Marketing Director at Bupa, and Chief Operating Officer at TalkTalk. Prior to this, Melanie was a partner in McKinsey's consumer practice. In her spare time, she is also the Deputy Chair of Sadler's Wells and the Remco Chair of SSE. She will bring a fresh perspective and new ideas but retain the NEC Group's central focus on our customers and our people.

Of his move, Thandi said: "To be at the helm of this incredible business for so many years has been an honour and I look forward to maintaining a key role in driving the growth of the

Group. We have been lucky to secure Mel to take on the leadership position. The importance of our people and my belief in giving them the best leadership, support and strategy, are all values that Mel shares close to her in her business and personal life, and I look forward to working with her over the coming years. It has been the greatest pleasure being CEO – there are more incredible things to come for the NEC Group."

In addition to the above moves, the Group's Chief Financial Officer, Richard Ashton, will be stepping down from the position, having radicalised the Group's financial analysis, management and reporting methods. The infrastructure he has created, helped the Group to successfully navigate through 15 months of near zero revenue as a result of COVID lockdowns, shortened its recovery period and secured its future longevity.

Paul Reeve is expected to join the Group as Chief Financial Officer in October, with Richard remaining in post until this time. Paul has spent the last 10 years of his career in senior finance roles at AEG, the owner of The O2 in London, most recently as CFO of AEG Europe working across a portfolio of venues, festivals, touring and ticketing businesses. As such, Paul brings with him a significant level of experience in the live entertainment and venue sectors, together with a strong background in driving commercial and operational value.