

FEBRUARY 2026 | BUSINESS OF HEALTH

# BUSINESS BULLETIN

## **Health of our economy now a top concern**

Economic growth must be put back at  
centre of policy-making in Scotland

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## **Scotland's first sober bar**

How Aberdeen's SOBR is challenging  
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Aberdeen Sports Village helping firms invest in healthier, more resilient workforces

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**Aberdeen &  
Grampian  
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# The health of our economy is now the top concern of Scots

**As Scotland heads toward the election in May, one message from voters is becoming increasingly clear: the health of our economy is now one of the country's most pressing concerns.**

Recent polling by True North Advisors shows that economy and jobs rank alongside health as the top issues facing Scotland, cited by 41% and 43% of respondents respectively.

Energy, taxation, housing and immigration also feature prominently. These are not disconnected concerns. They are deeply intertwined, and together they point to a simple but often overlooked truth - a healthy society depends on a healthy economy.

For too long, economic performance has been treated as a secondary consideration in public debate, something to be managed rather than actively strengthened. Yet without sustained economic growth, it becomes increasingly difficult to fund public services, tackle inequality or invest in long-term wellbeing. In that sense, the economy is not separate from health - it underpins it, shaping outcomes across communities, families and generations.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the North-east of Scotland. Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce represents around 1,400 businesses across the region, collectively employing over 100,000 people - around half of the local workforce. From global energy firms and exporters to small businesses embedded in our communities, these employers generate the economic activity that ultimately pays for healthcare, education and social support.

The North-east remains a net contributor to the public purse, with world-class energy capability, internationally recognised food and drink producers, two major universities and a highly skilled workforce.

But this strength should not be taken for granted. Investment confidence is fragile, costs remain high, and uncertainty around the energy transition continues to weigh heavily on business decisions. When investment stalls, the consequences are felt far beyond boardrooms, affecting household incomes, job security and community wellbeing.

Polling shows that voters instinctively understand this link. Concerns about health services do not exist in isolation from worries about jobs, wages and the cost of living.

An economy that is not growing places ever greater strain on the very public services people rely on. In that context, the idea that Scotland can tax or regulate its way to prosperity looks increasingly disconnected from reality.

As parties set out their platforms ahead of May's election, the central question should be how Scotland creates the conditions for growth. A fair and competitive tax system matters, not as an ideological position, but because investment, job creation and productivity growth are what expand the tax base in the first place.

A complex and increasingly uncompetitive system risks discouraging talent, holding back investment and ultimately reducing the resources available for public services.

Workforce issues sit at the heart of this challenge. Labour shortages, skills gaps and an ageing population are now structural features of Scotland's economy. Poor health among the working-age population, which has worsened since the pandemic, directly affects productivity and economic participation. Businesses that invest in training, occupational health and flexible working are not just supporting their employees - they are contributing to healthier, more resilient communities.





Education and skills policy therefore needs to be aligned more closely with economic reality. Universities and colleges are under severe financial pressure, yet they remain central to innovation, talent attraction and economic resilience. Strengthening work-integrated learning, graduate apprenticeships and clear pathways between education and industry is essential if Scotland is to compete in a global economy and retain its young talent.

Energy is another area where economic and societal health intersect. The North-east has powered the UK for decades and has the potential to remain a global centre for clean energy. But the transition will only succeed if it is managed with pace, clarity and realism.

Investment uncertainty, slow planning and consenting processes, and unresolved fiscal barriers are already driving skilled workers and supply-chain capability overseas. That is not just an economic risk; it is a long-term social one, with implications for communities built around energy employment.

Ultimately, this election should be a moment for honesty. Voters are rightly concerned about health services, living standards and public safety. But the polling shows they also recognise that jobs, energy and economic opportunity matter just as much. These are not competing priorities. They are part of the same system.

If Scotland wants a healthier population, stronger public services and more resilient communities, it must put economic growth back at the centre of policy-making. The health of our economy is no longer a niche concern for business alone. It is now one of the defining issues of the election – and rightly so.

*Russell Borthwick*  
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.

Without their support we would not be able to undertake much of the work that we do. Their engagement is hugely valued and appreciated.

If you are interested in joining them, we'd love to talk to you!





# The Business of Health: Why It Matters

By Professor Shantini Paranjothy  
Director of Public Health, NHS Grampian



**Across Scotland, an estimated 812,200 people aged 16-64 are economically inactive - not in work and not seeking work. Increasingly, this inactivity is linked to health conditions or disability, with one in three inactive individuals out of work for these reasons.**

The challenge is stark: few people return to work after health-related inactivity. Only 18.4% re-enter employment within a year, and just 2.3% return after two years away. Barriers include a lack of suitable and fair work, discrimination, limited inclusivity in recruitment, and complexities within the benefits system.

Our workforce is ageing, and health-related inactivity is rising among younger people too - rates for 16-24 year olds have almost trebled since 2005. Meanwhile, around 800,000 people currently in work live with a long-term health condition or disability, increasing the risk of leaving employment altogether.

Fair work matters. Jobs that offer security, supportive relationships, flexibility, and control can help protect health and keep people in work. Yet, fair work is not universal:

- 16.7% of employees are in low-quality work
- 26% report work negatively impacts mental health; 24% say it affects physical health
- Many lack influence over hours, tasks, or pay, and experience conflict or poor consultation on change.

## Creating healthier, fairer workplaces isn't just good for employees - it's good for business.

There are practical things businesses could do: and we can offer 'how to' support with these

- Become a Real Living Wage employer including living hours - providing secure contracts and a guaranteed minimum set of hours so staff have certainty on their income floor to help with budgeting and support better mental health
- Support financial wellbeing for staff - signposting to local organisations for financial, housing and welfare support; offer suitable workplace pensions; individual wellbeing budgets; employee assistance programmes; counselling; and mental health days
- Mental Health training for staff, including managers - such as becoming mental health first aiders, which can reduce stigma in seeking help and foster a supportive working environment
- Encouraging physical activity - reducing sedentary behaviour at work; promoting active (walking, wheeling) meetings; Cycle to Work scheme; in-house gym and sports facilities; subsidised gym memberships

- Promoting healthier eating through workplace meal options, particularly where employees are required to perform duties on physical sites

**NHS Grampian's Public Health Workplace Team is here to support north-east business leaders with a host of short, free online training courses.**

Delivered by NHS Grampian Public Health Workplace Team, the courses and awareness sessions identify the key factors that contribute to a mentally and physically healthy workplace, ensure managers are aware of their responsibilities in relation to wellbeing and improve managers skills and confidence in dealing with staff health and retention in the workplace.

Courses and awareness sessions are delivered virtually on Teams. The course content is most suitable for employers and for staff who have people management and supervisory responsibilities. Look out for upcoming courses in the AGCC business bulletins.

If you have any further questions please contact:  
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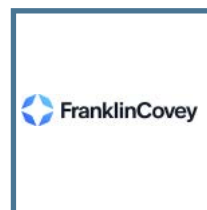
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MHA Plc is pleased to announce that the group has entered into an agreement to acquire Moore Stephens LLC, an audit practice, and Moore Stephens Consulting LLC, a tax and consulting services firm (collectively referred to as 'MS UAE') both headquartered in Dubai.

The acquisition is consistent with MHA's strategy of pursuing selective cross-border opportunities that enhance the firm's international presence.

Established in 1999, MS UAE has grown into one of the leading professional accounting practices in the region, providing audit, tax and advisory services to clients across a wide range of industries including financial services, manufacturing, construction, real estate, logistics, oil and gas, trading groups and government agencies.





# BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



**Amir Absoud,**  
*Founder and Director*  
Upstreamly

## Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

I can't pinpoint a single person. I've been shaped by many influences, from sporting heroes growing up, to colleagues across my international career, to family, friends, and even people I've met on my travels. I'm naturally curious and a good listener, so I take big inspiration from small snippets, moments, and encounters with people from all walks of life.

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

Working with my business mentor and coach has been the most effective development I've undertaken. My mentor's guidance has challenged my thinking, pushed me out of my comfort zone, and helped me focus on what really matters. The sessions have had a transformative impact on me personally and professionally, making me a more confident and effective leader.

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

Do as you would be done by. Surround yourself with the right people. These quotes speak for themselves:

"It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so that they can tell us what to do." Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple Inc.

"I surround myself with people who have knowledge and talents in areas where I might not be so well versed." Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group.

"I will only hire someone to work directly for me if I would work for that person." Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook.

## What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

My proudest career achievement has been setting up Upstreamly Chartered Accountants. For a long time, I didn't think I had an entrepreneurial edge. Taking the leap to start a firm and seeing it grow into an employer of strong talent and into a trusted partner for ambitious scale-up and growth companies has been incredibly rewarding.

