

DECEMBER 2025/JANUARY 2026 | POSITIVE CHANGE

BUSINESS BULLETIN

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SJP Approved 05/11/2025

SJP14332a_DS B3 (08/24)

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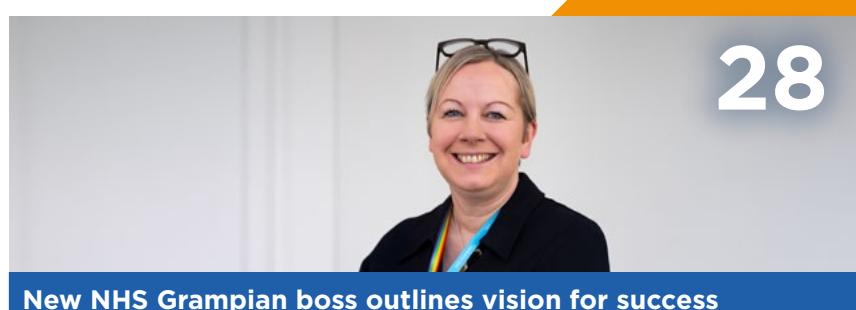
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Scotland needs positive, pragmatic, purpose-led change to power growth

In just a few months, Scotland will go to the polls in an election that will help define our nation's future.

Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty, political polarisation, and a world in flux, it's easy to feel cynical about the prospect of change.

But Scotland needs to shift through the gears with positive, pragmatic, purpose-led change that creates the conditions for growth.

At Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, we've been listening to our members - businesses large and small across every sector - about what that should look like.

It's clear from those conversations that we know what the problems are. We now need our political leaders to deliver the solutions.

Nowhere is that truer than in energy. The North-east continues to power the nation, but it feels increasingly under siege.

The Energy Profits Levy must end. It has served its short-term political purpose but for too long has eroded investment confidence in the very industry driving our transition to net zero.

A stable, competitive fiscal regime would unlock the capital required to invest in both oil and gas and renewables - because we will need both for decades to come.

We also need pragmatism on licensing. The Scottish Government's so-called "presumption against" new oil and gas developments sends the wrong signal to investors and workers alike.

Scotland's energy future should be guided by evidence, not ideology.

A managed transition means sequencing change - ensuring the supply chain, skills base and communities that have powered the North Sea for 50 years can adapt and thrive, not collapse.

Of course, by the time you are reading this we'll know whether or not they were listening.

At the same time, the renewables sector is crying out for greater regulatory certainty. Grid access costs, particularly punitive Transmission Network Use of System (TNUoS) charges, continue to deter investment in Scotland.

Scotland's universities and colleges are equally vital to this positive change. Yet they are under severe financial strain. We need a sustainable funding model that recognises the crucial role of post-school education in delivering the workforce of tomorrow, from graduate apprenticeships to reskilling programmes for the energy transition.

Collaboration between universities, colleges, and industry must be incentivised, and the commercialisation of research and spin-outs supported to drive growth in high-value sectors.

Connectivity remains another make-or-break issue. Businesses cannot compete globally if they cannot connect locally. Reliable train services to and from Aberdeen, investment to make our key trunk roads safer, protection and expansion of air routes, and support for a sustainable bus network are essential to a functioning regional economy.

Specifically, we need to see the reinstatement of freight and passenger rail services to Peterhead and Fraserburgh and this will be at the forefront of our election messaging.

Our hospitality sector, too, needs to be part of Scotland's growth story. The new visitor levy could be a force for good - but only if the revenues are ring-fenced to attract world class events, improve amenities, infrastructure, and the overall visitor experience, rather than being directed to fill gaps in general budgets.

Collaboration between universities, colleges, and industry must be incentivised, and the commercialisation of research and spin-outs supported to drive growth in high-value sectors.

On housing, the message from members is urgent: Scotland faces a housing emergency. Rising costs, restrictive regulation, and new levies are choking supply at the very time we need to be building more homes across all tenures.

Without a thriving construction sector, we cannot tackle affordability, attract workers, or sustain vibrant communities.

And as the digital economy continues to expand, Scotland has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to harness its renewable advantage to power data-driven industries. Supported by the North-east Scotland Investment Zone, this area could become a hub for clean data and digital innovation, creating high-value, high-skill jobs and diversifying the regional economy.

Finally, no discussion of positive change can ignore the social challenges beneath the surface. Rising unemployment, economic inactivity, and child poverty all threaten the fabric of our communities.

Behind the statistics are real people - and unless we grow the economy, we cannot sustainably fund the public services and social support they need.

As Sir Winston Churchill famously once said: "For a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle."

In the months ahead, politicians of all colours will promise change. The real question is: will they choose the kind that empowers enterprise, unlocks opportunity, and restores optimism?

Very shortly, we will publish a Chamber 'manifesto' ahead of the election. We believe in Scotland's potential and the key role that the North-east should have in delivering it. But potential means nothing without action.

The next Scottish Government - whatever colour or colours it turns out to be - must be bold enough to embrace positive change, not for its own political ends, but for the sake of the people and businesses who call this nation home.



Russell Borthwick
Chief Executive



OUR PREMIER PARTNERS

The Chamber sits at the heart of the North-east business community and one of our core aims is to help create the economic conditions and business environment which will allow this region to flourish.

Our premier partners see the value of a strong regional Chamber and choose to engage with us at this level to reinforce their ongoing commitment to the region and its economy.

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The principal's principles: A new era for the University of Aberdeen

When Professor Pete Edwards was asked, during his first days in office in November, what his ambition was as principal of the University of Aberdeen, his answer came as a single, uncompromising word.

Excellence.

“Because if we’re not excellent, why are we here?”

It was a characteristically direct statement from a leader stepping into the role after nearly four decades at the institution.

Edwards first joined the University in 1988 as a postdoctoral researcher in Computing Science, specialising in AI and scientific reasoning.

By the time he assumed the principalship in November, he had published more than 170 papers, raised over £20million in external research and innovation funding, and played a key role in major regional bodies including the North East Scotland Investment Zone Working Group, the Regional Inward Investment Forum and Aberdeen City Council’s Community Planning Board.

Few new principals have arrived with a deeper understanding of both the university and the region it serves.

“I’m thrilled to be stepping into the role,” he reflected as he began his first week.

“Aberdeen is a wonderful university with a rich history, an outstanding record of achievement and a lot of truly talented staff and students.”

A global outlook from the outset

Edwards’ first major act as principal was to progress one of the university’s most ambitious international developments to date.

“Higher education is now a global game.”

Just days after he formally took office, the university’s Finance and Resources Committee approved the joint venture agreement for establishing a new campus in Mumbai. The agreement puts the university on track to welcome its first cohort of students in India in September 2026.

“Those students in Mumbai will essentially get the same curriculum they would get here in Aberdeen,” he said. “Higher education is now a global game.”

The new campus joins the university’s established operations in Qatar and southern China, where around 1,200 students are currently registered on Aberdeen computing degrees. Negotiations are already under way for further international partnerships.

For Edwards, however, the Mumbai development was about more than global expansion. It represented an opportunity to raise Aberdeen’s profile across the subcontinent, strengthen academic collaborations and, crucially, attract more students to the North-east itself.

A university rooted in place

Even as he set out a global vision, Edwards emphasised that Aberdeen’s purpose remained deeply connected to the region it has served since 1495.

Nowhere is that more evident than at Foresterhill, where the university will begin marking the site’s centenary next year.

“From the outset it was a joint enterprise between the university and the city,” he said. “The medical school has the potential to be a real powerhouse in research as well as in teaching.”

Recent Scottish Government investment has seen first-year medical intake grow from around 180 to more than 300 - a transformation Edwards described with pride.

“Our medical student numbers skyrocketed. We’re training a lot more young medics - one of whom is my own son!”

Taking over in a time of transition

Edwards succeeded Professor George Boyne, who retired at

the end of October after seven years at the helm. For Boyne - who grew up in Aberdeen, studied in Aberdeen, and returned decades later to lead it - the moment was bittersweet.

"I finished with horribly mixed emotions," he reflected.

"I'm pleased to have served around seven and a half years, but I was sorry to be leaving Aberdeen for the second time. It felt like the right moment to hand this on."

Boyne's tenure spanned extraordinary upheaval: Brexit, Covid and a dramatic fall in international student numbers triggered by UK Government restrictions.

"We lost half our international postgraduate taught students in about 18 months. Around £25million was wiped out. We had to replace that income, restabilise and recalibrate."

In response to those pressures, the university's international model was transformed. When Boyne arrived, Aberdeen taught only around 150 students overseas; by the time he departed, that figure had risen to around 1,500, laying the

groundwork for Edwards' Mumbai focus.

Boyne also spoke passionately about the university's relationship with its home city.

"The University of Aberdeen is an institution for the North-east and of the North-east. People here are intensely proud of it."

Transforming for the decade ahead

Now Edwards inherits the major change programme Boyne began - one that will define the

university's next decade.

"It's about asking whether we are fit for purpose and how we deliver transformational change," he explained. "

The strategy to 2040 is bold and ambitious.

My job is to steer the university so we're in the right shape to deliver it."

His guiding principle remains the same: excellence.

"When I look at the transformation programme, the lens I apply is very simple: are we excellent at this, or do we have a clear route to being excellent? If not - why are we doing it?"

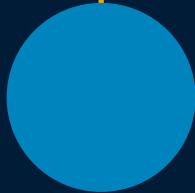
As the university enters this new chapter - with a new Principal, global expansion underway, and a century of the Foresterhill partnership to celebrate - both leaders share a belief that the North-east deserves a world-class university at its heart.

"That benefits everybody," Edwards said. "It strengthens the economy, supports public services, and equips our graduates with the skills to thrive.

"That's what excellence means for this region."



Professor Pete Edwards



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Margaret Brown,
Founding Director,
Margaret Brown Consulting Ltd

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I am a certified executive coach and organisational development specialist, with nearly 35 years' experience in helping corporate leaders inspire, engage, and measurably retain their people. I have worked all over the world, in various sectors and with every level of leadership from C-Suite right through to front line, to implement and sustain lasting positive change.

Tell us about your management style and how it has worked for you.

My business depends on me having a collaborative

style. My starting point is to find out as much as I can about my clients' culture, vision, and key objectives. It is all about listening to fully understand their business and any pain points and challenges they hope to overcome. Mutual trust is essential for both my clients' success as well as my own.

What is the biggest barrier you overcame in the workplace and how did you tackle it?

During the earlier years of my business, I was a single parent and sole provider. With a lot of international travel, I depended on my outstanding 'second mum' child-minder who slept over when I was away. When I was home, I always walked to and from school with my girls, and blocked out their birthdays to be as present as possible for my circumstances.

What's the best bit of business or life advice you've ever received?

In my 20s I struggled with low self-worth. I met a wonderful entrepreneurial lady who confided that she too had lacked confidence in her younger years. She made me promise to start reading personal development books which I was cynical about, but I persevered, and my mindset gradually started to change. She changed my life with that advice.



Scott Stewart,
Operations Director,
ZynQ 360

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Tell us about your management style and how it has worked for you.

My management style is collaborative, and outcomes-focused. I believe in giving people the autonomy to take ownership of their work while ensuring clear goals

and accountability. I am fortunate to have worked with managers and leadership who gave me the opportunity to do this myself and I think that this approach has helped to build an engaged team where trust, initiative and responsibility are prized.

What is the biggest barrier you overcame in the workplace and how did you tackle it?

Imposter syndrome - I feel it's one of those things that creeps up on you as you progress in your career. A bit of self-reflection has been the easiest way to tackle it, taking time to appreciate the efforts and the accomplishments and look to turn any failures into opportunities for learning. Talking to peers and colleagues also helps to recalibrate where you are and where you want to go in the workplace.

What's the best bit of business or life advice you've ever received?

Life advice-wise, I think it's "what's for you won't go by you". It's one I've heard the most from grandparents, parents, teachers, managers and friends over the years since I was wee. Over the years it changed its meaning once or twice for me, but I think in general it's all about ensuring you're open to new challenges, new opportunities and being ready to grasp them when they present themselves.

VSA launches biggest fundraising campaign in history

VSA has launched the biggest fundraising campaign in its history - as it reveals a new long-term strategy.

Like many social care charities across the UK, VSA is facing significant funding challenges. And yet, more people are needing support than ever before.

VSA provides services for more than 2,000 children and adults across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and their families.

The 2025-2030 strategy takes VSA back to the heart of its charitable roots that the organisation's founders in 1870 established.

VSA will deliver more flexible care into Aberdeen City and Shire communities and offer care in people's own homes. This means helping people remain in their own homes for longer, but to do so, requires a substantial focus on diversifying funding streams and rebuilding a volunteer force.

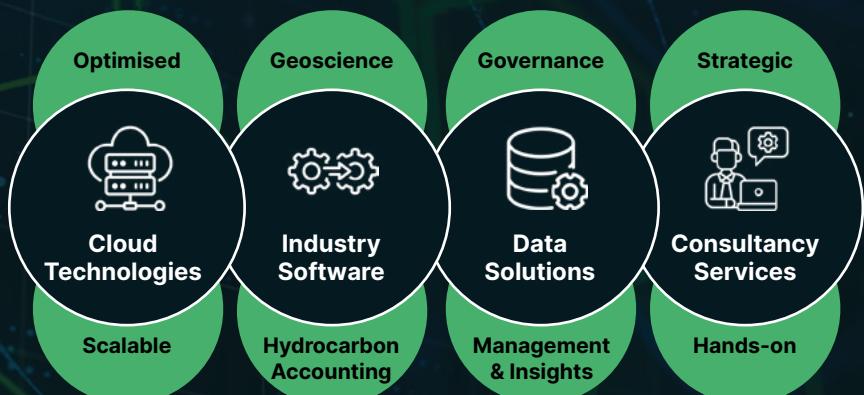
The campaign has been co-produced with people the charity supports, staff from across the organisation, and trustees.



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John Shaw,
Sales Lead, Software Engineering
Sword

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I'm part of the software engineering team, where we build custom software and mobile apps for clients who've outgrown their current tools or need something more tailored than off-the-shelf options. We can slot into existing development teams or take on the whole thing as a fully outsourced partner.

Who are your customers?

Our customers are typically growing service-based companies - especially in the energy sector - who are dealing with legacy systems, mammoth spreadsheets, manual processes or tools that just don't scale.

