

In celebration of
INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY

THE CHILDREN'S FRANCHISOR WHO IS 'EN POINTE'

CLAIRE O'CONNOR

Woman Franchisor of the Year FINALIST and
WINNER of Inspirational Woman in Franchising 2021
Babyballet



When Claire O'Connor made plans to celebrate her franchise's 15th birthday in 2020, little did she know what the year had in store. Far from rolling out her well-planned campaign of celebratory events, the hugely successful children's franchisor, which has 100 territories across the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore employing over 750 people world-wide, had to re-think her entire business model to manage the impact of the pandemic. Nonetheless, this inspirational woman turned disaster into success!

Within 16 hours of the Government telling the UK on March 16th we needed to cease all 'unnecessary social contact', Claire had her first online classes up-and-running. By the time the full lockdown was in effect most of Claire's franchisees were presenting classes online. Making such huge changes to the business was no mean feat! It required the adaptation of legal documents, booking systems, marketing, advertising, graphics, communications and reporting, all of which Claire rolled out at lightning speed. As a result, she sold five new territories, including her first master license in New Zealand, and in September the network recorded their highest retail sales figures in babyballet's history.

When the rules were relaxed and children could return to classes, Claire had to ensure classes were safe and secure for everyone: More new resources; more changes! When many might have settled for simply 'keeping things going', Claire moved in the opposite direction, introducing 10 new themed classes to widen their appeal.

Support of her franchisees was also crucial to Claire. Aside from reducing franchisee licensing fees, she also hosted daily, biweekly and weekly zoom calls, bringing in external speakers to support franchisees with 'teaching classes online', 'mindset' and 'compliance excellence'.

Claire's commitment to the wider world of franchising is unquestionable. She was invited to be a panellist at the bfa's annual conference, and has since been appointed as Chair for the bfa North Forum.

Franchising offers all women, the chance to 'be their own boss'. Organisations like, the British Franchise Association (bfa) and Encouraging Women into Franchising (EWiF) proved support to women wanting to enter franchising, with services like EWiF's volunteer mentors to the bfa's free online Prospect Franchisee Certificate.