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

The North-east of Scotland has a proud history at the heart of the energy industry, which has shaped both the region and its people. I'm inspired by the resilience and pride of the community here.

Add to that the stunning coastline, the Highlands, and the natural beauty on our doorstep, it's a place that combines industry with inspiration.

## What was your first job?

Manning the IT helpdesk at my university, The London School of Economics which mainly involved resetting passwords.

## Who or what inspires you most?

Some of my best ideas and decisions have come while out on a run.

## What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

This is not possible.

## How do you relax?

Running is my way of clearing my head, taking stock, and finding perspective.

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

World peace. It might sound simple, but it underpins everything else.





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# ‘I’m a psychologist by trade, I’ve got the industry knowledge now, I can put it all together’

How Shabnum Hanif founded IntrospeXion to fill the gaps in mental health support for oil and gas workers

By Danny McKay

**When Shabnum Hanif experienced burnout while working in oil and gas, she discovered gaps in the support available – and decided to do something about it.**

Having worked as a psychologist for six years before being recruited to the energy industry, Shabnum had all the right pieces and put them together to form IntrospeXion.

The behavioural risk consultancy is led by psychologists, looking at the wellbeing and mental health of employees and how what’s going on in an industry or organisation affects its people.

The company looks at how to maintain operational efficiency as well as looking after people themselves.

Shabnum began her career as a psychologist working in private hospitals around the central belt, but in 2010 she was offered a sales manager position with a geoscience consultancy via a LinkedIn message completely out of the blue.

**‘I experienced burnout as well’**

Despite not knowing anything about oil and gas, Shabnum met the challenge head on, moved up to Aberdeen and learned on the job.

She explained: “I really excelled and I like to say I was the best sales person in the world, but it wasn’t that. I was a good psychologist and I understood people and how to build relationships and trust and that helped me.”

Shabnum thrived and moved to various executive and director-level roles, but also saw a lot of people struggling.

She said: “I experienced burnout as well. I saw a lot of people suffering from dark thoughts and depression, I saw a lot of toxic behaviour and office politics. I saw a lot of stress and I was hearing about suicides offshore.

**‘There’s that gap of knowledge and you would only really fill that if you are a trained psychologist or psychotherapist’**

“When you struggled and you went to HR they’d say to take some time off.

“If you’ve got dark thoughts, the last thing you need is two weeks at home alone with your dark thoughts.

“Suffering from burnout, giving me time off was great but I was constantly having calls from work asking when I was coming back because I was in a senior role. So I didn’t really get that time to recover.

“There’s that gap of knowledge and you would only really fill that if you are a trained psychologist or psychotherapist who understands burnout and depression and trauma.

“So, when I saw that gap and I experienced it firsthand I thought ‘wait a minute, I’m a psychologist by trade, I’ve got the industry knowledge now, I can put it all together’.

“And that’s how IntrospeXion was born.”

Despite only being founded in 2024, Shabnum’s insight and passion has helped drive IntrospeXion to success.

She said: “It’s been received really well. Our biggest client is TotalEnergies.

“We travel offshore and we can be deployed straight away if there is an emergency offshore.





## **‘We’re really trying to bridge that gap and help get immediate access for workforces to help people’**

“We do a lot of work in offices as well really educating the workforce and also helping to build resilience as well as coaching for leadership and communication and how that really supports businesses.”

“In recent years, mental health, particularly at work, has been in the spotlight far more and is commonly talked about.”

Shabnum noted: “I think what’s really put that on an upwards trajectory is Covid because a lot of people struggled during that and it kind of also broke our NHS.

“On the NHS, there’s an 18-month wait period to see a counsellor, never mind a psychologist.

“We’re really trying to bridge that gap and help get immediate access for workforces to help people.

## **‘If we don’t look after the people, we’re not going to have a business’**

“We do a lot of drop-in clinics which are really popular. Essentially, we go into a business, they give us a room and it becomes a therapy or clinic for the day.

“It’s usually back-to-back. People just come in and speak about whatever they’re needing to speak about, which really highlights the mental health crisis that we have right now.”

Laying out why employee wellbeing should be a cornerstone of any successful business, Shabnum explained: “Our greatest asset in any business is our people.

“It’s not our products, it’s not our technology, and it’s not the revenue because we only get all that from the people that create that.

“If we don’t look after the people, we’re not going to have a business. That’s why it’s so important. We need to invest in the people that make the business.

“When we invest in their wellbeing, their mental health, then naturally our business elevates and becomes more successful because people are more motivated and driven.”

IntrospeXion’s success is exemplified by the double award win in November, both for the company and Shabnum herself.

Just over a year on from founding IntrospeXion, Shabnum received the Athena Award for Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyle from BWC Aberdeen.

The award recognises outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of organisations and individuals across the region, highlighting innovation, compassion and meaningful impact in the field of psychological health.

## **‘That’s why we do it, to help the people. This is why we exist’**

Shabnum described the “amazing” feeling of winning the award and said it highlighted the efforts of the whole team.

She continued: “Being a business owner, one thing I think people forget to do, especially in their first year, is to reflect and look back.

“It was just such a great recognition of the hard work the team and I put into this and the people that we’ve helped.

“That’s why we do it, to help the people. This is why we exist. It was so humbling and after a year’s hard work it was just nice to be recognised.”

Just days after landing the Athena Award, the IntrospeXion team travelled to London for the Great British Entrepreneurial Awards (GBE Awards) and secured the Best Early-Stage Start-Up Business prize.

Shabnum added: “It was just reaffirming what we’re doing is very much needed in every industry across the nation.”

Using the awards recognition as a springboard, Shabnum also looked ahead to what the future has in store for IntrospeXion, pointing to the “demand, need and request” for its services in the Middle East.

She said: “So 2026 will see us opening an entity in the Middle East and really taking IntrospeXion out there.”



# the MEMBER MEET the



**David Wilson,**  
*Energy Director*  
ETZ Ltd

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

ETZ Ltd's vision is for Scotland to remain a global energy leader fostering a world-class supply chain

and advancing low carbon energy projects.

To accelerate this, we have launched ETZ EnergyWorks, the UK's first Energy Incubator and Scale-Up Hub, now operational here in Aberdeen.

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

We recognise the significant pressures and challenges facing the energy industry, the region, and its supply chain.

However, this also creates opportunities for collaboration through ETZ EnergyWorks and wider initiatives.

ETZ Ltd provides the expertise, networks, and resources businesses need to innovate and succeed.

## **What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?**

The pace of the energy transition means no organisation can innovate in isolation - embrace collaboration and learning.

## **What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?**

The Chamber provides unrivalled support to businesses across North-east Scotland, creating a strong sense of community while advocating for change and creating opportunities to stay connected.

ETZ Ltd is proud to be part of this network and to work alongside the Chamber in supporting the region, its companies, and its people.



**Cath Sutherland,**  
*Director*  
Highland Learning Academy

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

We specialise in workforce development by delivering professional and vocational qualifications tailored to both employers and employees. Whether you're looking to upskill your team or

prepare the next generation of talent, we provide practical, impactful learning that drives performance and growth.

## **Who are your customers?**

Our customers include individuals looking to upskill, gain formal accreditation, or take the next step in their careers through promotion. We also work closely with employers who are committed to developing their workforce and building talent from within. We also partner with schools to provide pupils with meaningful work-based learning experiences.

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

The North of Scotland presents significant opportunities for training companies, driven by the region's shift toward renewable energy, construction growth, and a strong focus on apprenticeships. With

major investment in offshore wind, hydrogen, and energy transition, there is growing demand for skilled workers and reskilling of the existing oil and gas workforce.

## **What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?**

Invest in skills before you need them — because the cost of standing still is often higher than the cost of moving forward.

## **What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?**

The best thing about being a member of the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce is access to opportunity, influence, and visibility. The combination of networking, training, advocacy and market intelligence fast tracks our ability to liaise with local business leaders and decision-makers and have a voice in policy-making whilst gaining practical support.



# MEMBER MEET *the* ME



**Fraser Young,**  
*Director*  
Outline Event Services Ltd

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

Outline Event Services is a specialist provider of custom exhibition stand design and installation, offering a complete turnkey solution for

businesses looking to make an impact at events, both locally and internationally.

From concept development to build and delivery, we bring creative vision and precision execution to every project.

## **Who are your customers?**

Our clients range from SMEs to large organisations exhibiting at trade shows or looking to enhance their office environments with custom displays.

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

Global logistics continue to be a challenge post-pandemic, but they also present an opportunity.

We've proven we can deliver internationally and are actively expanding our global reach.