They come to us when they need something smarter and more tailored. We also work with SaaS companies looking to fast-track their roadmap and internal development teams who need extra hands to hit delivery targets. Outside of energy, we've got great clients in retail, property, finance and leisure too.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge right now is staying agile in response to constant cost pressures in the energy sector. That means scaling our teams quickly depending on what clients need. But it's also a big opportunity - we've got the size, experience and a strong pool of skilled software engineers that lets us take on larger projects and offer extra capacity when clients need it. It gives them a flexible alternative to recruiting, which is tough right now given the competitive job market.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Big or small, wins are worth celebrating as they show progress. Take what you can from the losses, then move on. Sales moves fast, with plenty of ups and downs and dwelling doesn't help. Stick to your principles, focus on doing the right thing, and remember: the next opportunity is always just around the corner.



Darren Walker,
Managing Director
Laings

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

At Laings, we design and install exceptional kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms tailored to how our customers live. With over 160 years of heritage and a reputation built on craftsmanship, quality, and service,

we transform everyday spaces into something extraordinary. In addition to our award-winning showroom and bespoke retail service, Laings has a well-established commercial division that specialises in delivering high-quality kitchen and bathroom solutions for volume housebuilders. We also work closely with clients in the hospitality sector - designing and supplying tailored bathroom fit-outs for hotels, leisure facilities, and event venues. Our reputation for reliability, design excellence, and project management makes us a trusted partner across both residential and commercial markets.

Who are your customers?

Our customers range from homeowners embarking on renovations or new builds to developers and architects seeking high-end, design-led solutions. Many are looking for a seamless, stress-free experience backed by trusted expertise and timeless design.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge is managing rising costs in a challenging market while maintaining the high standards our customers expect. At the same time, that challenge creates opportunity - we're investing in smarter processes, expanding our digital presence, and exploring sustainable product lines to continue delivering value and innovation.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

The connections. Whether it's a casual conversation or a strategic collaboration, being part of the Chamber opens doors to local partnerships, shared knowledge, and a collective voice for business. One standout advantage has been the Chamber's business training programmes. We've not only taken advantage of their existing courses but have also worked with them to tailor training specifically to meet our team's needs.

MEMBER MEET the ME



Gavin Smith,
Managing Director
Caledonia Competence

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Caledonia Competence is a leading provider of competence assurance services, predominantly for the energy sector.

Utilising our user-friendly ATTAIN portal, we help our clients to not only demonstrate the competence of their people but also to

provide cost-effective learning and development opportunities for them.

Who are your customers?

We have been supporting companies in the energy sector since our formation in 2015.

Currently we have around 10 oil and gas contractors who use ATTAIN for competence assessments and training.

We expect to increase this over the next few months.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge is probably visibility. As a small business, we are sometimes too busy delivering for our clients to spend time on communicating our offerings to the wider business community.

We are looking forward to utilising the services of the Chamber to address this.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

From a people development perspective, we believe it is important that training programmes are synchronised with competence assessments.

We also feel strongly that engaging content and embracing technology are vital to the success of these competence and training programmes.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

Having the opportunity to increase our profile is a major reason we joined the Chamber. This is particularly relevant as our services are not limited to the energy sector.

We would be delighted to talk with any Chamber member who is looking for support with assessing and developing their people.



David Diack,
Senior manager and head of Aberdeen practice
Upstreamly Ltd

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We are a team of finance and accounting professionals helping high-growth companies navigate complex challenges. We can provide all core finance and accounting

elements you may need, from the entire finance function to fractional CFO, through a bespoke solution that we can adapt as you grow. As our clients scale, they face increasingly complex financial and accounting challenges, requiring "Big 4" expertise and advice, however, delivered with a fairer pricing model, and this is where Upstreamly comes in.

Who are your customers?

We typically work with energy companies; oil and gas operators, and oilfield service providers. We also work extensively with FinTech and Crypto, energy and renewables, and other innovative sectors like university spin-outs because they face similar complexities, such as R&D tax reliefs. With an international client base, we have extensive experience in managing cross-border services in the areas where oil and gas and energy companies operate.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

As we service an increasing number of clients, we too are faced with the challenges that come along with scaling. Our core fractional CFO service offering is highly specialised and requires complex expertise. However, being one of the first ICAEW firms in Aberdeen, we can attract bright talent to balance our team of highly technical and specialised experts in an environment that facilitates growth and learning.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

If you are a founder or leader of a growing business, it's important to remember that you are not alone in the finance and accounting challenges you face. Equally, it is important to focus on your core business and operations, as this is the essence of your success. At Upstreamly, we work with multiple companies every day that face similar demands, so we are well equipped to help you navigate complexities and scale your business.



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Mobile MRI unit to be based at Dr Gray's Hospital

Patients across Grampian who are waiting for MRI scans will be seen at a new mobile MRI unit located at Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin.

The unit, funded by the Scottish Government, is on site until the end of March 2026, providing additional capacity for eligible patients across Grampian.

Radiology service manager, Claire Vernon, said: "We're delighted to bring MRI scanning closer to home for many of our patients in Moray and the surrounding areas.

"The mobile unit at Dr Gray's will make a real difference by reducing waiting times and helping us continue to tackle waiting lists across the region."

Claire added: "People waiting for a MRI scan do not need to take any action; we will be in touch with them to offer an appointment in Elgin where they meet the criteria for this. Whilst many patients will benefit from this, some will still need to travel to Aberdeen for their scan."

Marcliffe unveils Skylark: A bold new chapter in Aberdeen dining

Marcliffe, Aberdeen's only five-star hotel, is excited to reveal the name and first look at its new brasserie: Skylark.

Set beneath a striking glass dome in the centre of the hotel, Skylark is a vibrant space that reimagines dining at Marcliffe. With bold interiors, a lively atmosphere, and a menu rooted in the finest local ingredients, Skylark invites guests to rise above the ordinary and experience something truly special.

The name takes inspiration from the skylark bird known for its joyful song and skyward flight. It reflects the spirit of the brasserie: light, free, and full of life. Every detail, from the architecture to the ambience, is designed to elevate the experience.

Sir Jim Milne CBE, chairman of Balmoral Group and Marcliffe, commented: "Skylark represents everything we want the future of Marcliffe to be, welcoming, inspiring, and full of life. It's a space that brings people together and offers something truly unique for Aberdeen. We're incredibly proud of what's taking shape and excited to share it with our guests."

This announcement follows Marcliffe's recent recognition as Aberdeen's only AA five-star hotel, a prestigious accolade that reflects the highest standards of service, hospitality, and guest experience. Skylark will build on this achievement, offering guests a dynamic new space to enjoy five-star service in a setting that's uplifting, modern, and full of energy.



BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED

QUICK-FIRE ROUND



Aine Mishra,

*Head of Strategic Development
TauRx Therapeutics Management*

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

Brené Brown, without question. Her work on courageous leadership reframed how I think about effectiveness - not just in terms of technical skill, but emotional intelligence.

You can be brilliant at your craft, but if you can't build trust, navigate tension, or collaborate, your impact will always be limited.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

The Dare to Lead programme. I completed it two years ago, and it genuinely reshaped how I show up at work and in life.

It demanded deep self-reflection and helped me develop what Brené calls "grounded confidence" - something that feels increasingly vital in an unpredictable and often toxic world.

What's the biggest lesson you have learned in business?

Just because everyone around the table agrees, it doesn't mean it's the right decision. Groupthink is one of the most dangerous dynamics in business - and it's just as present at board level as anywhere else.

We've lost the art of respectful, critical discourse and become too focused on consensus.

Disagreement, when handled well, is where real progress happens.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

Helping build a strong, supportive network of female leaders in the region - women who genuinely champion one another and make space for others to grow.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

There's a quiet grit and determination here that often goes unspoken - but it runs deep.

It's part of the culture, and it's what makes this region so resilient and hopeful, even when times are tough.

What was your first job?

A supervisor at a French language summer camp, but my first corporate job was as a wireline field engineer logging wells in Balikpapan, Indonesia.

Who or what inspires you most?

My four-year-old daughter. She reminds me daily of what really matters.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

"That's the way we've always done it."

How do you relax?

Forest walks, jigsaw puzzles, and slow mornings with coffee alongside my daughter and husband.

If you had the power to change one thing in the world, what would it be?

I would set enforceable limits on mobile phone use - and ban them outright in social settings. We've lost too much presence and connection.

NorSea UK unlocks storage and logistics capacity within the Energy Transition Zone

NorSea UK is releasing approximately 60% of its indoor capacity at its facility located within the Energy Transition Zone (ETZ).

This equates to around 1,500 racked pallet locations or roughly 2,500 square metres of high-quality indoor space.

The area had originally been allocated to a North Sea project scheduled to commence in 2026. However, the project will now be managed by NorSea's operations in Denmark and Norway, freeing up part of the UK facility for alternative use.

As part of the Wilhelmsen group, a global leader in the maritime industry, NorSea benefits from a strong international foundation built on innovation, sustainability, and operational excellence.

Mearns & Gill produces its first true crime podcast, 'RGU Crime Files'

Aberdeen-based creative marketing agency Mearns & Gill has unveiled its first-ever true crime podcast - RGU Crime Files - produced for Robert Gordon University (RGU) and hosted by the agency's very own Pete McIntosh.

The five-part series delves into some of the North-east's most fascinating and gripping historic crime stories, brought to life through immersive storytelling and expert analysis from RGU's School of Law and Social Sciences.

Each episode examines a real case that shaped Scotland's social and legal history, from Murder at the Saltoun Arms, to Bodysnatching and the Anatomy Riot, to the haunting Witch Trials of Aberdeen.

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The power of positive change - and the leadership driving it



Ryan Crighton,
Director of Policy,
Aberdeen & Grampian
Chamber of Commerce

Positive change doesn't just happen.

It takes leadership, long-term vision, and the courage to keep investing, not only in projects, but in people and potential.

Few regions embody that spirit more clearly than North-east Scotland, and few individuals have done more to turn ambition into action than Sir Ian Wood.

This autumn, Sir Ian announced a transformational £80million investment in the region's future - £40million from The Wood Foundation, matched by the next Scottish Government, to accelerate economic diversification and the energy transition.

The funding will be split evenly between Opportunity North East (ONE) and ETZ Ltd, two private-sector-led organisations he chairs, both already proven engines of growth.

It is a striking vote of confidence in the model that ONE has built over the past decade - and a reminder that when business leads with purpose, economies can change direction.

Founded in 2015 with philanthropic funding from The Wood Foundation, ONE has invested £35million directly into the region's high-growth sectors: digital tech, food and drink, green energy, life sciences and tourism.

Independent analysis this year confirmed that this approach has generated £135million in additional value for the North-east economy and £190million across Scotland - an extraordinary £9 return for every £1 invested.

Behind those numbers is a story of real transformation.

Digital tech and life sciences are on course to double in size by 2030. Food and drink businesses are outperforming national averages, while the visitor economy now contributes £1.3billion annually.

Meanwhile, new innovation infrastructure - from ONE SeedPod to energy transition testbeds - is creating the conditions for sustainable, long-term prosperity.

At ONE's recent annual event, *Transforming Our Future, Delivering with Impact*, more than 120 entrepreneurs, investors and leaders gathered to reflect on that progress and look ahead. Hosted by journalist James Hanson at the newly opened SeedPod, the event captured the optimism of a region that knows it can compete on a global stage.

Sir Ian reminded guests that even through a decade of extraordinary shocks, "private-sector-led transformation and partnership working have been constants". He urged the business community to stay engaged and to use the opportunities created to drive their own ambitions.

ONE's chief executive, Jennifer Craw MBE, echoed that sentiment, describing how the organisation's unique model - private-sector leaders giving back, mentors investing time, founders taking risks, and partners backing ambition - is building "a unique model of leadership that gives back, unlocks potential, and creates opportunity for generations to come".

The latest £80million commitment ensures that this work continues at pace. It anchors a decade of progress and sets up the next, a decade in which ONE and ETZ Ltd will have the resources to expand innovation, scale entrepreneurship, and secure high-value jobs in the industries of the future.

As First Minister John Swinney put it, Sir Ian's philanthropic leadership is "utterly remarkable". But his true legacy lies in what he enables: a region empowered to lead its own transformation.

That is what positive change looks like in practice - bold investment, collaborative delivery, and a shared belief that the North-east's best days are still ahead.

The invitation to all of us is clear - stay ambitious, stay involved, and keep building on this foundation. Because in the North-east of Scotland, positive change isn't a slogan - it's our strategy, and it's working.



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THREE60 Energy accelerates Middle East growth with acquisition of Total Vision

THREE60 Energy, one of the fastest-growing companies in the global energy services sector, has announced a major step in its Middle East growth strategy with the acquisition of Total Vision (TV), a multidisciplinary engineering and project management services provider in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The acquisition marks a significant milestone in THREE60's long-term growth strategy, positioning the company to better serve clients across the Middle East's rapidly evolving energy landscape - from traditional oil and gas projects to emerging sectors such as carbon capture and storage and renewable energy.

The move also strengthens THREE60's regional footprint following the opening of its new UAE headquarters in Abu Dhabi, which serves as a strategic hub for its expanding portfolio of energy transition and engineering projects across the wider region.

Through the acquisition, THREE60 gains a fully integrated engineering and project management delivery organisation from Total Vision, securing a robust pipeline of ongoing and future projects, alongside deep local market expertise - providing an immediate platform for accelerated regional integration and growth.

The acquisition follows a period of exceptional performance for THREE60.

The company has delivered a 36% year-on-year increase in revenue and achieved a number of major contract wins, creating a combined £200million business with around 1,100 employees worldwide and expanded capabilities across subsurface, wells, subsea, engineering, operations and product solutions.





Aimee Maitland

Interim Director

Developing the Young Workforce
(DYW) North East

Describe your early career path

On finishing school, I wasn't completely sure what I wanted to do, so I chose a university course that reflected the areas I was interested in - politics and geography. My studies helped me to gain a better understanding of where my passions lay: I discovered that I really enjoyed the human and social aspects of both subjects. A summer job working in a human resources department allowed me to explore this further. I became interested in working in HR and training, so I opted to start my career there, entering as an HR administrator and working my way up to HR business partner level.

How did you arrive in your current industry?

As I gained more experience in HR, I became increasingly drawn to the areas of learning and development and training and competence. This, in turn, heightened my interest in education and skills, and I realised that this was where I wanted to focus. When Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) North East launched a recruitment drive for Employer School Coordinators in 2021, I applied and was successfully appointed to one of the roles. Since joining just under five years ago, I've moved into the Regional Lead, then Interim Director role.

What's the best thing about your job?