## **What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?**

Strong relationships are everything.

Invest time in understanding your clients, not just delivering for them.

## **What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?**

Being part of a connected and supportive business community that encourages growth, collaboration, and visibility across the North-east.



**Andrew Chalk,**  
*Corporate Secretary - EEG*  
Marlink

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

Marlink is a global leader in satellite connectivity and digital solutions, empowering remote operations across maritime, energy, enterprise, government, utilities, and humanitarian sectors. We deliver secure hybrid networks and

intelligent digital solutions that help customers optimise operations, strengthen cyber resilience, and keep their people and systems reliably connected.

## **Who are your customers?**

Marlink serves a diverse global customer base across the maritime, energy, enterprise, government, utilities, and humanitarian sectors. From commercial shipping fleets and offshore rigs to remote enterprises and NGOs, our customers rely on us for resilient connectivity, secure IT, and operational efficiency, wherever they operate in the world.

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

Our biggest challenge, and opportunity, is supporting customers through increasing digital transformation. As operations become more digital and data-driven, cyber threats are evolving. Marlink is uniquely positioned to

deliver secure, hybrid networks and digital solutions that drive efficiency, strengthen resilience and enable digitalisation - even in the world's most remote locations.

## **What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?**

Stay collaborative. The strength of our region lies in its network. Share insights, partner on innovation, and support one another to drive sustainable growth. Embrace change, invest in digital transformation, and never underestimate the power of local connections. What you put in is what you will get back.

## **What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?**

The best thing about being an Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce member is the opportunity to connect with a dynamic network of businesses, share insights, and collaborate on innovative projects. This membership fosters growth and development through strong local connections and support.

## New research identifies role of autism genes in early brain development

A team of researchers from the University of Aberdeen has uncovered, for the first time, how genes linked to autism and intellectual disability may influence early brain development.

Their work helps determine how differences in early brain development contributes to neurodevelopmental disorders and could help identify more targeted therapies for these conditions.

Published in Nature Communications, the study looked at an often-overlooked system in the brain, known as the extracellular matrix (ECM). The ECM guides how the brain grows and controls the 'framework' of tissue growth by delivering signals, via genes, throughout the early stages of brain development.

Using data from multiple studies, the researchers investigated how genetic changes in the ECM can affect brain development. In doing so, they created the first comprehensive map of how ECM-related genes, known as the "matrisome", behave in specific brain cell types and developmental stages. They found that many of these genes are linked to neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD, autism and intellectual disability and that their activity changes dynamically as the brain matures.

Funded by The Humane Research Trust, the study highlights how different brain cell types, including neural stem cells, neurons, and blood vessel cells, use the ECM to communicate and coordinate their growth during brain development.

Although previous studies have examined individual components of the brain's ECM, none have produced a detailed, cell-by-cell map of how it develops during early brain formation.

This study is the first to combine large single-cell datasets to show how different brain cells build and modify the brain's support structure over time, revealing coordinated changes in gene expression and their links to neurodevelopmental conditions. It offers a new layer of understanding of how the brain's structural environment emerges and functions during development.

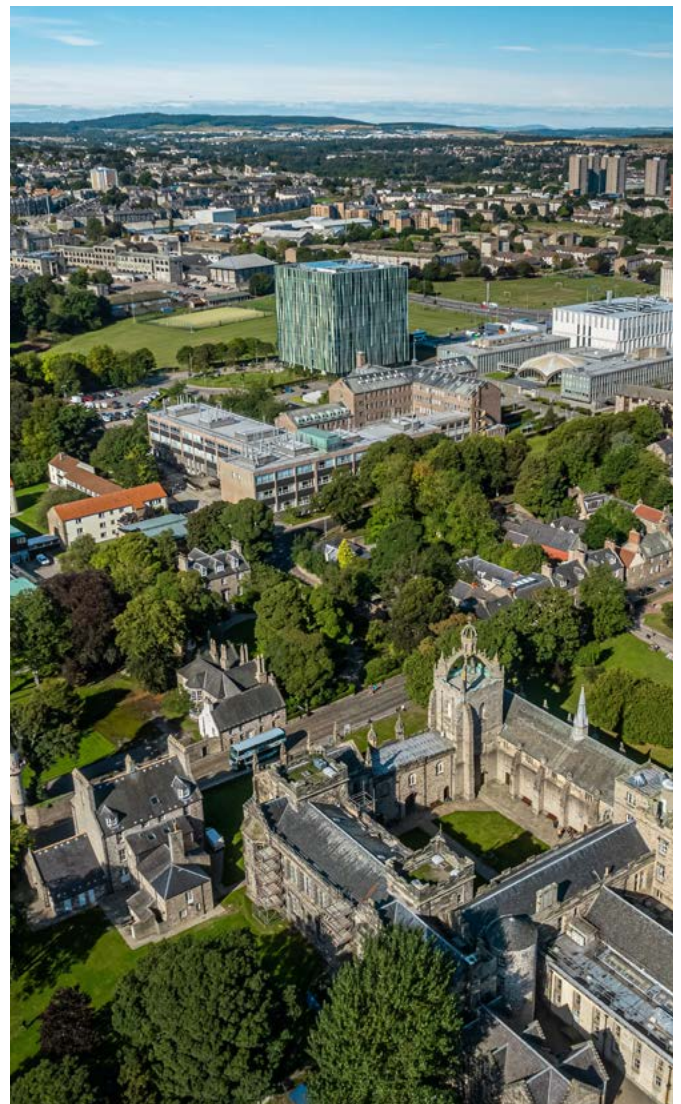
Dr Eunchai Kang, group leader at the Institute of medical sciences at the University of Aberdeen, who led the research, explains: "Human brain development is an incredibly complex process. Stem cells need to know what to become and where to go, and many different cell types have to coordinate their behaviour. This coordination happens within the dynamic environment of the ECM, which guides and supports these developing cells.

"While we know the ECM plays a crucial role in guiding these processes, its specific contributions and how changes in these pathways may relate to neurodevelopmental conditions remain underexplored."

"By pooling together data from different studies on the ECM, we have been able to create a detailed map of its activity and see how it changes over time, helping us understand what these changes may mean for the developing brain."

Dr Daniel Berg, group leader at the Institute of medical sciences at the University of Aberdeen, and co-lead of the study, adds: "Knowing which genes are active in specific cell types at different stages of early development gives us a clearer picture of how the brain is built. This will guide future experiments and help researchers study gene function in the right biological context.

"This knowledge provides an important foundation for understanding the pathways involved in developmental brain conditions. In the long term, it may also support efforts to develop more precise and targeted therapeutic approaches."





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## Asthma and Allergy Foundation achieves CPD Certification for Allergy Awareness and Adrenaline Auto-Injector Training

Asthma and Allergy Foundation is pleased to announce that its Allergy Awareness and Adrenaline Auto-Injector Training: Ensuring Safety in Emergencies Training has officially been certified by the CPD Certification Service.

This achievement marks an important milestone for the Scottish asthma charity as all its training courses, including the 'Asthma Awareness' and 'Asthma Certified' eLearning training courses have now gained the coveted Continuing Professional Development (CPD) accreditation.

Martina Chukwuma-Ezike, the organisation's chief executive, said: "This certification reflects Asthma and Allergy Foundation's continued commitment to delivering high-quality and accessible training solutions for professionals across all industries in Scotland and beyond.

"Making workplaces safer for employees with asthma and allergies and equipping all staff with the right set of skills to confidently handle emergency situations in the workplace is not optional, it is a must for all businesses, particularly in sectors such as oil and gas, aviation, education, etc."

Martina Chukwuma-Ezike





# How Balmoral Business weathered a decade of disruption

**Author:** Andrew Davidson,  
Balmoral Group

**Aberdeen's economy has faced more than its share of turbulence over the past decade. From the oil price collapse of 2014 to the impact of Covid-19 and the rapid shift to hybrid working, the city's commercial property market has been tested time and again.**

Yet through these challenges, one constant has remained: Aberdeen's capacity for resilience. And at Balmoral Business Park, that same resilience has been built into the foundations of how we support local businesses.

## **Building confidence in uncertain times**

When Balmoral opened Building One in 2014, it was a bold step. The development launched just as oil prices plummeted, triggering one of the toughest downturns in decades. But where others saw risk, Balmoral saw long-term potential.

Our approach was rooted in belief: belief in Aberdeen's skilled workforce, diverse industries and ability to reinvent itself. Rather than chasing short-term yield, we made a commitment to creating adaptable, high-quality space that could support growth - whether for start-ups needing a two-person suite or established firms seeking room for 100.