My job gives me the opportunity to work with many fantastic organisations, projects and people. DYW North East helps our region's young people prepare

for the world of work; however, we cannot achieve this in isolation. The standout part for me is collaborating with others to jointly find solutions to ensure that we are supporting our young people, our regional skills profile and our economy. I like to hope that we add value to the overall effort, for both employers who may be facing skills shortages and for the young people who are preparing to enter the workplace.

What has been your biggest career challenge to date?

It may sound like a cliché - and it's perhaps not a career challenge in the traditional sense - but achieving a healthy work-life balance challenges me on a daily basis. There is a pressure to be everything to everyone, especially when you are juggling family and work responsibilities. Managing expectations can be difficult. I imagine that many people reading this will identify with these feelings.

What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?

18-year-old Aimee was a little worried that she needed to have a fully scripted life plan. My parents and siblings were all very focused and always knew what they wanted to do, so I think I felt that I should

too. I would tell younger Aimee that it's okay to not have it all worked out - everything will come good. As DYW's #NoWrongPath campaign promotes, there are twists and turns on most people's career journeys and that is absolutely fine. Follow your passion and it will all be okay.

What's something surprising that most people wouldn't know about your job?

I have a large number of touchpoints with various people, programmes and industry sectors - all of whom rightly expect us to understand their challenges and aims. The cultures within industry and education, for example, are very different - and we're only a small team managing relationships and activities across 28 different regional secondary schools, all of whom have their own unique identities. As Interim Director, I require a detailed understanding of our regional skills landscape, while also ensuring that we're monitoring developments nationally and contributing to the overall DYW effort in Scotland.

How do you unwind in your time off?

I don't. I have young children!

What did you want to be when you were little?

I swayed between wanting to be a hairdresser or a teacher.

What was your first job?

Delivering papers. On bike and foot. In all weathers.



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New NHS Grampian boss outlines vision for 'sustainable future'

Laura Skaife-Knight wants communities and region to be 'proud' of NHS

By Rebecca Henderson

"There is a way out of where we are now, and it's my job to develop the plans to get us there."

When Laura Skaife-Knight took the helm of NHS Grampian earlier this year, she stepped into the role with a sense of optimism about what's possible for healthcare in the North-east of Scotland.

Having steered NHS Orkney through a period of improvement, Laura also helped strengthen vital links between island and mainland services throughout her two-and-a-half-year tenure as chief executive.

"My time in Orkney gave me a real understanding of how interconnected our health systems are across the North of Scotland and the many unique elements of delivering remote, rural and island health and care," she explains.

"There's a huge reliance between Orkney and Grampian, and I could see the potential here immediately with so many talented people just wanting to do an amazing job for patients and communities.

"I just felt I could really make a difference, and for me, it felt like the natural next step."

'Nobody's more important than anyone else'

Her belief in progress through people, partnership and collaboration sits at the heart of Laura's approach. In just a few months, she has focused on rebuilding confidence and beginning to set out a vision for a healthier, more sustainable future for the region.

"I want to lead with hope and optimism," she explains. "We're already putting the foundations in place for a brighter future, and I believe we'll get there together."

Laura's leadership style centres on connection and authenticity. "It's about relationships, knowing your workforce, listening to how people feel about working here, and acting on that feedback.

"As chief, I try to be as visible as possible and make sure I carve out time to have the right conversations with our staff at all levels because staying in touch with what matters and how it feels is hugely important."

She believes honesty, ability to listen, approachability and responsiveness are essential to strong leadership. "Nobody's more important than anyone else. You don't need to change who you are when you take on a leadership role because people value openness and respect.

"Sometimes people think when you come to these jobs, you've suddenly got to have a personality transplant. I don't see it like that at all. I think it's all about being yourself first and foremost and having respect for everyone."

Her focus on visible leadership runs throughout Laura's vision for NHS Grampian.

"We need a culture where staff feel psychologically safe to speak up and share concerns and where there is a focus on visible and compassionate leadership.

"Fairness, equity and inclusion are hugely important and leading with hope and optimism really matters.

"Even in difficult times, people look to leadership for hope."

'We cannot operate as an island'

Laura believes collaboration, system and strong partnership working is the key to driving positive change.

"We cannot operate as an island. The world doesn't work like that, and certainly not the NHS if we are to deliver our own strategy (Plan for the Future) and on national policy – the Service Renewal Framework and Population Health Framework included.

"We will only move forward and get the best results across health and social care for our communities if we work together."

That means working ever closer with local authorities, integration joint boards, the third sector and academic partners, as well as wider partners.

She also highlights NHS Grampian's role as an anchor institution within the region.

"We're the largest employer in the North-east, and that brings an important responsibility beyond healthcare."

She says this includes playing a part in employment, housing and education will support economic development across the region.

'Health has to be everyone's business'

"Good health supports productivity, attracts investment, and helps communities thrive," she says.

"Health has to be everyone's business.

"We all have a personal responsibility to stay as fit and healthy as we can, and if we do that, then we'll move to a much better place and ultimately make sure fewer people are in hospital."

Laura believes that partnerships with the business community will be central to delivering that vision.

"The Chamber gives us a vital platform to collaborate and align our goals. If we can work together on wellness, prevention and innovation, we'll build a healthier, more resilient Grampian."

'I want NHS Grampian to be known for excellence'

With NHS Grampian currently under level four escalation as part of the NHS Scotland Support and Intervention Framework, financial recovery remains an immediate focus, but Laura is clear that stabilisation and planning for the long-term must go hand-in-hand.

"The short answer is, we have to do both," she says. "We're focused on financial recovery and improving waiting times now, but at the same time, we're increasingly looking at redesigning services and moving care closer to home."

"The shift towards community-based, preventative care is how we'll secure a sustainable future."

She points to digital transformation as one of the most exciting opportunities ahead.

"We want people to have more control over their own care, with better access to information and services digitally."

"Prevention is key to reducing pressure on hospitals and improving health outcomes."

She admits the role of chief executive is a challenge, but it's one she finds energising and rewarding.

"Some might find it daunting, but to have the opportunity to shape the future of the NHS across Grampian and in Scotland and this is a huge privilege."

Laura is passionate about the connection between a thriving NHS and a thriving economy.

"A strong, sustainable health system makes the region more attractive for investment and talent. When people see high-quality healthcare, they see stability."

She's also keen to strengthen collaboration across sectors.

"By bringing together business, education and healthcare, we can build the future workforce the region needs."

It's about shared skills, shared learning, and shared ambition."

Looking ahead, Laura defines success in clear terms. "Delivering our future strategy through to 2032 is key.

"That means achieving financial and clinical sustainability, improving population health, and ensuring that our staff and communities are proud of NHS Grampian."

For her, leadership is as much about trust as targets. "I want NHS Grampian to be known for excellence, including outstanding care and strong clinical outcomes for the communities we serve.

"In the long run, a strong health and care system makes the region more attractive for investment, recruitment and retention.

"I want this to be an organisation where everyone is really proud to work, and I want our community to be proud of the NHS as well."



Laura Skaife-Knight

Gold standard for North-east logistics specialist

A North-east logistics expert has cemented its position among the UK's leading providers after successfully retaining Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) status.

With headquarters in Aberdeen, Petrasco Energy Logistics specialises in international logistics solutions for the energy industry, ranging from air, sea and road freight services to customs compliance and warehousing and distribution.

AEO is an internationally recognised quality mark, awarded by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), and its award underlines Petrasco's commitment to compliance, reliability and the highest standards of supply chain security.

The company, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2024, has held the accreditation – widely regarded as the pinnacle of compliance for customs controls and procedures – since 2014. Petrasco was one of the first UK-based freight agents to obtain AEO status and has continued to pass rigorous assessments set by HMRC as well as meeting ongoing assessments.

Kevin Buchan, managing director of Petrasco Energy Logistics, commented: "Retaining our AEO status reflects the hard work and dedication of our team as well as our ongoing commitment to providing clients with the highest

level of competency. I'm extremely proud of what we have achieved together, while demonstrating a clear drive for continuous improvement and innovation.

"To maintain the demands of this accreditation for more than a decade demonstrates our commitment to business excellence and supporting our clients' operations, particularly when it comes to customs consultancy. In an industry where reliability, speed and compliance are critical, this status gives our customers an extra layer of confidence that they are working with a trusted logistics partner."

Petrasco continues to support clients across the energy sector and beyond with bespoke logistics solutions, while retaining AEO status reinforces the company's ability to deliver supply chain excellence in an increasingly complex global trading environment.

Whilst not mandatory, possessing AEO status can give companies quicker access to certain customs procedures and the ability to 'fast-track' selected shipments. This can save time and money as well as providing a competitive advantage in demonstrating that a company's role in the international supply chain is secure, efficient and compliant.



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Turning the Tide: Data and Insight at Aberdeen's Tall Ships event

When the majestic fleet of tall ships sailed into Aberdeen in July 2025, they brought more than just spectacle. The event ignited a wave of positive change, boosting Aberdeen's economy, lifting civic pride, and reaffirming its place as a vibrant, forward-looking city. Research Chamber were proud to partner with Aberdeen City Council in designing and delivering the face-to-face data collection and fieldwork programme that underpinned the robust evaluation of the event's impact.

Why data matters

In an era where major events demand significant investment and carry high expectations for legacy and community benefit, simply "making it happen" is no longer enough. What distinguishes a momentary spectacle from a legacy impact delivering event, a catalyst for positive change, is the ability to measure and translate outcomes to demonstrate that impact flows into jobs, business turnover, city branding, visitor behaviour, and resident wellbeing.

Market research serves as the bridge between ambition and accountability

By collecting robust data and structured fieldwork during the four-day event via on-site face-to-face interviews with visitors, online surveys for vendors and city businesses, we helped ensure that the evaluation didn't rely on anecdote alone. It provided our client, Aberdeen City Council and event partners with the hard evidence they need to draw conclusions, make investment decisions and shape future strategic bids.

Key findings and immediate change

The evaluation demonstrated how powerful the event was as a catalyst for change. More than 400,000 visits were recorded across the Port of Aberdeen and surrounding areas during the four-day event, while city-centre footfall rose by almost 38% compared with the same period the previous year. Businesses across the city centre reported a significant uplift in visitor numbers and spending, with many describing the event as one of their busiest weekends on record. Beyond the economic figures, the event also fostered a strong sense of civic pride, volunteer engagement, and community spirit, elements that contribute to a lasting social legacy. Together, these outcomes show that the Tall Ships event was more than a successful festival; it was a demonstration of change in motion, energising the city centre, boosting local businesses, and reinforcing Aberdeen's identity as a vibrant and welcoming host city.

Our role: From design to delivery

At Research Chamber, our role focused on the delivery of high-quality, face-to-face data collection throughout the event, followed by careful data refinement and a light topline analysis to support Aberdeen City Council's full evaluation process. Adhering to Event Scotland guidelines, we developed tailored questionnaires to capture behaviours, spending patterns, motivations, and perceptions. Our team trained and supervised event volunteers who acted as field researchers - our team of "Fact Finders". We continually monitored results and data collection throughout, ensuring consistent and

high-quality interviews across multiple sites and time periods. Following the event, we undertook the initial data cleaning, validation and rapid analysis, providing the council with accurate insights within days of the event's conclusion. By maintaining high standards of accuracy and rigour, we helped ensure that every response contributed to a credible, evidence-based understanding of the event's impact.

Looking ahead

As the city considers hosting future Tall Ships Races and attracting other major events to the region, the lessons from this evaluation are clear: data collection and analysis are the foundations for communicating meaningful legacy. When designed and executed with care, research becomes more than a reporting tool. In the case of Aberdeen's Tall Ships event, the city is now riding a rising tide of momentum fuelled by insight, evidence, and a shared commitment to progress.



Samira Heshmatzadeh,
Senior research executive,
Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber
of Commerce

samira.heshmatzadeh@agcc.co.uk



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Colin Dawson,
Managing Director
Dax Group

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Dax Group supports organisations through every stage of digital change, combining strategic advisory, bespoke solutions development, AI, and change management to ensure technology is adopted and adds value. At the core of our approach is a people-first ethos, building collaborative cultures where change is embraced, and impact is delivered.

Tell us about your management style and how it has worked for you.

Fostering a people-first culture is central to our approach. Guided by core values; embrace curiosity, ignite passion and stronger together, we empower teams with trust and autonomy. Unburdening. Freedom to ideate and innovate gives clarity and focus, enabling transformative outcomes instead of being consumed by day-to-day firefighting.

What is the biggest barrier you overcame in the workplace and how did you tackle it?

'This is how we've always done it'. Functional, but lacking efficiency. We applied systems-thinking: balancing people, process and technology. By mapping processes, identifying friction points and delivering small, measurable gains, we built trust. Early stakeholder involvement and clear communication shifted culture toward progress and sustainability.

What's the best bit of business or life advice you've ever received?

A quote that resonates with me is: "The only thing worse than starting something and failing is not starting in the first place." Innovation involves trial and error, but progress begins with action. When you begin to understand your purpose, the risk and fear of failure become much smaller.



John Willis,
Director
SCG Solutions

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

SCG is a UK-wide telecoms and IT group. We provide: Voice; mobile; internet; IT and cyber support. Because we are privately owned and have a remarkable footprint - we can work closely with customers and offer service levels far higher than the industry standard. We aim to make the complex simple, provide premium value, and deal with problems effectively. As a result - we have one of the highest client retention rates in the industry.

Tell us about your management style and how it has worked for you?

Swiss Tony meets David Brent...Well - hopefully it's better than that - I would aspire to be more like Richard Branson. Find great people, create an environment where they can be the hero, and try not to let ego get in the way. The latter works far better... but I do love a good Swiss Tony impression.

What is the biggest barrier you overcame in the workplace and how did you tackle it?

Managing my own ego and how I show up in the world.

What's the best bit of business or life advice you've ever received?

Expectations are resentments waiting to happen. You can't manage expectations. that's the root cause of all personal conflict. You can only manage clear agreements and lead people by inspiring them to be their best version.

What's your top tip for someone joining your organisation today?

I was only kidding about the David Brent meets Swiss Tony bit. Well, sort of...

Fathom Group joins ONE AGM panel to spotlight the power of mentorship in business growth

Fathom Group took part in Opportunity North East's (ONE) annual general meeting, celebrating a decade of innovation, collaboration, and entrepreneurship across the region.

The event placed a spotlight on the North-east Venture Mentoring Service (VMS) - a programme based on the world-renowned MIT Venture Mentoring Service model, designed to connect ambitious founders with experienced business mentors.

Fathom Group's founders Richard McGowan and Krzysztof Mackoń joined the panel discussion alongside mentors Trevor Garlick, Jacquelynn Craw, and Mark Griffiths, in conversation with broadcaster James Hanson. Together, they shared their experience of the VMS journey, reflecting on how structured, team-based mentorship has accelerated Fathom's growth and leadership development.

The company joined the programme in early 2025 and now meets regularly with a panel of mentors to explore strategic opportunities and challenges. The format - built on trust, openness, and balanced guidance - has been a transformative addition to Fathom's business journey.



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From pain to purpose: The power of one step

If someone told me a few years ago that I'd be running through Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and beyond dressed as a Minion, unicorn, or T-Rex - raising thousands for mental health and cancer support - I'd have laughed.

But that's exactly what happened. I'm Marius Coste. Originally from Transylvania in Romania. I've called Aberdeen my home for 17 years. By day, I lead over 60 cleaning staff across 15 sites as a facilities management professional. By weekend, I become the "Smiles Runner," bringing joy and awareness through Miles of Smiles: The Costume Comeback Tour, supporting SAMH and Clan Cancer Support.

Why SAMH and Clan?

Supporting SAMH is personal. My wife and I went through three consecutive miscarriages during the pandemic, which led to me experiencing difficulties with my own mental health. SAMH showed me that asking for help is a strength, and I wanted to share that sentiment and that support with others. SAMH recently announced it is opening Scotland's first network of walk-in mental health hubs, called The Nook, and invited me to visit its first location in Glasgow. Seeing this vision for mental health support - with no referrals, no waiting lists and no appointments needed - just reinforced my mission even more. I'm so excited that the second of The Nooks will be opening in Aberdeen in 2026. Every smile, every step, every donation helps spaces like this bring hope to those who need it most. Clan Cancer Support is equally personal. I fundraise in memory of my grandpa, who passed from prostate cancer, and for the one in two people who will face a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime.

Finding purpose through running

Running became my therapy. In 2021, I ran 36km a week for 52 weeks - nearly 3,000km in total - and raised over £7,000 for SAMH. That year, my

first Minion video went viral with over 90,000 views, and many others regularly reached 40,000+ views. Since June 2025, I've reached 50,000 views on Instagram and 45,000 LinkedIn impressions - using humour to spark conversations about mental health. I've joined Parkruns, Kiltwalks, fancy runs with Albyn Nursery, as well as running alongside my local MP. Elior senior management supported me at the Edinburgh Kiltwalk, which I feel highlights the powerful role that business leadership plays in both staff wellbeing and local charitable support. I've also been part of city centre events across Aberdeen, Montrose, Dundee and Glasgow - often drawing positive attention from police, ambulances, and fire engines - which shows how engagement can reach all corners of the community.

Looking ahead, I've pledged to run, cycle or walk over 50km weekly for 78 weeks, ending December 31, 2026 - just before my 40th birthday. My family are my biggest supporters. I couldn't do this without them.

The power of the cold

I take a two-minute cold shower after every session and a weekly five-minute plunge to build mental resilience. Growth begins on the edge of discomfort - just like mental health.

Impact so far

Since June 2025:

- 1,404 km covered (running, cycling & walking)
- £1,475 raised for SAMH (+ £7,000 in 2021)

Author: Marius Coste, SAMH ambassador

- £932 raised for Clan Cancer Support
- 122 cold showers and 30 cold dips
- 50,000+ Instagram views and 45,000+ LinkedIn impressions

Why it matters in business

Resilience, productivity, and performance are essential, but behind every target is a human being. Real strength isn't silence - it's saying, "I'm not okay" and having someone listen. Miles of Smiles demonstrates how humour, vulnerability, and community engagement create meaningful impact.

A final thought

I run for our three angel babies, my grandpa, and everyone visiting The Nook. When I think of them, I cry - and when I cry, I run harder.

This journey isn't just about kilometres. It's about conversations, compassion, and community. Because even superheroes need to talk - and sometimes, all it takes to start that conversation is a Minion running down Union Street.



From Adelaide to Aberdeen: Australian company chooses AM Sci Tech's Energy Park for first UK location

AM Sci Tech, a subsidiary of Hurstwood Holdings and owner of Aberdeen Energy & Innovation Parks, is pleased to welcome Treadwell Group, as the newest occupier on the Energy Park for the company's first location in the UK.

Treadwell Group has signed-up for Unit F8 at the Enterprise Centre in Bridge of Don. This small first-floor office suite will initially accommodate three people.

The expansion marks a significant step in Treadwell's international growth strategy and highlights Aberdeen's appeal as a destination for innovative global businesses.

Founded more than 30 years ago, in Australian Treadwell has built a reputation for being a leading and trusted global provider of Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) solutions, known for delivering durable High Specification Designed and Tested GRP Materials and Systems, giving 'Fit & Forget', low maintenance solutions.

The company's new facility in Aberdeen will serve as its UK base, supporting operations across the UK, Ireland, Europe and the Middle East.



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BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



Alison Riley,
MAI Client Deliverables Manager
Fugro

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

It's hard to pinpoint just one person, I'd say my dad had been the most consistent early influence. He always believed in me, took pride in my career choices and showed genuine interest. Another pivotal moment came when a project manager I worked with as a temporary administrator encouraged me to speak with other women in the industry and consider a career in offshore data processing. I performed roles in Australia and Glasgow before settling in Aberdeen. My second temp job was with Fugro in 2001. When I was a project manager, my first major client had considerably high expectations and presented tough challenges. That experience shaped me as a manager and taught me resilience.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

One of the courses that impacted me most was Growing My Team. It was not only useful in terms of leadership and team development, but an enjoyable experience. I made lasting friendships with colleagues from across Fugro and still keep in touch with many of them for advice on complex or demanding topics. They have become an important part of my professional support system.

What's the biggest lesson you have learned in business?

Never respond in anger and always re-read everything before replying, especially when the topic is important. It is often a good idea to get a second opinion from someone you trust. Above all, stick to your guns and remain truthful.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

I lived and breathed a major project for 18 months, during which I became deeply immersed in every detail. When the opportunity arose to reassess the pricing, I was able to identify significant cost improvements that ultimately improved the project's profitability. I'm also really proud of the team we've built. We're a close-knit, yet uniquely diverse group with a wealth of knowledge from different academic and cultural backgrounds. We're at the forefront of global initiatives and innovation projects, continuously improving on what we deliver to our clients and working together to achieve excellence.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

I love living in Scotland, especially on the east coast. The work-life balance here suits me perfectly, and I've found the climate to fit my lifestyle. While the area gets

unfair criticism, I genuinely wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Over the years, I've had opportunities to relocate globally, but after weighing up what we have here, I've never seen a real benefit to moving. Working here has allowed me to meet and collaborate with people from a wide range of nationalities.

What was your first job?

A paper round, which I loved. Then while I was still at school, I was a vet receptionist on Saturdays.

Who or what inspires you most?

Doing a good job. There is nothing better than sitting back and looking at what you have achieved and receiving acknowledgement from others.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

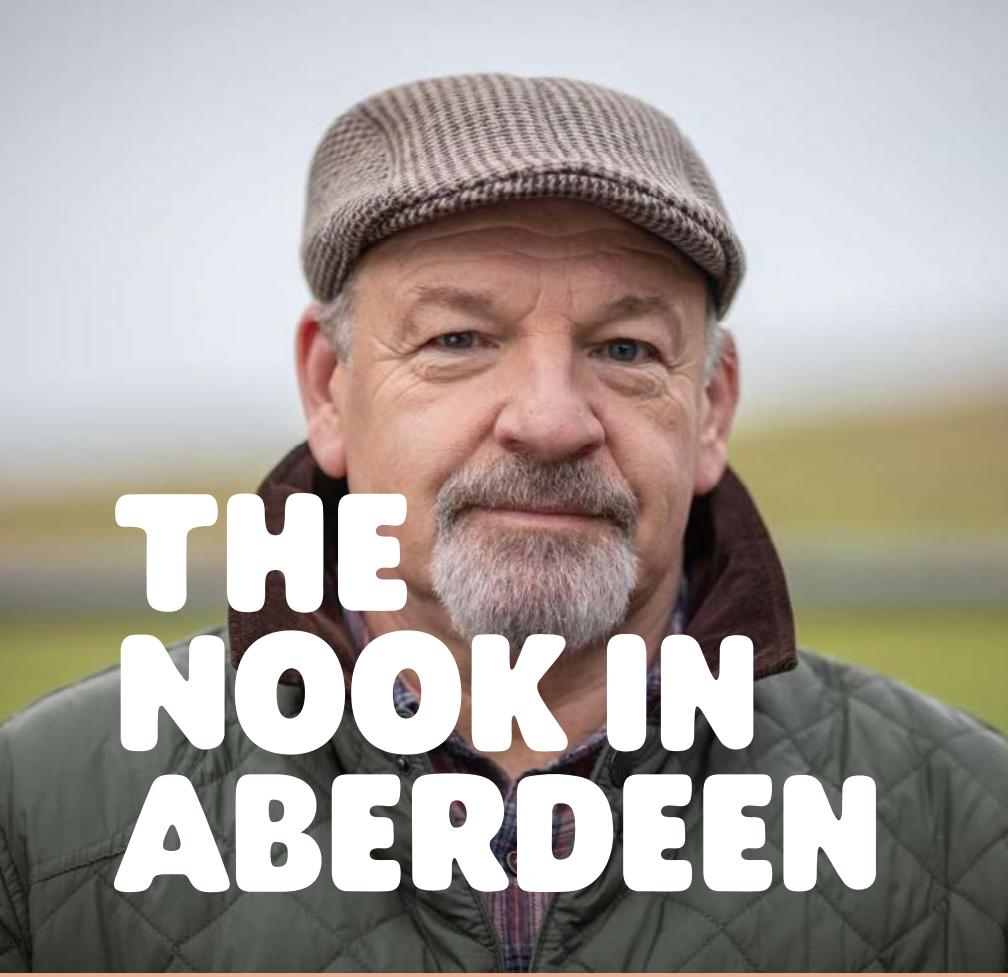
"Not my remit". It's not a helpful phrase - it's a dead end without any indication of who to ask next.

How do you relax?

I don't. I do a lot of outdoor activities and I'm always on the go.

If you had the power to change one thing in the world, what would it be?

End the violence.



THE NOOK IN ABERDEEN

TRANSFORMING
MENTAL HEALTH
SUPPORT IN THE
NORTH-EAST



TOGETHER, WE CAN BUILD THE NOOK – A
MENTAL HEALTH R



THE **NOK** from **SAMH**

SAMH (Scottish Action for Mental Health) is bringing The Nook — Scotland's first national network of walk-in mental health hubs — to Marischal Square, Aberdeen. This groundbreaking initiative will offer free, immediate mental health support with no referrals, appointments, or waiting lists.



MAKE A DONATION

AND ENSURE NO ONE IN ABERDEEN FACES A
PROBLEM ALONE.

BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



Kimberley Morrison,
Hotel Manager
Aloft Aberdeen TECA

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

I've learned that influence doesn't come from just one person - it comes from every general manager, managers, and trainers I've worked with along the way. Some taught me things I wanted to carry forward, others showed me what I didn't want to become. I've been lucky to work with leaders who genuinely cared about my growth, and that's shaped how I support and develop my own team today. Their guidance showed me the value of staying resilient, paying attention to the details, and making time to support and develop the people around me.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

One of the most impactful pieces of personal development I've done was a leadership course focused on emotional intelligence and team dynamics. It helped me understand how to support different personalities, stay calm under pressure, and build a positive, productive team culture. I've always been interested in what drives people - why they make certain decisions and how their personalities shape how they work. The course helped me put that into practice. When you understand what makes someone tick, what

motivates them, or what might trigger stress, you can lead more effectively and help your team perform at their absolute best.

What's the biggest lesson you have learned in business?

Don't be afraid to be wrong. The biggest lesson I've learned in business is that success comes from consistency, honesty, and being open to trying new things. That includes being willing to say when you got it wrong. In hospitality, guests remember how you made them feel - and that comes from delivering quality service, even on the busiest days. As a leader, being consistent builds trust and stability within your team. While trends and technology shift, the core of great hospitality stays the same: respect, reliability, and attention to detail. Taking time to reflect - on your decisions, your team, and how the business is performing - leads to better choices.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

My proudest achievement is seeing the team genuinely engage with guests - asking about their day, picking up on the small details, and making sure they have a great stay. It shows the culture we've built is working. For me, it's those day-to-day moments where the team takes real pride in what they do that matter most.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

The best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland is the strong sense of community and resilience. There's a real pride in local identity, and people value quality service and lasting relationships - both of which are at the heart of hospitality.

What was your first job?

My first job was as a retail assistant during my school years.

Who or what inspires you most?

What inspires me most is seeing people grow - watching team members gain confidence, develop new skills, and take the next step in their careers, especially through programmes like our in-house TECA development programme led by Katie, our HR co-ordinator, and the wider leadership team.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

"Kimberley, please can you answer these questions for me by next week?"

How do you relax?

I enjoy spending time with my friends, going to the gym, walking my friend's dogs and the occasional glass of wine.



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City Restoration Project unveils vision for Golden Square transformation

The first images of a £2million project to bring life back to one of Aberdeen's most historic squares have been released today; showing how a long-vacant granite landmark will be restored to residential use.

Award-winning developers City Restoration Project, the team behind some of Aberdeen's most celebrated historic building restorations, is proposing to convert 6 Golden Square into 11 high-quality apartments, including a roof-level penthouse with a green roof and communal roof garden.

The B listed property, which has lain empty since 2014, was originally built in 1821 as a townhouse

before being converted into offices in the 20th century.

The new plans will return it to its original purpose, helping to repopulate the city centre while preserving the character of one of Aberdeen's most architecturally significant civic spaces.

The development will see the granite townhouse frontage carefully restored, a traditional basement lightwell reinstated to match neighbouring properties, and the 1960s rear extension adapted to create modern apartments.



A discreet roof-level apartment with private roof terrace has been designed to sit back behind the chimney line, clad in dark zinc to blend into the surrounding roofscape. It will provide panoramic city views, when complete.

This latest project follows City Restoration Project's acclaimed redevelopment of 1, 2 and 3 Bon Accord Crescent; three 200-year-old townhouses by the "Architect of Aberdeen" Archibald Simpson, which had spent decades as tired office space.

Now restored to their original splendour, they have been reimagined as 11 luxury apartments, including a penthouse overlooking Bon Accord Terrace Gardens, reclaiming the Crescent's status as one of Aberdeen's most exclusive addresses.

The company, run by brothers Dean and Darren Gowans, now hopes to deliver a similar transformation at Golden Square.