## **A home for diverse and growing businesses**

Today, more than 25 organisations call Building One home, spanning sectors from engineering and digital services to HR, health and wellbeing. Alongside our partners at Lomond House, which provides additional office, warehouse and yard space, the business park has become a thriving hub for enterprises at every stage of their journey.

Many of our tenants have grown within the park, expanding their footprint rather than moving on. That continuity reflects not only the flexibility of the space but also the sense of community and support that underpins our approach. Shared common areas, EV charging points, ample parking and responsive management ensure that businesses can focus on what they do best.

## **More than property: Reinvesting in community**

At Balmoral, success has never been about filling space. It's about creating an environment where businesses can scale with confidence - and where growth contributes to something bigger.

Income from Balmoral Business Park helps to support charitable initiatives including Friends of ANCHOR and the Milne Family Foundation. This circular model of reinvesting in people and communities is unusual in the property world, but it reflects our wider purpose as a group.

## **Looking ahead with quiet confidence**

As Aberdeen continues to diversify its economy and lead in the energy transition, the role of resilient, flexible workspaces will only grow in importance. Balmoral Business Park has shown that with patient investment and local belief, it is possible not only to weather uncertainty but to help businesses thrive through it.

For our tenants, it is more than an address. It is a place to start, to scale, and to stay. For Aberdeen, it is a reminder that the future is built step by step - through commitment, confidence and spaces that enable growth.

**balmoralHUB**  
business begins here

OPINION  
OPINION

# The health of our political parties going into the crucial 2026 election

**As Scotland enters the final stretch before May's Holyrood election, the health of our political parties matters not just to those fighting campaigns, but to businesses and communities seeking stability, clarity and credible leadership.**

The first Scotland-wide poll of 2026, conducted by Survation for True North Advisors, offers a revealing snapshot. It suggests a political system that is fragmented, volatile and, in several cases, struggling to connect with voters in a meaningful way.

The headline is clear enough. The SNP remains on course to be the largest party, projected to win 61 seats. That would leave John Swinney short of an outright majority, but still firmly in first place.

In a political landscape defined by churn and disillusionment, the SNP's steadiness is itself notable. Constituency support at 34% and list support at 28% point to a party that has stabilised after turbulence, but one that is not obviously building momentum.

For businesses, that matters. A largest-party-without-a-majority outcome implies continued reliance on deals, informal alliances or issue-by-issue negotiation. That brings uncertainty, slower decision-making and a heightened risk that economic policy becomes hostage to parliamentary arithmetic.

The more striking story, however, lies behind the SNP.

Scottish Labour and Reform UK are effectively neck-and-neck for second place. Reform's 19% constituency vote, compared to Labour's

16%, would have been unthinkable in Scottish politics even a few years ago. On the regional list, both parties sit at 18%. If borne out on election day, Labour and Reform would each return 18 MSPs.

This is not simply a protest vote story. The polling suggests a deeper challenge for Labour in Scotland: almost half of voters say the performance of the UK Labour government makes them less likely to back Scottish Labour, while just 17% say it makes them more likely.

That is a serious warning sign.

Scottish Labour's fortunes are now tightly bound to Westminster, but without the buffer of goodwill that might once have existed. Anas Sarwar's approval rating of -18% reflects a party struggling to define itself independently, at a time when voters appear increasingly sceptical of centralised power and remote





decision-making.

Reform UK, meanwhile, is disrupting the system rather than replacing it. While Survation suggests Reform's momentum may be stalling slightly, its presence is already reshaping the contest. By fragmenting opposition to the SNP, Reform makes a nationalist plurality more likely. At the same time, it exposes the vulnerability of parties that rely on legacy loyalties rather than clear propositions.

The Conservatives, often written off in Scotland, show modest signs of life, polling 13% on both votes and projected to win 12 seats. That is hardly a recovery, but it does suggest a hardened core vote remains.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats' edge over the Greens on the list vote — 11% to 9% — points to a quiet but persistent appeal in parts of the country where localism and competence still cut through.

For businesses, the broader implication is uncomfortable.

Scotland's political ecosystem is increasingly fragmented, with no obvious governing majority and a weakened centre ground. Leadership approval ratings across the board are deeply negative. At UK level, trust in senior figures is exceptionally low. Even the most popular of the UK leaders polled remains significantly underwater.

This is not a healthy environment for long-term economic planning. Investment decisions thrive on predictability, policy coherence and confidence in institutions. What the polling reveals instead is volatility, voter disengagement and a widening gap between political debate and everyday economic reality.

As the campaign unfolds, parties that want to earn the confidence of Scotland's business community will need to move beyond tactical positioning.

They must demonstrate seriousness on growth, infrastructure, skills and competitiveness — and show they understand the pressures facing employers and employees alike.

The election may still be months away, but one conclusion is already clear: Scotland's political parties are not operating from a position of strength. The electorate knows it. And businesses, watching closely, will be looking for signs that this fragmented system can still deliver stable and credible leadership when it matters most.



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





## Body Language expert headlines Chamber's Business Breakfast 2026 launch

### Business Breakfast

BODY LANGUAGE EXPERT



**February 19, 2026 | 07:30 - 09:30**

Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce and RSM are flying world-renowned communication and body language expert Mark Bowden to Aberdeen for a dedicated Body Language Business Breakfast.

Widely regarded as one of the world's leading authorities on body language, Mark has been ranked the number one global body language professional multiple times and advises senior leaders across business, government and international institutions.

How you communicate matters - but how you are perceived matters even more. From boardrooms and negotiations to client meetings and leadership moments, non-verbal communication plays a decisive role in trust, credibility and influence.

Drawing on decades of research and real-world experience advising global business leaders, governments and Fortune 500 companies, Mark will explore how body language shapes outcomes, how to "read the room" more effectively, and how to project confidence and authority under pressure.

This highly practical session will focus on improving executive presence, sharpening influence, and translating complex ideas into clear, compelling messages that resonate with your audience.

Attendees will leave with actionable techniques they can apply immediately to strengthen communication, improve engagement and lead more effectively in high-stakes environments.

### Business Breakfast

BUSINESS OF HEALTH



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Aberdeen & Grampian  
Chamber of Commerce

## Business of Health

This breakfast will explore how employers, the public sector and health partners can work together to support workforce wellbeing, reduce absence, and improve long-term outcomes for individuals and organisations alike.

**March 25, 2026**  
**07:30 - 09:30**

## Digital, Technology and AI

This breakfast will consider how AI adoption is likely to accelerate, what this means for businesses of different sizes, and how organisations can position themselves to benefit from rapid technological change rather than be disrupted by it.

**April 29, 2026**  
**07:30 - 09:30**

### Business Breakfast

DIGITAL, TECHNOLOGY & AI

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# Business Breakfast

## ENERGY TRANSITION 43

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## Energy Transition 43 Business Breakfast

Join us as we unveil and analyse the findings of Energy Transition 43, the latest edition of our biannual barometer of the energy sector's outlook and future direction.

**May 26, 2026**  
**07:30 - 09:30**

## Investment Tracker Launch

Wayne Hemingway MBE, one of the UK's most influential designers and thinkers on place, regeneration and brand, will share insights from his career and why good design matters more than ever for economic growth and regeneration.

**September 17, 2026**  
**07:30 - 09:30**



## Business Breakfast

### DEALMAKERS

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## Business Breakfast: Dealmakers

Join us and our expert panel as we examine the state of the region's mergers and acquisitions market, unpacking deal activity, valuation trends and the drivers shaping investment decisions across Scotland.

**October 7, 2026**  
**07:30 - 09:30**

## Energy Transition 44 Business Breakfast

Join us as we present and interrogate the findings of Energy Transition 44, the latest edition of our biannual barometer of sector sentiment, strategy and future plans.

**November 17, 2026**  
**07:30 - 09:30**

## Business Breakfast

### ENERGY TRANSITION 44

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## Sport Aberdeen welcomes dynamic duo as new mascots arrive in style

Sport Aberdeen has welcomed a fun pair of sport and fitness ambassadors as its two new community mascots have been officially unveiled.

The dynamic duo, Dee the Red Squirrel and Don the Highland Bull, have been brought to life by Sport Aberdeen to inspire pride, movement and joy and to encourage community spirit.

Dee and Don will champion active lifestyles while standing as beacons of inclusivity, equality and diversity in sport.

The new mascots will bring their unique personalities to life by taking an active role in school activities as well as guest appearances at local events and city-wide sports programmes.

The mascot campaign, designed with community at its core, aims to build a genuine connection with people across the city to ensure everyone, no matter age, ability or background, feels supported and included.

Both characters are proud to reinforce the message that living with certain health conditions doesn't necessarily have to limit anyone's ability to enjoy an active lifestyle.