Dean Gowans said: "Golden Square represents another important milestone for City Restoration Project. Our vision is to honour Aberdeen's unique architectural character while breathing new life into buildings that deserve to be lived in and appreciated.

"With Bon Accord Crescent now fully occupied and warmly received, our ambition is to see Golden Square thrive again. By returning No.6 to its original purpose, we can help bring people back into the heart of Aberdeen and secure the future of a beautiful building."

Each buyer at Golden Square will be invited to shape their apartment with the developers, co-designing spaces and finishes so that every home feels truly personal.



Darren Gowans added: "We've learned that no two residents are the same, we take real pride in working closely with buyers to shape homes around the way they live. That collaboration ensures every residence is personal and that every home tells its own story."

City Restoration Project has already invested several million pounds in Aberdeen city centre and was recognised at the Northern Star Business Awards, run by Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, for its outstanding contribution to the regeneration of the city.

Russell Borthwick, Chief Executive of the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, said: "City Restoration Project has already shown what can be achieved when a passion for our city's heritage is combined with a clear vision for its future.

"The company's track record speaks for itself; from Bon Accord Crescent to Union Street, they have taken forgotten buildings and turned them into places people are proud to call home.

"We warmly welcome their continued investment in Golden Square, which will not only restore another historic building but also bring new energy into the heart of Aberdeen."

For more information about 6 Golden Square, visit goldensquare.apartments



SIX
VI GOLDEN
SQUARE

MOTOR MOUTH

I recently had the opportunity to spend some time behind the wheel of the new Ford Ranger Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV), and I came away genuinely impressed.

The Ranger has long been known as a dependable workhorse, but this latest version adds a layer of refinement and versatility that makes it stand out in an increasingly competitive market.

Under the bonnet, Ford's 2.3-litre EcoBoost petrol engine is paired with an electric motor to deliver exceptional pulling power, producing up to around 697 Nm of torque, the most ever in a Ranger. Out on the road, that translates into smooth, confident acceleration and impressive towing ability, while still maintaining the practicality that has always been central to the Ranger's appeal. With a towing capacity of roughly 3,500 kg and a very usable payload, it's clear that Ford hasn't sacrificed capability in the name of efficiency.

A feature that really stood out to us was Ford's Pro Power Onboard system. This allows the Ranger to act as a mobile power source

FORD RANGER PHEV: A CAPABLE WORKHORSE REINVENTED FOR A CLEANER, SMARTER FUTURE

By Corey Milne, director, Smoke and Soul

with outputs of up to 6.9 kW (16 Amp). For us, that's not just a clever addition; it's a genuinely useful tool. It would make camping trips far more convenient but also has real value for our catering business when working remotely. The ability to run equipment directly from the truck without relying on an external generator gives us a new level of flexibility and independence. It's the kind of feature that turns the Ranger from a vehicle into a practical partner for both work and leisure.

Inside, the cabin feels modern, refined and well thought out. The electric assistance makes low-speed driving smoother and quieter, and the suspension soaks up rough surfaces with ease. The large central touchscreen is intuitive and responsive, and we really appreciated the heated steering wheel and seats, ideal for chilly mornings in the North-east. It's easy to forget you're behind the wheel of a large double-cab pickup when it feels this composed and comfortable. Our two-year-old son Reuben absolutely loved it too. He was thrilled to be up high, "driving the big truck with Dad", which probably says as much about the Ranger's presence and appeal as anything else.



Of course, there are a few compromises worth noting. The pure-electric range is up to 26 miles on a full charge, ideal for local errands, commutes or short worksite runs, but not much more. Charging takes several hours on a typical home or workplace setup, so it's best suited to those who can plug in overnight or during downtime. There's also a small rise in the load bed floor to accommodate the battery, which slightly reduces cargo depth compared

to the diesel version. As with most plug-in hybrids, fuel economy depends on how regularly you charge and how far you travel on electric power before the petrol engine takes over.

Overall, the new Ford Ranger PHEV feels like a smart and forward-thinking evolution of a proven formula. It blends serious workhorse ability with genuine efficiency benefits,

offering the best of both worlds for drivers who need toughness, towing strength and off-road capability, but who also want to reduce fuel use and emissions. For anyone who can make the most of that 26-mile electric range, especially those using their vehicle for business or local travel, the Ranger PHEV is a very attractive choice.

I'd like to extend my thanks to TrustFord Aberdeen for arranging the test drive and to the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce for its continued support in promoting innovation and sustainability across the region. The new Ranger PHEV shows that hard-working vehicles can be both capable and cleaner, and for us, it's proof that modern technology can enhance the way we work, travel and even spend time as a family.



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The MEMBER MEET the M



**Donald Todd and
Kate Goodhand,**
Managing Partners
Go To First Aid Training

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Go To First Aid Training delivers accredited first aid courses at your workplace or locally across the North-east of Scotland. Run by registered nurses and qualified teachers, we ensure your business

or community group meets safety standards with expert, flexible training that comes to you.

Who are your customers?

Our customers include local businesses of all sizes needing trained first aiders to meet health and safety regulations, as well as community groups, schools, and organisations supporting people of all ages who want to learn essential first aid skills.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge is the tough economic climate, with businesses tightening budgets. However, our key opportunity lies in the fact that First Aid at Work is a legal requirement and by delivering training on-site or locally, we help businesses save on travel, accommodation, and downtime costs - making compliance more affordable.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Starting a small business is challenging - local networking and support are essential. Take full advantage of what's available, build strong relationships, and stay connected. These connections can offer fresh insights, spark new ideas, and help keep your business relevant, resilient, and adaptable in a constantly changing environment.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

AGCC membership offers valuable support, including a dedicated relationship manager. Ours, Suzanne, provides outstanding advice and clearly believes in the power of the AGCC network to connect and support local businesses, fostering collaboration and promoting strong, sustainable commerce across the region.



Marta Benzie,
Senior Crew Operations Manager
OSM Thome

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

OSM Thome is a transparent ship management company dedicated to customer satisfaction. We have strong experience in all areas relevant to ship and crew management services and many other maritime services; all with a strong accent on

training. We at OSM Thome manage a diverse fleet of vessels which is equally distributed between offshore, tankers and dry/bulk.

Who are your customers?

Currently OSM Thome's customers the world's leading shipping companies; the mixed fleet represents companies in many and diverse sectors such as tanker, bulker, container, car carriers, cruise ships, offshore vessels and others.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

There are major regulatory complexities facing the maritime industry just now. Sustainability is quite rightly a very important issue facing all operators like us. We are facing complicated and evolving environmental regulations, decarbonisation goals and compliance requirements. Sustainability is so important to OSM Thome that we have created a dedicated subsidiary, EVIGO, tasked with offering innovative,

eco-friendly solutions and expert green consultancy to customers around the world. We are setting our own stringent standards to meet and exceed world environment targets. They involve stringent waste management protocols, programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and eco-friendly technologies across our fleet and facilities.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

We are surrounded by a diverse group of people - each bringing a unique mix of experience, skills, and perspectives. Don't underestimate the power of learning from other sectors. Often, it's those fresh viewpoints that spark the most innovative ideas. By connecting with members outside your usual circle, you open the door to new ways of thinking, creative approaches to shared challenges, and opportunities for unexpected collaboration. The real strength of the Chamber lies in this diversity. Let's embrace it - and grow stronger, together.

MEMBER MEET the ME



Stephen Murray,
Managing Director
Nu-Style Products Limited

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Nu-Style Products has been trading for over 75 years, with experience designing, manufacturing and supplying high-quality laminate products to various industries and sectors. A subsidiary of 165-year-old family business Donaldson Group, we're best known for our shower panel brand, Perform Panel, which

offers a stylish and cost-effective alternative to tiles, with many additional benefits.

Who are your customers?

Most of our Perform Panels are sold through timber and plumbing merchants but other customers include local authorities, housebuilders, distributors/stockists and bathroom showrooms.

Ultimately, anyone that has a property is a potential client! All manufacturing takes place in Scotland, but we have four distribution centres in England; one in the central belt, a distributor in the Netherlands, and supply across Europe and beyond.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

As with most businesses, the current economic uncertainty is a concern. Consumer spend is down as people are facing rising costs which are impacting their purchase choices.

However, Perform Panel can save money on install and on alternative options, with low maintenance once fitted, so we believe demand will continue to grow.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Get involved! We've seen a huge improvement with increased engagement in the Chamber, utilising the various platforms they have to share news about our company.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

It's great to be part of such a rich community of like-minded businesses and individuals, from a range of sectors and backgrounds. It also offers a powerful platform to share information and learn more about other organisations in our area.



Sam Aitken,
General Manager - RAIS
Somatic

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Somatic delivers inspection and integrity services with fresh energy, a client-first mindset, and consistent delivery through three specialist divisions:

- RAIS - providing turnkey inspection solutions including traditional NDT, ANDT, engineering, and integrity services.
- Specialised - delivering subsea, UAV, ROV, RII, and other specialist applications.
- E2i - developing and enhancing bespoke inspection equipment and solutions.

Together they offer complete, cutting-edge capability.

Who are your customers?

We work with a broad range of customers - from asset owners and operators in oil and gas, petrochemical, power, renewables, and marine to onshore fabricators and overseas clients. Our work spans offshore assets, onshore plants, and from our purpose-built NDT workshops, delivering everything from long-term incumbent contracts to projects, each tailored to the specific scope and environment.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge is keeping pace with fast-moving technology and changing client expectations. For example, traditional methods don't always suit modern access or safety requirements - but we move with the times. By doing so, we've introduced a UAV division to tackle hard-to-reach inspections, not to replace rope access or visual inspectors, but to complement them - giving our inspectors the chance to work alongside new technology, expand their skills, and deliver more versatile solutions. The opportunity lies in continuing to adapt in this way, blending innovation with our core expertise while maintaining the quality we're known for.

Aberdeen-based Goldstar is celebrating its 45th year in business by recording a year of growth, investment and expansion

The family-run business has achieved growth across all service lines, expanding contracts with major contractors, and securing multiple new clients across construction, energy, property, healthcare, entertainment, education and domestic sectors.

Employing 150 people, Goldstar is a leading provider of commercial and domestic cleaning, maintenance and facilities services across the North of Scotland.

Director Scott Willox said: “We’ve achieved an upsurge in contracts across both the commercial and domestic sides of the business. This year has been challenging for the service industry, but we’ve remained focused on each of our client relationships. We’ve invested to serve our growing client base, while carefully executing our strategy for steady and sustainable growth.”

Goldstar’s specialist construction division, with an award-winning reputation in support of many of Scotland’s big industry names, currently operates across a record number of live sites and continues to expand in Tayside.

Scott added: “Many of our construction clients choose Goldstar for multi-service contracts, across multiple sites. That’s a fantastic achievement in support of Scotland’s construction sector.”

The domestic cleaning business – as well as gardening and winter maintenance services – have seen exponential growth this year.

Operations director Rachel Willox said: “We approach 2026 with a healthy order book and an increasingly diverse customer base. Everything we do is centred around our clients – we are all so passionate about that – and we

continue to achieve high levels of customer recognition.

“A huge thank you to all clients and staff. To survive in business for 45 years is an amazing achievement. To continue to thrive, invest and stay relevant is something that makes us grateful and proud.”

Kevin Urquhart, construction director, Barratt & David Wilson Homes, North Scotland, said: “Congratulations to Scott, Rachel and all at Goldstar on reaching this impressive 45-year milestone. Goldstar’s success is down to total commitment to their customers, and the delivery of the highest levels of quality service. That can only be achieved through sheer hard work. Well done.”

Russell Borthwick, chief executive of Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, said:

“It’s so encouraging to see a local, family-run business continue to grow, invest, and achieve after four and a half decades of operations.

“Congratulations to Scott, Rachel and the Goldstar team on achieving their 45th Anniversary. Goldstar has worked on many of the city’s key development projects and continues to play a role in helping to make our city shine. Long may that continue!”

Proud to be
at your service
for 45 years



When you partner with our family-run business, you experience a level of service and loyalty that stands the test of time. Trends can come and go, but it's only an unwavering focus on what makes you happy that makes a team stand out.

**That's Goldstar. Constant. Consistent.
And proud to serve you for 45 years.**



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gold-star.co.uk

BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



Michael Reid,

Partner

MHA Aberdeen

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

My late father, Sandy Reid, and my uncle, Robin Reid, both chartered accountants in private practice in Aberdeen. Indeed, there has been a direct Reid descendant as a chartered accountant in Aberdeen since 1853. I learned so much from them. They showed me the importance of treating people with respect, behaving professionally and always being aware of what's happening around you. These lessons have been invaluable throughout my career.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

Serving as President of Junior Chamber Aberdeen (now known as Junior Chamber International Aberdeen) and then National President was a tremendous honour and very challenging. I developed skills in public speaking, dealing with people and project management as well as other attributes. Junior Chamber provided a safe environment to learn and grow. If you took on something and it didn't work out, while you'd be disappointed with failure, it was a place where you could make mistakes, learn from them and improve. I was a member for 10 years. Many businesspeople I know have gained a great deal

from being a member and I would recommend the organisation to anyone between the ages of 18 and 40.

What's the biggest lesson you have learned in business?

Do as you would be done by. The principle is explained in The Water Babies by Charles Kingsley. If you behave properly to people in all walks of life, you should expect to be treated properly in return. A person's code of conduct is important and helps to define your reputation - treat others well, and you'll be treated the same.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

Co-founding Meston Reid & Co in 1990 and growing it to the point where it was attractive enough for a UK firm to want to merge with us in 2023. It's been an exciting journey with plenty more to look forward to as the business develops. I am now an equity partner in MHA which is one of the largest accountancy groups in the UK and Ireland, with a turnover of £205million, over 1,960 staff, 150 partners and comprises of 20 offices nationwide including England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

The people. I went to school

and university in Aberdeen and have always felt at ease with the general business style and approach in the area. Dealing with a wide cross-section of people is invigorating and I've always found that an honest, transparent and communicative approach gets to the point of an issue and allows matters to be progressed quickly and effectively. My main field of practice since 1988 has been insolvency which faces unique and interesting challenges, but a practical and measured approach, allied to the candour of the people here, usually provides a successful end result.

What was your first job?

A cream boy! I sold cartons of cream on Saturday mornings in Hazelhead and Woodend.

Who or what inspires you most?

The energy of youth. They have so much to look forward to.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

Generally people being too familiar when first dealing with you when they don't know you... or perhaps I am simply getting too old for the modern business attitude!

How do you relax?

Time with my grandchildren, football - supporting Aberdeen FC - and golf at Royal Aberdeen.

RGC launches £5million vision to expand bursary provision and transform sports facilities

Robert Gordon's College has unveiled its most ambitious fundraising strategy in its 275-year history. The three-year, £5million campaign is designed to broaden access to bursaries and deliver transformative sporting facilities for its students and the local community.

The new strategy aims to strengthen the culture of philanthropy across the RGC community in a bid to fund transformative projects that will benefit generations of students to come.

Kevin Reynard, chair of board of governors, said: "We have embarked on a strategy that represents a pivotal moment for the future of Robert Gordon's College. By raising funds for bursaries and investing in sports facilities, we are enriching the educational experience while reaffirming our commitment to expanding access and promoting excellence. The board is deeply inspired by this strategy, and we look forward to working closely with our community to achieve these vital goals."

Over the next three years, the college will work in partnership with supporters – including the RGC Parents' Association and the Gordonian Association – to advance this vision and build stronger connections across the Robert Gordon's community.



Left to right: Robin Macpherson, Laura Presslie, Kevin Reynard

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STRENGTH IN DEPTH: REFLECTING ON 2025 AT BOSKALIS

Author: Stuart Cameron, Managing Director

As 2025 draws to a close, it is an opportunity for us to look back on a year that has allowed us to develop both our commitment to the North Sea and our operational capability. At Boskalis Subsea Services, our responsibility goes beyond delivering offshore solutions, it is about safeguarding the long-standing industry which has been a cornerstone of the region for decades and strengthening the communities we serve. We need to ensure our strategy allows us to join conversations that will shape the future of energy industry for generations to come.

Driving the future of energy

At the heart of Boskalis is our allegiance to Aberdeen and ensuring we continue to attract the best talent to the region. We continue to beat the drum that Aberdeen still has a major part to play in the global energy industry, making significant investment in our operations and technology. Our ongoing development of our Remote Operations Centre (ROC) demonstrates this belief as we have invested £40million in this capability.

Phase one is complete with four of our vessels now running 24/7 engineering support remotely. We look forward to the delivery of four new Work Class ROV's and four new Cougar ROV's and the integration of those into our ROC.

We see opportunity in the region and are proud to be contributing to the North Sea's progression as it balances energy production as we have known it, with the future of renewables.

Our presence in the region continues to be a focus for us, and we are proud of the part we play in the growth and culture of our region.

In 2025, we proudly continued to sponsor the Aberdeen FC Women's Team and supported the Player of the Year Awards, as well as key initiatives with the Aberdeen FC Community Trust. For us, these partnerships reflect our shared values of teamwork and ambition.

Leading positive change

A particular highlight for us this year was sponsoring the Crew Parade at the Tall Ships Races in Aberdeen, one of the city's most celebrated events in recent years. To see the streets filled with international crews and local pride was a vivid reminder of Aberdeen's enduring status as a global maritime hub, and we were honoured to play a part in such a special occasion. Our dedication to making a positive difference extends beyond our offshore operations, as we focus on supporting the local community and charitable causes.

Across our UK operations, we've raised £30,000 for our charity partners, Autism & Neurodiversity North Scotland (A-ND) and UCAN Charity, through a range of initiatives that brought our people together.

From team participation in Run Garioch to creative fundraising through our Boskalis Worldwide Connected radio show, our colleagues have shown how small actions can create big impact. The same sense of teamwork that defines our offshore operations has fuelled our community efforts, and we are immensely proud of the enthusiasm and generosity that made this possible.



Engaging in conversation

This year, we also had the privilege of hosting Energy Minister Michael Shanks at our Aberdeen office and on board the BOKA Polaris.

The discussions held with the Minister centred on the challenges facing the industry as a whole and what changes must be implemented imminently to meet the demands of the future.

We were pleased to have the opportunity to address these challenges directly with the minister, laying our learned experience out in the hope we can assist the necessary shaping of the future collaboration between both the government and the energy industry.

Looking ahead

Looking forward to 2026, we remain focused on the impact we can make as a business, an employer and a member of the community. We are dedicated to enhancing the capabilities of the ROC, developing our workforce and supporting causes that mean a lot to our region. We also remain committed to the North Sea and the people who give their all to see our industry thrive and develop how we know it can.

2025 has reinforced our commitment to the region. It has allowed us to understand our focus is not only on what we deliver offshore, but in the positive change we can create back onshore. At Boskalis, we are proud to be part of Aberdeen's story and even prouder to help shape its future.



THE NOOK – SAMH'S RESPONSE TO THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

The game-changing hub slashing barriers to mental health support

By Danny McKay

"No referrals, no barriers, no appointments required. People will be able to walk in off the street and start a mental health conversation."

That's how Alex Cumming, executive director of delivery and service development for SAMH, summed up the goal with the organisation's mental health hubs – Nooks.

The first opened in Glasgow in October, with an Aberdeen Nook set to launch next summer on the ground floor of Marischal Square – the unit formerly occupied by Tony Macaroni.

The walk-in hubs will do away with waiting lists, appointments, rejection and barriers, eventually creating a national network of free, readily available mental health support.

SAMH (Scottish Action for Mental Health) has been supporting Scotland's mental health for more than a century through over 70 different services across the country.

In Aberdeen, the organisation is best known for its work around suicide prevention and community engagement.

Alex said: "Unfortunately we are experiencing a mental health crisis in Scotland – and that's not language that I use lightly.

"The reality is that double the number of people experience mental health problems now than they did 10 years ago.

"At the moment, the mental health system is not set up to meet that demand. It's funneling people through to places where they're waiting a long time or, in the cases of young people, they're actually being rejected from those services.

"We need to have places that are more focused on prevention and early intervention that will provide that much broader support.

"That's where SAMH and other third sector organisations are really important.

"We can be innovative, we can adapt and be quite fleet of foot to react to different challenges and problems facing communities. We've done that quite recently in Aberdeen and also in Inverclyde where we've been supporting a group of asylum seekers with their mental health.

"SAMH is also really important in relation to advocating for people and challenging inequalities.

"We do that through our campaigning work and public affairs work, and very soon we'll be launching a new stigma campaign which will have a broad, general public behavioral change focus.

"It will also look at challenging some policy areas with the Scottish government as well."

Designed to "declutter" and simplify the mental health system and the way in which people can access support, Alex explained how The Nook will work.

"*QUITE OFTEN, PEOPLE REFLECT AND THEY DIDN'T REALISE THAT THEY NEEDED TO SPEAK TO SOMEBODY.*"



Alex Cumming, SAMH executive director of delivery and service development



From left, Alex Cumming, executive director of service and delivery at SAMH; Claire Wilson, ACHSCP chief officer for adult social work; Hussein Patwa, chair of Aberdeen Integration Joint Board; Billy Watson, chief executive of SAMH; and Kevin Dawson, ACHSCP community mental health lead. Credit: Norman Adams / Aberdeen City Council

"The Nook is our response to the current mental health crisis. We believe that we need to take action," he said.

"We opened our first Nook in Glasgow in October and we're going to be coming to Aberdeen next summer. It's going to be a network of national mental health hubs across Scotland.

"We want to be there to declutter the mental health system for people. People will be able to access support for themselves or for loved ones.

"No referrals, no barriers, no appointments required. People will be able to walk in off the street and start a mental health conversation.

"Within The Nook, you'll be able to get one-to-one support, group work, support from peer workers as well as training and capacity building around mental health."

Alex explained The Nook aims to tackle age group and postcode barriers to support, with anyone aged 10-plus able to walk in and access help.

He was also keen to stress the importance of opening up and talking about mental health to remove the stigma.

He said: "I always go back to the old line 'a problem shared is a problem halved'. Quite often people reflect and they didn't realise that they needed to speak to somebody. There's a huge weight lifted off their shoulders when they've been listened to and somebody has supported them.

"The biggest misconception for me is that lots of us still believe that by asking about someone's mental health, asking if they're okay or maybe asking if they have got suicidal thoughts, that in some way we're going to make things worse and have a negative impact.

"That is absolutely not the case.

"Actually, quite often we need to get over our own embarrassment and be brave and ask those questions. What that demonstrates is that you're there for someone, you care for them and when they are ready to talk, you'll be there for them."

In the workplace, employers also have their role to play in making wellbeing a priority and fostering positive, open environments.

Alex said: "Being in work is inherently a good thing for all of us. It gives us purpose and quite often gives us identity. We all recognise that, whether it be directly in work or in our personal lives, we can all face challenges and we can all face really stressful times.

"I think one of the most important things we can do, particularly as leaders within organisations, is acknowledge and call it out when things have been tough within an organisation.

"If a team has faced a really stressful timescale or project that has included some challenges, just acknowledging that from senior leadership is really important."

SAMH
Scottish Action for Mental Health

Make 2026 the year of positive change for your people

By Jason Stewart, Commercial Director, Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce

In my role at Britain's leading Chamber of Commerce, I hold the privileged position enabling my team and I to support our 1,300+ brilliant member organisations in a number of ways. One common theme pops-up time and time again when speaking to our members – the commitment to develop and retain key staff.

Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce share this commitment, and alongside our dedicated training manager, Dianne Gardiner (dianne.gardiner@agcc.co.uk) and our highly efficient support team, we are passionate about helping our members to develop their workforce through skills training.

The theme of this edition is 'positive change', and as we enter 2026, we have to ask ourselves – will this be the year of positive change for our people? Which changes and improvements do we need to implement within our teams? How do we show our employees a career path and our investment in them and their professional development? That is where Chamber training kicks in.

At the Chamber we are proud to offer training courses designed by business, for business. We have trained thousands of talented delegates for hundreds of companies in important development areas including management and leadership, HR, finance, key business skills, digital marketing and international exporting.

Our training courses on average receive a delegate rating of 4.9/5.

In late 2025, the Chamber hosted a VIP preview day alongside our training partners, allowing the companies who maximise their investment in training to hear first hand from our trainers about the methodologies and learning styles enjoyed by delegates. Attendees also heard about the advantageous fees on offer to Chamber members, and how we have supported members with more complex training needs – for example by providing tailored training courses where we send our trainers to a venue chosen by the member company on a date chosen by them – providing flexibility, tailored content and certainty.



In my opinion you never stop learning, especially in a professional capacity, regardless of seniority within your organisation. At the Chamber we believe development of skills are essential to help our members do better business, and we are proud to play our part to help our members upskill their workforce.

So, if 2026 is a year of positive change for your organisation when it comes to people development, please get in touch with our training team on training@agcc.co.uk or 01224 343900.

We would love to hear from you.



TRAINING BROCHURE

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Real stories from Chamber members



Featured Trainer: *Victoria Vyalikova, BrandHouzz*

I work with B2B teams who are done with guesswork and need their marketing to drive real business outcomes: more qualified leads, better positioning, and growth they can measure.

Since 2005, I've helped global multinationals, start-ups, and not-for-profits navigate marketing in complex, high-trust sectors: energy, logistics, oil and gas, procurement, legal, and government services. I've led strategy on multimillion-pound campaigns and rolled up my sleeves for zero-budget projects. The context changes, but the principles stay the same: clarity, consistency, and commercial focus.

I train marketers, business owners, and commercial leaders to cut through noise and build digital strategies that support long sales cycles, technical buyers, and demanding commercial targets.

My approach is grounded in experience, not just theory. I cover everything from audience definition and messaging to campaign architecture and AI tools that save time without sounding robotic.

If you need marketing that supports growth, not just activity - I'll help you get there with clarity and confidence.



Driving innovation for Scotland's future

It takes an ambitious vision to shape the future of enterprise, entrepreneurship and societal impact - the University of Aberdeen has that, and the solid strategy needed to deliver it.

Access to the resources required to help turn business ideas into reality is the cornerstone of driving innovation for Scotland's future. Through our 'The Founder's Journey' course, we have created a resource for all students to ensure every single one of them, regardless of their discipline or level of study, has an unmistakable entry point into our entrepreneurial curriculum.

We are also normalising and nurturing entrepreneurial mindset among our staff to encourage pursuit of commercialisation of research.

Rooted in our foundational purpose of serving others, our Innovation Strategy, created to support delivery of both the Scottish Government Innovation Strategy and our Regional Economic Strategy, in line with our five-year Knowledge Exchange & Innovation Fund Strategy, is designed to underpin transformation of ideas into real-world solutions that enhance quality of life, drive sustainability, and support economic growth regionally, nationally and globally.

Our strategy is built around five core pillars, which guide our activities and programmes for both students and staff, foster industry collaborations, and provide the infrastructure to support bold, impactful ventures:

People - Empowering students and staff to develop entrepreneurial skills through programmes such as our ESBF-supported 'Lightbulb' Ideas Competition, a Student Summer 'Take-Off' Accelerator, the Innovate UK 'ICURe Discover North East'

programme and our Entrepreneurs in Residence.

Place - Aligning our activity with Scotland's regional economic priorities, being a partner and co-signatory of the North-east Scotland Investment Zone and envisioning environments like the King's Innovation Quarter, a future hub for university-business co-location and collaboration in the heart of our Old Aberdeen campus.

Partnership - Working closely with regional and national organisations to amplify resources, avoid duplication, and accelerate progress in areas of focus, specifically green energy, digital technologies, life sciences, and food, drink and agriculture, aligning with regional priorities and the contributing to the North-east Scotland Investment Zone.

Process - Simplifying how new businesses are created from the university by adopting a 'founder friendly' approach, including a revised Intellectual Property, Equity and Revenue Sharing Policy that reduces our equity stake in new spinouts to as low as 5%.

Platform - Building the digital, physical, and human infrastructure that supports entrepreneurship, from incubating startups to powering collaborative research, including our monthly breakfasts and ABVentures!

The university is home to inspiring new ventures that showcase



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UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN

Author: Dr Heather May Morgan, Dean for Enterprise and Innovation at the University of Aberdeen

Scotland's innovation strength. Recent examples of spin-outs include Brigid Bio, founded by Professor Carol Munro with Dr Soumya Palliyil and Professor Andy Porter, which is pioneering antibody treatments to fight life-threatening fungal infections; Hychor, founded by Dr Jani Shibuya, is developing groundbreaking technology to produce clean hydrogen directly from seawater; and we have also seen student success with multi-award winning CAnswer BioSolutions Limited, a company led by one of our graduates, Dr Soham Mitra, to develop an innovative portable biopsy kit for community use, and AI-based cancer diagnostic software to help the surgeons and pathologists reduce diagnostic waiting times and cut the dependence on operating theatres.

These success stories illustrate the university's role in supporting and promoting transformative ideas that move from labs to markets, delivering solutions to some of the world's greatest challenges.