Dee, who is hearing impaired, proudly wears a hearing aid, while Don the Highland Bull wears a Continuous Glucose Monitor (CGM) for diabetes.

Commenting on the arrival of Dee and Don, Sport Aberdeen interim chief executive Graeme Dale said: "Community mascots have an amazing ability to spark joy and bring people together. Dee and Don are more than simply new characters, they are fun and visible reminders that sport is limitless and that there is truly something for everyone at Sport Aberdeen."



## Befriend a Child reflects on its special 50th anniversary year milestone and thanks local community for support

Befriend a Child is proudly reflecting on a remarkable year of celebration, community spirit and generosity as the charity marks its 50th anniversary.

Since 1975, the organisation has been dedicated to supporting children and young people across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire who are growing up in difficult life circumstances.

Through its befriending, mentoring, family support and youth club programmes, Befriend a Child continues to ensure that young people have the support, encouragement and positive role models they need to build confidence and thrive.

The charity kicked off its Golden Anniversary celebrations at the start of 2025 with a programme of special events, challenges and fundraising activities that brought together volunteers, supporters and funders.

Among the highlights of the year was its celebrated Barbie Boozy Brunch held in March, which raised over £50,000 and set an exciting tone for the months ahead.

The charity was honoured with a Civic Reception at the Aberdeen Town House in its birthday month.

The event, hosted by the Lord Provost, united long-standing supporters, partners and volunteers and provided an opportunity to reflect on the organisation's lasting impact over five decades.

Throughout the year, Befriend a Child reconnected with past volunteers and former befriendees, inviting them to share their stories and celebrate the meaningful relationships that have positively impacted their lives.

Over the last 50 years, Befriend a Child has made a positive difference to thousands of children across our local communities.



# WORDS OF ADVICE



**Wayne Mackay,**  
*Regional Director*  
ARO Technology

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

At ARO, we believe technology should empower, not overwhelm, your business. As a trusted partner to forward-thinking organisations, we deliver innovative cloud communications, collaboration, and customer experience solutions that drive real results. Our expertise in AI-powered automation and advanced cyber security ensures your operations are not only efficient, but also resilient against evolving threats.

Whether you're streamlining workflows, enhancing customer service, or enabling hybrid work, our agile platforms and expert support make transformation simple and secure.

We are trusted by local authorities and leading businesses alike, supporting more than 8,000 customers and safeguarding over 600,000 end users with our advanced cyber security expertise, underpinned by hands-on experience in addressing the complex challenges organisations face today.

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

The best advice I've ever received is that sometimes the best business you do is the business you walk away from. Early in my career, I thought success was about saying yes to every opportunity, but experience teaches you that not every deal is a good deal. Sometimes the real strength lies in recognising when something isn't aligned with your values, your capabilities, or your long-term strategy.

I've had a few moments where walking away felt counterintuitive at the time, but in hindsight, it protected our team, our reputation, and our ability to focus on the right opportunities.



**Colin Mill,**  
*Depot Manager*  
Speedy Hire

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

Whatever the job, project Speedy hire will have the correct machine in stock.

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

Always to listen to staff and keep them involved in the day to day process, keeping everyone engaged.

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

Making sure everyone enjoys their work and having regular team talks.

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

To treat everyone with respect and remember your manners.

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

Join and enjoy the information that can be used from being a member of the Chamber.



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# BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



**Leigh Marcella,**  
*Specialist Cleaning Supervisor*  
Goldstar Services

## Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

Definitely Scott Willox (director at Goldstar). His attitude to work is amazing, his wealth of knowledge and experience is unbelievable. After all these years in business, I can still come across something I'm not sure about. I know I can pick up the phone and call Scott. He either has the answer or can find the solution and come back to me. He is a great source of knowledge, support and guidance to me and others.

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

IPAF training for working at heights has to be one of the most effective pieces of training. You have to be so aware of what you are doing at height on machinery. For my personal development, first aid training has been essential. Having that knowledge, I would be comfortable encountering health emergencies. Both pieces of training are vital for the job you do and to make sure you are prepared.

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

It has to be patience and understanding. When you are working with a group of people, you have to be patient.

Every day is different; people's attitudes and reactions are different.

If someone is acting out of character, for example, it might not be work related. People can have issues outside of work and it's about having the empathy to realise that and the understanding and patience to help the situation.

## What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

Being promoted. I started in Goldstar as a window cleaner on construction. You need to get to know everyone on construction sites, not just your own team, and I feel I get on with everyone. Building good relationships with people can make life a whole lot easier. I became a charge hand, and then was promoted to supervisor, which means I can go from team to team to make sure everything is being done properly and everybody is all right. It was a great sense of achievement to be promoted and know your strengths are recognised.

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

Travelling from site to site, meeting new people. The more you travel, the more you are recognised when you walk onto a site, which is a great feeling.

You notice people spotting your van and taking a note of your number, so wherever I go I am representing the brand! Passing my driving test recently and getting my own van has made it all the better!

## What was your first job?

Apprentice glazier.

## Who or what inspires you most?

My wife and three kids.

## What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

"It is what it is" really hacks me off! It's either a licence to be lazy or not to do something right!

## How do you relax?

Cooking. You name it, I'll cook it. I was brought up with that; cooking was a big thing in our family.

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

Would have to be world peace. I'm sick of all these wars.



# People are a business' greatest asset

How Aberdeen Sports Village is helping businesses invest in healthier, more resilient workforces.

By Rebecca Henderson

Photo credit: Euan Duff

**For businesses navigating rising pressure around productivity and retention, supporting employee health has moved from a “nice to have” to a business priority.**

And for Aberdeen Sports Village (ASV), pushing workforce health higher up the leadership agenda is central to helping employers invest more effectively in their people.

“Aberdeen Sports Village plays an important role in supporting the region’s business community by helping employers invest in the health and wellbeing of their people,” says Ludi Metelski, interim CEO of ASV.

“We understand that people are a business’ greatest asset, and our corporate wellbeing offering is designed to make it easier for employers to support their teams in a practical, inclusive and sustainable way.”

## **Putting workforce health on the leadership agenda**

At the heart of ASV’s approach sits its corporate memberships, which give employees access to a wide range of sport, fitness and wellbeing facilities.

From its newly refurbished state of the art gym, to swimming pools, over 100 group exercise classes plus the new reformer studio offering a range of reformer classes to suit all abilities, plus specialist sports spaces, the organisation has long been recognised as a wellbeing partner for the regional business community,

helping employers turn health into a driver of engagement and performance.

But rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach, ASV works directly with employers to tailor memberships around the realities of modern working life.

“We work closely with employers to make sure the offer fits their organisation,” Ludi explains. “That might mean working around shift patterns, supporting hybrid working, or encouraging staff who are new to physical activity to get involved.”

This flexibility allows businesses of all sizes to prioritise wellbeing without the cost or complexity of building in-house facilities. For many employers, this helps ensure initiatives are genuinely inclusive, supporting employees at different stages of their health and fitness journey.

**‘By making activity more accessible through workplace wellbeing initiatives, organisations can support their employees not just at work, but in their overall quality of life.’**

## **Spaces that support people, not just workouts**

ASV’s commitment to wellbeing is also reflected in its physical environment. The organisation has recently completed a £500,000 investment in a major gym refurbishment, alongside a £50,000 transformation of its cycle studio, reinforcing its long-term focus on high-quality, accessible facilities.

The upgraded gym features new equipment, improved training spaces and enhanced sound and visual systems, while the revamped cycle studio features industry-leading bikes and advanced performance technology. These developments ensure ASV remains a premier sport and exercise facility not only in the North-east but in Scotland.

For corporate members, this creates an environment designed to support sustained engagement, rather than short-term participation.

Beyond the gym floor, ASV is also developing new spaces aimed specifically at the business community, designed to embed wellbeing into the working day.

Ludi says: “The idea is to move away from traditional meeting environments and create a space that encourages people to step away, reset and genuinely take a moment.

“Alongside this, we’ll be able to tailor packages that combine meetings with guided wellbeing activity from reformer Pilates



and yoga to more energetic sessions depending on what best suits each organisation and its people.

“This will allow us to offer packages that are truly unique to businesses across the region, and we’re really excited to be launching this in 2026.

“Ultimately, our aim is to support healthier, happier and more engaged workforces across the region.”

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**‘The ASV Games are hugely popular with organisations across the region. They bring teams together through fun, inclusive and friendly competition, with a strong focus on participation rather than performance.’**

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### Why movement matters at work

The emphasis on activity is intentional. The link between physical activity and workplace performance is well established, with regular movement supporting mental clarity, resilience and energy levels, which are qualities that are increasingly critical in high-pressure working environments.

“From an employer’s perspective, an active workforce is more engaged, productive and connected,” Ludi notes. “It can also contribute to reduced absenteeism and improved morale.

“By making activity more accessible through workplace wellbeing initiatives, organisations can support their

employees not just at work, but in their overall quality of life.”

ASV also supports businesses through corporate health testing, helping organisations understand the health of their workforce and tailor effective wellbeing strategies depending on the results. This approach helps turn wellbeing from a one-off initiative into a longer-term strategy that will deliver real impact.

### The ASV Games

One of ASV’s most visible corporate initiatives is the annual ASV Games, which bring organisations together through a programme of inclusive, team-based sporting events.

Ludi explains: “The ASV Games are hugely popular with organisations across the region.

“They bring teams together through fun, inclusive and friendly competition, with a strong focus on participation rather than performance.”

With activities ranging from table tennis and swimming to a Highland Games-style finale, the Games encourage participation from employees who may not normally take part in sport.

“For organisations, the benefits include stronger team bonding, improved communication, increased morale and a real sense of shared achievement,” he adds.

“Importantly, they also create opportunities for networking and collaboration across the wider business community in the North-east.”





Feedback from participating organisations consistently highlights the longer-term impact of ASV's corporate initiatives.

"That lasting behaviour change is one of the most powerful outcomes."

**ASV: A long-term partner for business wellbeing**

Looking ahead, ASV sees its role continuing to evolve as a strategic partner for business wellbeing.

"We see Aberdeen Sports Village increasingly acting as a wellbeing partner for businesses across the region.

"With our facilities, expertise and strong links to sport, health and education, we're well positioned to support organisations in developing and delivering their wellbeing strategies.

"Our long-term goal is to help create a healthier, more resilient regional workforce which supports both people and productivity across the North-east."

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**'Our long-term goal is to help create a healthier, more resilient regional workforce which supports both people and productivity across the North-east.'**

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Ludi Metelski, interim CEO









## University of Aberdeen's campus in India to open in summer after official signing

The University of Aberdeen has made an admissions call to all aspiring students in India to its new branch campus in Mumbai after principal and vice-chancellor Professor Peter Edwards signed a joint venture agreement with a leading India-based education provider.

The signing ceremony represents a significant step forward in the university's global expansion ambitions – as it becomes the first Scottish university to open an in-country presence in India.

In collaboration with partners EruLearning Solutions Pvt. Ltd. (a subsidiary of the Eruditus/Emeritus Group), the university plans to open the facility in Powai, a suburb of Mumbai, in August 2026 with teaching beginning in September.

Initially, teaching will focus on AI, management, and computing and data science programmes, aligned with India's National Education Policy 2020.

As part of his visit to Mumbai, Professor Edwards also strengthened industry-academia collaboration in the country with a number of official agreements (MoUs) with key India-based companies in the entrepreneurial and health and wellness sectors.

The principal and vice-chancellor also chaired a roundtable on the impact of artificial intelligence on early-career talent, with industry leaders discussing how universities and employers can better prepare graduates for an AI-driven workplace.

The new campus underpins the university's commitment to India and its vision of fostering world-class education, cutting-edge research and transformative innovation in collaboration with Indian institutions.

Building on decades of partnership working between the University of Aberdeen and more than 200 Indian universities and research centres including IITs – the Indian Institutes of Technology; AIIMS – All India Institute of Medical Sciences; ICAR – Indian Council of Agricultural Research; and the International Institute of Information Technology – Bangalore, the branch campus will serve as a hub for academic excellence and global problem-solving. A follow up second phase will see the university aim to establish a research and innovation office on the new campus to expand research collaborations and industry partnerships in critical areas such as AI, energy and life sciences.

Professor Peter Edwards, principal & vice-chancellor of the University of Aberdeen, said: "For more than five centuries, the University of Aberdeen has stood for academic excellence, purpose-driven learning, and global engagement. Our entry into India reflects our commitment to delivering world-class, future-focused education to one of the world's most dynamic talent ecosystems.

"As we prepare to welcome our first cohort, we look forward to building a globally connected academic community and working closely with stakeholders to foster meaningful collaborations that support India's education and innovation ambitions."

Alison Barrett MBE, country director India at the British Council, said: "I congratulate the University of Aberdeen on opening admissions for its Mumbai campus. International campuses are aligned with the priorities of the UK-India Vision 2035 and the National Education Policy 2020, and will expand access to globally recognised education, strengthening academic collaboration, and creating meaningful opportunities for students and educators. As the first Scottish university to be granted permission to establish a campus in India, Aberdeen's entry reflects the growing trust and shared ambition between India and the UK."

Harjinder Kang, British Deputy High Commissioner to Western India and His Majesty's Trade Commissioner to South Asia, said: "The University of Aberdeen opening its first Indian campus in Mumbai brings the India-UK Vision 2035 to life. As the first Scottish university to take this step, Aberdeen is expanding access to world-class UK degrees and equipping young people with future-ready skills in AI, data, and business. This is what our education partnership looks like in action – a shared commitment to nurture the next generation of global talent."



## KGM Musso: Built for business, ready for Scotland

For businesses across the North-east of Scotland, a pick-up isn't just a vehicle – it's a working partner.

The KGM Musso is designed with exactly that in mind, offering strength, practicality and value in a package that suits everything from construction and agriculture to utilities, logistics and outdoor industries.

The Musso builds on a strong heritage while delivering modern capability.

It is one of the few pick-ups on the market to combine genuine workhorse credentials with the comfort and refinement expected from a contemporary vehicle, making it equally at home on site, on the road or pulling into a client meeting.

At its core, the Musso is engineered to work hard. With a robust ladder-frame chassis and impressive towing capacity, it is well suited to hauling trailers, machinery or materials across challenging terrain.

The generous load bed offers ample space for tools and equipment, while practical features such as tie-down points and durable finishes ensure it can cope with daily demands.

For businesses operating year-round in the Scottish climate, the Musso's selectable four-wheel drive system provides confidence and control on rough ground, muddy tracks and winter roads.

Power comes from a proven diesel engine that delivers strong torque at low revs – exactly what's needed for towing and load-carrying – while maintaining respectable fuel efficiency.

This balance makes the Musso a cost-effective choice for fleets and owner-operators alike, helping to keep running costs predictable without compromising performance.

For business owners, reliability and value are just as important as capability.

The Musso is competitively priced and comes with comprehensive warranty cover, offering reassurance and long-term peace of mind.

Its strong specification levels mean many desirable features are included as standard, reducing the need for costly options and making it easier to manage budgets across a fleet.

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Fuel consumption figures for the Musso range in mpg: 30.1-33.5, CO2 emissions: 221-246 g/km.

\*Model featured is a Musso Saracen with optional extras priced at £41,805 ex VAT, inc metallic paint priced at £625 ex VAT. Prices are correct at the time of going to print but may be modified or changed at any time. \*All KGM vehicles come as standard with a 5-year/100,000-mile warranty except for Torres EVX, which attracts a 7-year/90,000-mile warrant





# WORDS OF ADVICE



**Daryl Mitchell,**  
*Director*  
The Blind Mannie - Made to Measure Blinds

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

Here at The Blind Mannie, we provide a bespoke and high quality made-to-measure service, with most of our products being manufactured on our doorstep here in Aberdeen. We visit you in the comfort of your home, business or generally wherever is convenient for you to discuss any projects and show you samples at a location that suits you.

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

Our style is really simple, we treat our staff and customers how we would like to be treated - with care, compassion, honesty and, from the minute we meet up until the job is delivered, communication is key. Being adaptive to certain situations is also very key for us because this is what sets us apart from the rest.

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

Our biggest barrier is our rapid growth, which we are still adjusting to at the moment, with plans to add to our team so that we can cope with further growth.

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

Be yourself, be honest and be real as people really appreciate and value this.

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

Embrace the culture of collaboration and open communication from day one. Don't hesitate to ask questions, share your ideas, and seek help when needed. It's important to build relationships and understand the values and goals of your team and the organisation as a whole.



**Paul Bicker,**  
*Product & Technology Director*  
Asset55 LTD

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

Asset55 is a UK-based SaaS company supporting the energy industry. Around the globe, our software helps operators and contractors manage complex assets with precision helping drive safer, smarter execution through technology. We combine interactive 3D models with live data to give teams real-time visibility, better decision-making, and assurance on integrity, progress, and compliance.

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


You could describe my management style as connecting daily work with strategic goals, so the team understands the "why" behind what they're doing. I try to delegate with intention, giving people ownership and offering feedback to support performance and growth. This approach has worked because it creates clarity, accountability and a culture where people feel valued and empowered to deliver their best.