By empowering people, building partnerships and fostering a culture of innovation, the university is building on its reputation of helping to shape a future where ideas thrive and impact lasts for generations.

OPINION

BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



Neil Forbes,
Partner/Corporate Lawyer
Stronachs LLP

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

During my 30-plus years with Stronachs I have worked with many exceptional lawyers who have influenced me in one way or another.

It is difficult (and potentially divisive) to pick any one individual from these so I won't name names.

They know who they are! I can tell they have had an influence on me by the number of times I find myself nowadays regurgitating their sage words to younger colleagues.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

Ignoring the five years spent at university to become a lawyer, I would have to say it is the in-house training delivered by senior colleagues at the start of my career.

Throughout my career, I have found gaining the benefit and wisdom of more experienced colleagues to be absolutely invaluable.

What's the biggest lesson you have learned in business?

As a younger lawyer I was told by a senior colleague that a career as a corporate lawyer was "a marathon and not a sprint". I am not sure that

I fully understood the comment at the time, but I certainly do now. I have also learned that it takes all sorts to make a successful business and thankfully not everyone is like me.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

I could say becoming a partner in Stronachs but really my proudest career moments and the ones that give me most satisfaction are where our team has delivered exceptional results for clients.

I have been involved in many complicated, time pressured transactions during my career and there is always a great feeling of achievement (and relief) when we get these over the line.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

I was born and raised in Aberdeen, and it took me a while and some travel to appreciate just what a great place it is.

In a professional capacity, the number of interesting and diverse people and businesses I come across in the North and North-east of Scotland never ceases to astonish me.

The level of skills, expertise and innovation in the region is something we should be really proud of.

These businesses and business owners need to be provided with an environment which will allow them to thrive. It would be nice to think that our governments understand this.

What was your first job?

Working in the summer holidays for a tree nursery planting saplings and weeding as a 15-year-old. I think that is when I decided I would become a desk jockey.

Who or what inspires you most?

My wife and three children without whom I would be retired.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

As a lawyer, when I am told something is not agreed because it is "not market".

How do you relax?

Watching sport and whisky.

If you had the power to change one thing in the world, what would it be?

On the basis I am not a beauty queen, I will avoid the obvious answers. Scotland winning the World Cup.

QUICK-FIRE ROUND

NOR Steps onto the Global Stage with Key Acquisitions in Singapore and the USA

“Opening our new facilities in Singapore is not just about expanding our footprint — it represents a major milestone in NOR Offshore Rental’s global journey and our commitment to growing in the Asia-Pacific region. With the combined strengths of Clockwise Subsea and NOR, we are ready to deliver enhanced subsea solutions to a broader, more diverse clientele. Being physically present in Singapore, Malaysia, India, and soon Australia, allows us to build stronger relationships with our partners and clients. This proximity is key to delivering

quality, reliable service — a core part of NOR’s DNA — and none of our success would be possible without the dedication of our talented employees worldwide.”

**Tore Gautesen –
CEO, NOR Offshore Rental**

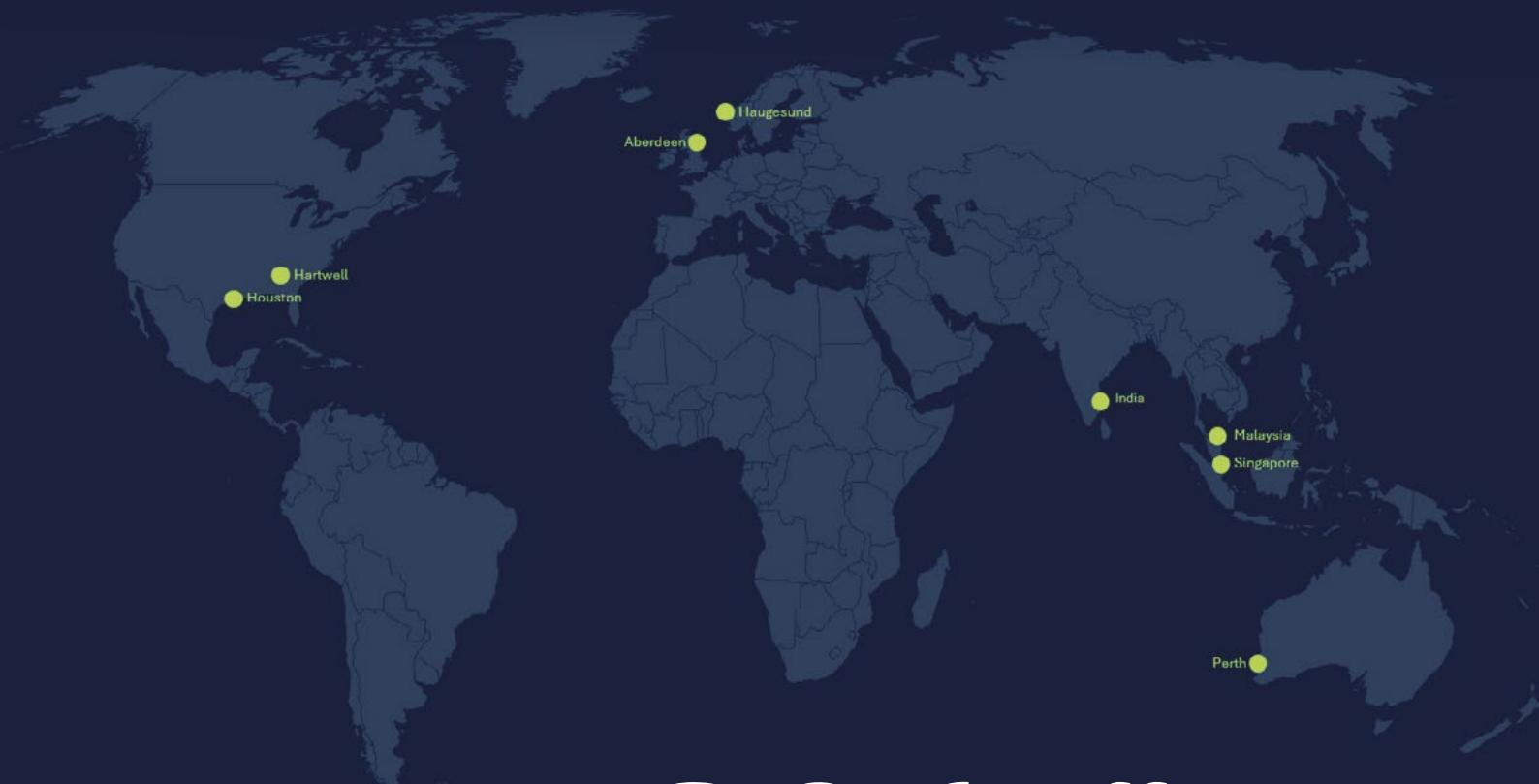


“I’m truly excited about what’s ahead for NOR Offshore Rental. By joining forces with Echo81, we’re not just combining operations — we’re combining people, passion, and expertise.

The team at Echo81 brings an incredible drive and capability that will help take NOR to the next level. Together, we’re strengthening our local roots while expanding our global reach — offering clients even greater access to world-class rental solutions and the reliable service that defines NOR.

This partnership is about more than growth; it’s about bringing together great people who share a vision of raising the standard across our industry. Here’s to what we can achieve — together”

Jostein Jansen – CCO, NOR Offshore Rental



nor Offshore
Rental

Powering the future: SSE Transmission commits to 600 'earn as you learn' roles between now and 2030



First Minister John Swinney with graduate engineer Deepanjali Dayal and trainee engineer Isla Mackay

SSEN Transmission has reaffirmed its commitment to the energy workers of the future through 600 'earn as you learn' roles between now and 2030, marking a significant investment in the next generation of talent powering the north of Scotland's transmission network.

The announcement was made at a special event at SSE's Training Centre in Perth attended by the First Minister for Scotland, John Swinney, who welcomed SSE Transmission's bold commitment.

The First Minister praised the initiative as a vital step in supporting Scotland's green energy ambitions and ensuring access to high-quality, future-focused employment opportunities in Scotland.

As part of its ongoing major recruitment drive, where the company has grown from around 400 people in 2019 to 2,500 and rising today, SSE Transmission has committed to have 5% of its workforce in 'earn as you learn' roles at any time. This commitment is opening doors for young people across a range of disciplines, from aspiring engineers, environmental specialists and planners, to join the rapidly growing electricity transmission sector.

The roles will support early careers through ramped up recruitment for trainee programmes, summer placements, graduate schemes and apprenticeships, offering a wide range of opportunities for young people to gain hands-on experience and build meaningful careers in infrastructure powering a sustainable future.

The commitment will also create new opportunities for reskilling of SSE's existing workforce and earn as you learn roles from other sectors, including oil and gas, supporting the organisation's Just Transition strategy.

These positions will be based across SSE Transmission's network area in the north of Scotland, including Wick, Elgin, Shetland and Aberdeenshire - regions at the heart of Scotland and the UK's renewable energy revolution.

The company is delivering an ambitious Pathway to 2030 programme - a major programme of electricity transmission projects that are part of the business's plans to invest at least £22billion in the coming years.

This investment will see the construction of new substations, subsea and underground cables and overhead lines across the north of Scotland. The programme will unlock Scotland's homegrown, clean power potential, and deliver the infrastructure needed to meet national energy security and clean power targets, all while bringing jobs and local benefits to the community.

First Minister John Swinney said: "This investment from SSE Transmission is great news for Scotland's workforce, renewables industries, economy, and our green, clean future.

"The Scottish Government's Green Industrial Strategy is all about making sure everyone benefits from the global transition to net zero. Apprenticeships play a critical role in all of this, providing current and future workforces with in-demand, lifelong skills.

"Since 2023-24, we have invested over £185 million annually in high-quality apprenticeships - to meet the needs of employers, workforces, young people, and the Scottish economy.

"We will continue to work with employers like SSE to shape provision and drive innovation - creating good, green jobs to help us all capitalise on Scotland's vast renewables potential."

Greenwell champions wellbeing with sit/stand desks across its workforce

Aberdeen-based Greenwell Equipment has introduced sit/stand desks for all its employees as part of a company-wide commitment to health, wellbeing and productivity in the workplace.

The family-run business, which supplies new and refurbished office furniture across the North-east, believes in leading by example when it comes to creating a healthier working environment. Every member of staff at Greenwell - from its directors to its sales and design teams - now uses a height-adjustable desk as part of their daily routine.

Alternating between sitting and standing throughout the day has proven benefits for posture, circulation and concentration, helping to reduce fatigue and back strain while boosting focus and energy levels.



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The MEMBER MEET the M



Adam Sroka,
Chief Executive Officer
Hypercube

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Hypercube builds AI and technology solutions for the energy sector. It combines industry knowledge with advanced AI, data and cloud capabilities to address the complex challenges of the energy market.

Hypercube delivers tailored AI strategies, scalable solutions, and long-term support to drive real-world impact.

Who are your customers?

We work across the entire energy market ecosystem, from supporting critical cloud infrastructure for oil and gas majors through to building machine learning models for flexible asset energy trading. Our deep domain expertise in energy enables us to build and support the best technical solutions for our customers and deliver value to them quickly. Based locally in Aberdeen and headquartered in Scotland, we have long-standing relationships with many Aberdeen energy companies and look forward to strengthening this further as part of the chamber.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

We are scaling quickly, so one of our biggest challenges is keeping up with hiring and growth! The opportunity is being part of the energy sector,

a market that is innovating and rapidly embracing change and modernisation.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

There is a lot of hype around AI and emerging technologies powered by AI, but the principles of secure, well-governed data and technology practices still hold true. I would recommend prioritising the business value you want to achieve, making the right technical solution your enabler, rather than leading with technology.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

The opportunity to connect and keep up to date with the incredible range of organisations driving innovation across the North-east.



Alex Solovskoy,
Director
Alba Investigations

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

We're a discreet, professional private investigation agency based in Aberdeen, delivering high-quality surveillance, tracing, and intelligence services to legal, corporate, and private clients across Scotland.

Who are your customers?

Solicitors, insurance firms, oil and gas companies, employers, and private individuals looking for answers and evidence.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Be visible, be useful, and make time to connect in person - it often pays off when you least expect it.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

Access to a network of decision-makers and the credibility that comes from being part of a trusted local business community.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Raising awareness that professional, ethical investigation services exist locally - and proving that hiring a PI isn't just for TV dramas.

MEMBER MEET the ME



Andrew Thomson,
Managing Director, North Sea & US GoM
Contrak Catering Services

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Contrak Catering Services is an independently owned market leader in the provision of catering, housekeeping and support services to the offshore, marine and renewable market segments. We deliver world class service by focusing on our vision: "Even the simplest of tasks conducted with passion."

Who are your customers?

We are solely focused on offshore customers working onboard fixed, floating and mobile assets, accommodation barges, drilling assets, DSVs and OSVs and wind intervention vessels.

Focused on the North Sea, Gulf of Mexico, West Africa, Middle East and South East Asia, we have delivered our services in over 25 countries.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

With our rapid growth in the Middle East and South East Asia, and now focused on establishing ourselves in the North Sea and US Gulf, I'd say our continued growth trajectory is both the largest challenge and opportunity, as we continue to always deliver on our promises to clients every single day.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

As a new member I am not sure I am qualified to answer this just yet!

At this point I would just say get involved, make sure you prioritise that and make it happen.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

The strong independent voice the Chamber has at such an important time for the North-east of Scotland, and that voice is such a broad representation of so many members from differing walks of life.

You can feel the strength that comes from the diversity, which has real common purpose.



Craig Franklin,
Managing Director & DGSA
Franklin DGSA Consultancy Limited

Give us the elevator pitch for your business.

Having spent over 30 years dealing with all aspects of dangerous goods, such as packing, training and consultancy throughout the UK, Franklin DGSA was set up in April 2024.

Our services surrounding dangerous goods include expert training courses for air, sea and road, this includes radioactive material. We also provide Dangerous Goods Safety Advisor (DGSA) Consultancy which is a legal requirement if your company is involved in the handling, loading, unloading and transportation of dangerous goods.

Who are your customers?

Our clients are based all throughout the UK and cover a variety of different industries, this currently includes whisky/distilleries, haulage companies, oil and gas drilling, renewables, petrochemical, decommissioning, marine engineering and more.

What is the biggest challenge and opportunity your organisation is facing right now?

Our biggest challenge is the ever-changing regulations surrounding the transport of dangerous goods, but in particular, lithium batteries.