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

One of the biggest barriers I've faced is creating a culture of quality in an industry that often demands solutions yesterday. I overcame this by embedding quality into the process rather than treating it as a checkpoint. We focus on building lean but robust workflows, making quality metrics visible to the team.

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

Learn to be comfortable with discomfort. I think this cuts across life and business whether it's difficult conversations, tough decisions without all of the information, saying no when it's easier to say yes. I think people who lean into that grow faster, lead better and build things that last.



# We all need to take that first step in helping to improve brain health

**Author:** Dr Sonya Miller, Medical Director at TauRx Therapeutics Management Ltd.

**We have long been encouraged to hit the magic 10,000-mark when it comes to our daily steps, and we will all have seen people go to great lengths to ensure they hit their target.**

There's no doubt that collective change in the public's mindset has helped many people find a form of exercise given this daily target.

But whilst many have been focusing on their physical health, it's important we don't lose sight of our brain health. It is equally important to ensure we are spending time exercising our brains on a daily basis as this can help limit the impact of conditions such as Alzheimer's disease (AD), the most common form of dementia.

Around one million people in the UK are now living with AD, with statistics showing one in two people will likely be affected by dementia in our lifetime – either through developing the condition, caring for someone with the condition, or both.

In the next 15 years it is predicted the number of people living with dementia will reach 1.4 million, so the recent UK Government announcement that it aims to have more than 92% of patients receive a formal dementia diagnosis within 18 weeks of a doctor's referral by 2029 is to be welcomed.

In this instance, time is decline. Every delay – between concern, diagnosis, and treatment – costs cognitive health. For too long, people have faced long waiting lists for memory clinics, slow diagnostic pathways, and fragmented post-diagnosis support, which is why Lord Vallance's announcement is a crucial step forward.

Early diagnosis must go hand-in-hand with accessible care, both pharmacological and non-pharmacological. In short, identifying cognitive decline sooner is only meaningful if the system can offer people onward, consequential help.

Aberdeen-based TauRx Therapeutics Management Ltd is hoping to play its part as it focuses on trying to obtain regulatory approval for a potential oral treatment for AD. An effective, accessible, oral treatment could help ease the strain on health and social care services, allowing some of those living with the disease the opportunity to be able to stay at home with loved ones for longer.

While the concept of brain health is relatively new, it cannot be separated from general health. Maintaining cognitive function relies on the same principles as overall wellbeing: eat well, sleep well, move and stay connected. These simple, timeless habits – often repeated by

grandparents and doctors alike – are now being recognised as pillars of slowing the rate of cognitive decline.

The challenge lies in making these practices routine. Just as step-counting became a global phenomenon, we need a cultural shift that makes caring for our brains a daily priority. Regular activity doesn't just strengthen muscles – it boosts blood flow to the brain, reduces inflammation, and supports cognitive resilience.

The goal for all of us should be to make incremental, sustainable improvements that fit individual circumstances. Whether it's walking, learning a new skill, socialising, or sleeping well, every small step adds up.

Ultimately, brain health must become as integral to public consciousness as heart health, calorie counting or fitness tracking. Just as 10,000 steps became a shorthand for vitality, we need a similarly simple cultural touchpoint for cognitive wellbeing.

Because the truth is, the first step toward preventing dementia might not be in a laboratory – it might be the one you take today for your own brain.

# Insights that drive action

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## Aberdeen Inspired and Fierce Beer partner to make the Northern Lights: Aberdeen Beer Festival a dazzling affair

After the runaway success of the first Aberdeen Beer Festival, Aberdeen Inspired is delighted to join forces with Fierce Beer to serve up its second outing this April.

Now named Northern Lights: Aberdeen Beer Festival, the one-day event at the iconic Music Hall on April 11 will be bigger and better, organisers promise.

Featuring 12 world-class breweries, from established favourites like Northern Monk to darlings of the craft beer scene like Beak Brewery, the festival has also increased capacity from 1,300 to 1,600.

Adrian Watson, chief executive of Aberdeen Inspired, said: "We are once again delighted to collaborate with Fierce for the return of the Aberdeen Beer Festival. We are confident that beer-lovers will find it as dazzling as the Northern Lights it is named after.

"The success of the first festival in April last year proved there was a real thirst for this event, driven by Fierce which has a reputation second-to-none as one of the top craft breweries."







**Sarah McColl,**  
Research and Insights Manager,  
Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber  
of Commerce

[sarah.mccoll@agcc.co.uk](mailto:sarah.mccoll@agcc.co.uk)

# From manifesto to delivery:

## Why evidence matters

The publication of the AGCC manifesto is an important moment for the region. It sets out a clear vision for growth, competitiveness and opportunity. In effect, this is our Business Plan for North-east PLC. But as businesses know, ambition alone is not enough. The real challenge lies in delivery.

Across energy, infrastructure, housing, skills and connectivity, the questions facing policymakers are not theoretical. They are practical and immediate. Is the supply chain ready for a managed energy transition? Can our grid and regulatory framework support investment rather than deter it? Do the right skills exist at the right time and scale? Can people get to work and businesses get to markets? Will there be enough homes and facilities in the right places to support growth? What are the real economic consequences of delay, uncertainty or poorly sequenced change? This is where independent evidence matters.

Too often, policy debates are driven by ideology or national averages that fail to reflect regional realities. The North-east has a distinct economic

profile, a globally significant energy sector and communities that have powered Scotland's prosperity for decades. Decisions that affect this region and the companies doing business here must be informed by data that reflects the now, not assumptions made by people based somewhere else who don't understand our place.

As the manifesto moves from publication to implementation, demand for robust, region-specific evidence will only grow. Funding bids will need to be justified. Infrastructure and skills programmes will be scrutinised. Investors will look for confidence that the region can deliver. Whether it is supporting an investment case, informing a consultation, testing whether the workforce is ready or showing the cost of inaction, independent research will be critical to turning ambition into action.

For businesses, this is not theoretical. These macro decisions shape investment, workforce planning and long-term competitiveness. Whether you are navigating the energy

transition, trying to recruit and retain skilled people, dependent on reliable transport links or struggling with property issues, the evidence that sits behind policy choices will directly affect your ability to grow.

As will the choices you make and the long term plans you put in place for your company.

Through Research Chamber, AGCC works with businesses, partners and stakeholders to provide the evidence that supports sound strategic planning. Our role is to ensure that decisions are made with a clear understanding of impact, risk and opportunity, grounded in what is really happening in the North-east economy, its sectors, communities and companies.

That is why now is the moment for businesses to engage. Whatever growth challenges you face, Research Chamber can help you understand and quantify these and plot your journey to success.

## From ambition to action – Research Chamber can help

Many of the priorities in the AGCC manifesto have been driven by data and evidence from our Energy Transition Surveys, Quarterly Economic Surveys and evidence from our members.

### *If your organisation is:*

- Looking to diversify or expand into new products/markets
- Not fully understanding what your staff or customers think about you
- Seeking to evaluate your economic impact and value

- Suffering from skills shortages or workforce planning
- Being limited by transport and connectivity challenges

Research Chamber can help you turn those challenges into clear, decision-ready evidence.

### *We work with businesses to:*

- Understand where you are today
- Provide solutions to problems
- Test whether plans are deliverable
- Strengthen strategic, funding and investment cases

Whether you are updating your business plan, preparing a funding bid, responding to a consultation, planning new investment, launching new products or services or trying to unblock delivery, independent evidence can help you plot the right course.

**To discuss how the Research Chamber can support your priorities, contact the AGCC Research team.**  
[research@agcc.co.uk](mailto:research@agcc.co.uk)

# the MEMBER MEET the MEMBER



**Lisa Ironside,**  
*Managing Director*  
The HR Dept Aberdeenshire

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

We provide friendly, expert HR support to local businesses who

care about their people but need practical, tailored help to do it right.

We're here to take the weight off your shoulders, so you can focus on growing your business with confidence.

## **Who are your customers?**

Our clients are local SMEs who value their people and want to get HR right.

From family-run firms to growing start-ups, they rely on us for trusted advice that's personal, professional, and never off-the-shelf.

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

Our biggest challenge is helping clients navigate ever-changing employment law.

The opportunity? Supporting businesses to build healthy, human-centered cultures that attract and retain great people. That's where we shine.

Don't wait for an HR crisis to get advice.

Whether it's managing absence, conflict, or contracts; proactive, people-first HR makes life simpler, protects your business, and helps your team thrive.

## **What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?**

It's the sense of community — connecting with other business owners who genuinely care about the people behind the brands.

It's inspiring, energising, and full of kind support.