These items are ever changing, and evolving, therefore pose challenges with transporting. There are also the challenges in place when airlines and shipping lines impose new requirements regularly.

What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?

Ensure you utilise all that the Chamber has to offer as part of your membership.

What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?

In addition to the support and advice available? I think having a large amount of companies all connected and working together, locally, is fantastic for all involved.



SJA Property Solutions

Launches New Website and Expands into Kitchens & Bathrooms

SJA Property Solutions, part of the SJA Property Group, has officially launched its new website – www.sjapropertysolutions.com – marking an important step forward as the company continues to grow and specialise in kitchen and bathroom projects, alongside full-home renovations across Aberdeen and the Shire.

Founded in Aberdeen, SJA Property Solutions has steadily evolved from a small refurbishment team into a trusted name in local property improvement. Known for its reliable service, high workmanship standards, and clear communication, the company has built long-term relationships with both homeowners and investors across the region. Built by Experience.

The business was founded by Shaun Murray, James Duguid, and Alexander (Ali) Pittendreigh, three directors who bring practical experience across construction, property, and business management.

- Shaun Murray oversees the construction and project delivery side of the business, ensuring every job runs smoothly and to specification.
- James Duguid focuses on operational structure and process, helping maintain consistency and quality as the company grows.
- Ali Pittendreigh manages client relations and business

development, bringing together the group's wider network and forward planning.

Together, they've built a company focused on straightforward service, clear communication, and dependable results. A focus on Kitchens and Bathrooms with the new website launch, SJA Property Solutions is highlighting its growing specialization in kitchen and bathroom renovations – areas that have become a core part of the company's workload.

From practical upgrades to full redesigns, SJA manages every stage of the process, coordinating trusted local trades to deliver work that balances function, durability, and design. The team's attention to detail and client-first approach have become hallmarks of the company's reputation throughout Aberdeen and the Shire.

"Kitchens and bathrooms are often the most important parts of a home," says Director Shaun Murray. "Our aim is to make the process as simple as possible for clients, from planning through to completion." A Modern Platform for a Local Business

The new website – www.sjapropertysolutions.com – gives clients an easy way to explore

recent projects, learn more about the company's services, and make direct enquiries.

It features:

- A gallery of completed kitchen, bathroom, and renovation work
- Simple enquiry forms for quotations and consultations
- Information on full-house refurbishments, maintenance, and extensions

Like the business itself, the site is practical, clear, and built around the customer experience.

Looking ahead as SJA Property Solutions continues to expand across Aberdeen and the Shire, the company remains focused on what matters most – quality work, honest communication, and strong local relationships.

With its new website now live and a growing reputation across the region, SJA Property Solutions is well placed to keep delivering the type of projects that speak for themselves – professional, reliable, and built to last.

Visit: www.sjapropertysolutions.com
 Follow: @sjapropertysolutions
 Contact: projects@sjaproperty.com



Mearns & Gill acquire Scottish Self-Build and Renovation Events from Etiom

Mearns & Gill, the Aberdeen-based creative marketing agency, has announced the acquisition of the Scottish Self-Build and Renovation annual events, alongside its online trades' directory and job referral portal, from Etiom Limited for an undisclosed figure.

The acquisition marks a new chapter for Scotland's leading platform dedicated to self-builders, renovators, and home improvers.

With immediate effect, Mearns & Gill has assumed full ownership and operational responsibility for the events, which will return in 2026 with confirmed dates of March 7 for the Thainstone Exchange, Inverurie event and September 19 for the Macdonald Aviemore Resort event.

Harper UK expands portable power unit fleet with £800,000 investment

In a bold move that underscores its commitment to innovation and client safety, Harper UK has announced an £800,000 investment to expand and upgrade its fleet of Portable Power Units (PPUs).

These purpose-built systems - long trusted across the marine and offshore sectors - are now being reintroduced with an enhanced specification that sets a new benchmark for operational performance.

Power and performance at the push of a button

Harper UK's latest generation of PPUs are designed with one clear goal: to make power deployment faster, safer, and more efficient. Engineered as a single-lift, plug-and-play solution, each unit can be fully operational on a vessel's back deck in as little as 15 minutes, dramatically reducing both downtime and lift operations.

"Our clients want two things: savings and safety," explains Gemma Burnett, commercial director at Harper UK. "This investment delivers both. It's about getting operations running faster, keeping costs under control, and giving everyone the confidence that safety comes first."

Engineered for speed, built for safety

Every PPU in the new fleet is a self-contained powerhouse, combining critical systems and storage into a single, compact structure. Each unit includes:

- 240 CFM Compressor
- 400 kVA Tier 5 Generator
- 12 x Welding Plants
- Dedicated storage for cabling, tooling, and consumables — everything needed, securely housed and ready for use
- Integrated Fire Alarm System, installed and tested for rapid response
- Emergency Stop System, offering instant full-system shutdown and seamless vessel integration
- Comprehensive Surround Lighting for improved safety and visibility in all weather conditions

By consolidating these essential systems into one streamlined lift, Harper UK reduces complexity, operational time, and potential risks — all while improving efficiency for marine and offshore crews working in demanding environments.

A safer, smarter future for offshore operations

The expanded fleet reflects Harper UK's continued mission: to help clients achieve minimal downtime, lower operational costs, and uncompromising safety standards. With every element engineered to simplify deployment and safeguard personnel, the upgraded PPUs embody the company's philosophy — elite by performance, elite by design.



BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



Hazel McIlwraith,
Director of Fundraising & Major Appeal
Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH)

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

I started my career in acting and musical theatre, so in the early days my biggest influence was Barbra Streisand - an incredible performer who embodies versatility, resilience, and determination. Over time, my inspiration has evolved to come from strong women who carve their own paths and lead with authenticity and purpose. And, if I'm honest, I've learned to be my own biggest influence - continually driving, striving, and pushing myself to do more, to grow, and to make a real difference through my work.

What's the most effective piece of training or personal development you have undertaken?

The most effective training I've ever had was in musical theatre and acting. It taught me far more than stagecraft - it taught me to understand people. Acting is about relationships: reading emotion, interpreting motivation, and connecting authentically. You learn to really listen - to what's said and what isn't. That foundation shapes how I lead, fundraise, and build partnerships today. Whether with colleagues, donors, or stakeholders, it's about empathy, trust, and genuine connection. Acting taught me to step into others' shoes and see through their eyes - a skill that underpins every meaningful relationship and success I've achieved.

What's the biggest lesson you have learned in business?

The biggest lesson I've learned in business - and especially in fundraising - is resilience. You can pour your heart into an idea or partnership and still hear "no." I used to see that as failure; now I see it as progress. Every "no" brings you closer to the "yes" that matters. Fundraising is about belief - in your cause, your strategy, and your ability to inspire others. Setbacks are inevitable, but resilience turns them into growth. It's not just about bouncing back; it's about bouncing forward - learning, adapting, and building relationships grounded in trust, purpose, and perseverance.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

I've helped raise over £75million for charities, leading major campaigns that transformed services and spaces across the UK - but I believe the proudest moment is always the next one. For me, that will be The Nook in Aberdeen in 2026: a walk-in mental health hub offering free, stigma-free support with no appointments or referrals. It's more than a building - it's a statement of hope and change. Bringing it to life with our incredible partners and communities will be my proudest achievement yet, because it's not just about raising money - it's about transforming lives and creating lasting impact.

What's the best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland?

The best thing about doing business in the North-east of Scotland is the people - resilient, loyal, and full of genuine community spirit. The region's proud industrial and entrepreneurial heritage is matched by how grounded and generous its people are. Relationships here are built to last; once people believe in your purpose, they back you wholeheartedly. In fundraising and partnership work, that authenticity is everything. You see it in how businesses rally around causes, individuals step up to help, and communities unite when it matters most. The North-east is driven by integrity and heart - making it an inspiring place to work.

What was your first job?

Child actor.

Who or what inspires you most?

Hope.

What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

Let's circle back.

How do you relax?

Spending time with my dog - he's the cutest, most demanding little character in the world, and he has an incredible way of grounding me.

If you had the power to change one thing in the world, what would it be?

Replace stigma and judgment with empathy and support.

i-Protech celebrates 10 years of innovation, growth and green energy

i-Protech, a leading provider of security and renewable energy solutions in the North-east, is celebrating a milestone with its 10th year of business.

What began as a one-person operation providing CCTV for farmers looking to monitor their cows calving remotely, has grown into a thriving business with a team of 13 staff, as well as contractors, delivering the latest security systems, solar power installations and EV infrastructure to customers across the region and beyond.

Founded in 2015 by Stuart Munro, i-Protech was established during a challenging period in the oil and gas industry.

"I had spent many years offshore and onshore in the oil industry, working in a variety of roles with companies such as Weatherford, Expro, FMC, and more senior roles with Kvaerner and Shell," said Stuart. "When the industry faced a downturn, I felt I had had enough and wanted a new start. I saw an opportunity to do finally what I'd always wanted and that was to start my own business."

Initially focused on CCTV installations for agricultural clients, i-Protech quickly expanded its offerings to include intruder alarms and security systems, gaining accreditation along the way. Over time, the company shifted its focus to renewable energy, driven by Stuart's early ambition to enter the solar market.



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Craig White

Apollo has appointed Craig White as head of sustainability and just transition within its Decarbonisation Business Unit. Craig brings a distinguished career in designing and implementing sustainability strategies at company, regional, and national levels in the UK and Internationally.



Energy Institute Aberdeen, Highlands & Islands

The Energy Institute Aberdeen, Highlands & Islands branch has announced the appointment of a new leadership team to drive forward its activities across the region. Together, the committee will focus on three core pillars of activity.



Laura McLean

The Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen has welcomed Laura McLean as operations administrator. Laura brings a wealth of experience in administrative coordination that will be invaluable in supporting the day to day running of Trinity Hall and their wider civic activities.



Ian Milne

Integrity HSE has appointed Ian Milne as its safety and compliance manager. This strategic appointment further highlights the award-winning consultancy's ongoing investment in delivering QHSE excellence across the North-east of Scotland.



Jack Swan

rockwealth Aberdeen is delighted to announce that chartered financial planner Jack Swan has joined the team. Jack was welcomed by Lloyd, Claire and Lynsey into the firms Neo House office after seven years at AAB Wealth.



Glen Small

Johnston Carmichael has announced the appointment of Glen Small as head of construction and property, strengthening its commitment to supporting one of the UK's most vital and dynamic sectors.



Laura Whitfield

The Russell Anderson Foundation (RAF) has appointed experienced coach Laura Whitfield into the new role of education and development lead. Laura brings over 16 years' experience in education and community sport, having worked across grassroots, academy and performance pathways.



Ben Lumley

Fulkrum has appointed Ben Lumley as global head of integrity following the expansion of its dedicated asset integrity division. This marks a significant milestone in the company's ongoing strategic growth and its continued commitment to evolving client needs.



John Moffat

Odfjell Technology has appointed John Moffat as SVP Operations and P&A UK. Since joining Odfjell in 2023, John has played a key role in strengthening safety and operational performance across the UK business, as well as leading major Plug & Abandonment (P&A) projects.



Ali Pittendreigh

SJA Stays has announced that director Ali Pittendreigh will step into the newly structured business development manager role tasked with driving growth across Scotland including the wider holiday let market.



David Rodger

The River Dee Trust has welcomed David Rodger as its new trust manager. With experience across the UK Civil Service and the wider energy industry David will be working closely with existing and new supporters of the Trust.



Dr Miriam Glendell

The James Hutton Institute has appointed Dr Miriam Glendell as the new director of the Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW). Dr Glendell is currently part of the Hutton's Environmental and Biochemical Sciences Department, where she has worked as a researcher since 2016.



Azets

Azets, one of the UK's top ten regional audit, accountancy, tax and business advisory firms, has announced a series of promotions in the Aberdeen office, following the firm's financial year end in June 2025, which marked the seventh consecutive record financial year for the Aberdeen office.



CRC Evans

CRC Evans, the global leader in welding and coating services for the energy and infrastructure sectors, has appointed 13 apprentices to support its future talent development strategy.



Graeme MacLeod

UK top 50 and leading Scottish law firm Brodies LLP has bolstered its dispute resolution and risk practice with the appointment of new partner, Graeme MacLeod. Graeme brings more than 20 years' experience in commercial disputes and professional negligence.



Steve Clark

A1 Digital Solutions has appointed Steve Clark as a director of the business, marking a significant milestone in the company's evolution and leadership expansion. Steve brings a wealth of experience in digital transformation, sales leadership, and operational excellence.

Pinefield Glass awarded Supplier of the Year 2025

Leading windows, doors and glazing solutions provider Pinefield Glass has been named 'Supplier of the Year' for the North of Scotland at the Barratt Homes and David Wilson Homes National Seminar.

This accolade recognises Pinefield Glass' unwavering dedication to excellence, reinforcing its reputation as a trusted partner to some of the UK's leading homebuilders and as a company committed to raising standards across the construction industry.

The event, held at P&J Live in Aberdeen, celebrated the achievements of suppliers across the North of Scotland, highlighting those who consistently show excellence in performance, quality, aftercare and the ability to meet the demanding needs of large-scale construction programmes.

Martin Charlesworth, operations director at Elgin-based Pinefield Glass, said: "Winning this award means

everything to us. We have worked incredibly hard to build strong relationships based on shared values of quality, continuous improvement and employee development. This award is also a chance to recognise our brilliant staff and supply chain partners, who have been instrumental in achieving this success."



A baker's dozen is a welcome number for Spectrum's team in Aberdeen

Spectrum Service Solutions has announced that following a busy summer in Aberdeen, which saw the expansion of its team and the provision of services to events such as the Tall Ships Races in July, and servicing its already strong portfolio of clients, it has been awarded contracts for 13 new sites in and around the city.

Thanks to a long-established relationship with its valued client, CBRE, one of the world's leading property management and investment companies, Spectrum Service Solutions has been commissioned to manage some of the prime properties it oversees in the North of Scotland.

The additions to its growing list of clients in the North-east include nine sites for Halliburton, one of the world's largest providers of products and services for the energy industry.

There's one site for Aker Solutions that delivers integrated solutions, products, and services to the global energy industry. Another is at Enovate Systems, which designs, develops, qualifies, and manufactures solutions for the well-completion and intervention sector.

Another single site is for Chevron, the global energy company with a long-established presence in the North Sea. Finally, another single site for North East Scotland Pension Fund (NESPF) administrators of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), the third largest fund in Scotland.

On each of the 13 sites, Spectrum will provide a full range of services, including daily cleaning, sanitary, laundry, window cleaning, and janitorial.



Rebecca Bell



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