**Jane Akadiri,**  
*Founder and Director*  
Touch of Love

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

Touch of Love is a grassroots charity that supports minority ethnic youth in Aberdeen through early-intervention programmes, cultural workshops, sports, and mentoring which boosts confidence and wellbeing. We also give families

support through our two food bank points, create safe spaces for mums and toddlers, and offer holistic services to support women's wellbeing.

## **Who does Touch of Love serve?**

Touch of Love youth programmes are created with and for new Scots and young Scots from ethnic minority backgrounds, especially those who cannot access public funds. Club membership is free, ensuring open access for all. TOL community football sessions and the Mum and Baby group bring new Scots and local residents together in a safe and welcoming environment.

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

With growing demand across youth programmes, food banks, and women's services, our biggest challenge is expanding capacity sustainably. Yet this also presents our greatest opportunity, which

is to build new partnerships, innovate our offerings, and extend our reach, bringing support, confidence, and community to even more people in need.

## **What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?**

Every connection matters. When we work together, we create lasting change for our communities and businesses. Touch of Love values are compassion, resilience, and inclusivity, and staying true to this has kept us focused and growing. Stay connected, stay passionate - it's how real impact is made.

## **What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?**

The Morning Bulletin! It's a fantastic tool that has helped us stay up to date with local events and opportunities every day. AGCC also hosts many insightful and relevant events which are always worth attending. They are a great way to learn, grow, and stay connected.

# MEMBER MEET *the* ME



**Kevin Watt,**  
*Managing Director*  
KCI (Kinetics Controls and Innovation Limited)

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

KCI delivers expertly engineered leak sealing solutions that minimise downtime and maximise safety.

Trusted by global operators, we combine innovation, reliability, and integrity to keep your critical systems running, because every second counts.

## **Who are your customers?**

KCI's customers are a who's who of the world's leading energy companies.

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

The biggest challenge and opportunity that KCI is facing right now is the energy transition and the path to net zero.

## **What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?**

Focus on what you can control and let go of what you can't.

## **What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?**

The best thing about being a Chamber member is the staff and services that they provide as well as the incredible network that you have access to.



**Martin Charlesworth,**  
*Operations Director*  
Pinefield Glass

## **Give us the elevator pitch for your business.**

Pinefield Glass is a leading window and door specialist in the North of Scotland, covering areas from Wick and Thurso to Dundee and Perth on the east coast, and as far south as

Lochgilphead on the west coast. We supply and install high-performance windows, doors and glazing solutions for domestic, trade, new build and local authority markets.

## **Who are your customers?**

We serve domestic homeowners, trade customers and new build house builders. Essentially, anyone needing windows, doors or glazing solutions, directly or through our partners, is our customer.

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

The growing volume of new homes being built across Scotland presents a major opportunity, both through direct partnerships with builders and by supporting existing homeowners upgrading their properties.

One main challenge is managing the lasting impact of the post-pandemic material cost increases.

We continue to work closely with our key suppliers to offer value-for-money solutions in every sector we operate in.

## **What is your word of advice for fellow Chamber members?**

Support each other and be open to learning from one another. Someone always has experience or knowledge that can make your life easier or even bring in valuable custom. Whether within the same industry or across different sectors, collaboration can provide insights that help improve your business.

## **What is the best thing about being a Chamber member?**

Networking and connection. We've benefited from leaning on other members for support, and in turn, others have come to us.

The Chamber creates a 'safety in numbers' environment making it easier to connect with people on a wider scale and form relationships you otherwise might not have discovered.



# The success story of Scotland's first sober bar

Founder Kate Kenyon busts non-drinker 'boring' myth

By Danny McKay



**The businesswoman behind Scotland's first sober bar has lifted the lid on the Aberdeen city centre venue's instant success.**

When Kate Kenyon decided to take a step back from drinking alcohol, she quickly noticed a glaring gap in the market for those who want the social space and variety of drinks of a bar without the alcohol.

SOBR opened on Thistle Street on October 22 - offering alcohol-free spirits, beer, cider, cocktails, shots, and other drinks - and has already been proved a game-changer.

Kate explained: "SOBR is Scotland's first and only sober bar.

"We're a bar for everyone who is looking to cut back on drinking, whether that's for cultural reasons, or health reasons, but also those who just don't drink anyway and those in recovery from addiction.

"We're an inclusive, safe space really - that's SOBR."

Kate said the reaction so far has been overwhelmingly positive, with even sceptics quickly changing their minds.

**'We've created a small community who feel it's a safe space'**

She said: "It's been so, so lovely. We've had so many people come in for a variety of reasons. There are people who are genuinely curious and nosey and want to see what it's about.

"We've had doubters come in who want to be proven right but they come in and go 'actually this is really nice'. I love proving people wrong.

"The nicest thing is that we have, I hope, really created a small community of people who feel that it's a safe space for them.

"We've had a lot of men come in on their own who are recovering, which is really heartwarming.

"People have come in and spoken about their recovery with us. I had a conversation with a gentleman for probably about 45 minutes who is an AA mentor and had been an alcoholic for 23 years and has been sober now for a very, very long time.

"We've had other mentors from various charities and that's hugely important and a wonderful thing to be able to be part of."

**'We've had people come from Dundee, Montrose, Keith specifically for the bar'**

People have also visited the bar for different health reasons, including diabetics who are able to enjoy SOBR's sugar-free drinks without worrying about spiking their insulin levels.

Another lady who is waiting to have a double lung transplant has also enjoyed being able to come into the bar without worrying about alcohol affecting her medication.

Kate continued: "We've had a lot of people from the Muslim community come into the bar.

"We had one gentleman who had come in with a friend who wasn't Muslim, and he started trying things like a 'rum and coke' and asking his friend to taste it and see how similar it was to the real thing, because he'd never had a rum and coke.

"It's little things like that that make you realise that this makes such a big difference to people because they've never had that before or had that space."

"We've had people come from Dundee, Montrose, Keith specifically for the bar."

## 'I'm really proud of what we've created for people'

She went on: "I'm really, really proud of the team. I keep saying to our general manager Hayden, 'I might make the overall decisions, but it's your bar', and he's led it with a really lovely style. The team really trust him and he's just a really good manager."

"Our team are bartenders and supervisors, but they're also SOBR experience ambassadors. They're the people who speak to the customers and carry the brand. They're really wonderful and are great with the customers."

"Apart from Hayden, they're all women, which is also something I'm quite proud of."

"I'm really proud of what we've created for people."

Some might argue there's no need for something like SOBR, and that non-drinkers can still go to a "normal" bar and choose a non-alcoholic drink – but Kate has the perfect response.

She said: "From the recovery side of things, a lot of people we've spoken to who are alcoholics don't want to go to a bar because they're so tempted to get back on the wagon, and that is the last thing that they need."

"If they're surrounded by people who are loud and abrasive and drunk it makes them want to do it again and they become uncomfortable and it's not a

good environment for them to be in."

"What then happens is that instead of going to the bars and dealing with it they end up staying in their house and they become very, very isolated."

"That causes a loneliness epidemic, particularly among men."

"With alcoholism, because you don't want to go out and none of your friends want to stay in, you end up staying at home on your own and become very lonely, and then you become depressive and then you become suicidal."

"That is so detrimental, when actually there is so much possibility for something like SOBR. There's so much that you can have, we've created an entire bar and there's still so much more that we could do, we just don't have the space."

"It's such a shame for people who are alcoholics but don't have that safe space to go out, but still want to go out so desperately and still be part of society and they feel that they can't."

## 'We're not boring, we don't need rescued, we're having fun without alcohol'

One of the main inspirations behind founding SOBR, Kate explained, was a societal view of non-drinkers as "boring", and that a friend might need "rescued" on a night out if they are sitting with others who aren't drinking.

Kate, right, with her friend Isla Nicoll.





She said: "If you don't want to drink, people still ask you 'why aren't you drinking? Oh that's a bit boring'.

"That's literally what SOBR was founded on – the fact that we're not boring, we don't need rescued, we're having fun without alcohol.

"The fact people say you're boring or need rescued if you won't drink, that's so damaging.

"We're so caught up with the idea that you need alcohol to have a good time, and if you're not drinking you're seen as this boring, dull person who doesn't have fun.

"If that's your opinion, then you probably have a problem."

Kate explained her own reasons for going sober, a combination of health issues and the fact she simply doesn't enjoy alcohol.

She said: "I have kidney failure. I have done since I was three. I've had two transplants.

"I had my first transplant when I was 12 and it failed when I was 19 for a number of reasons, but one of them was abuse of alcohol. I was a student, I was going out with my friends and having a good time and I just didn't realise the impact that drinking had on my body."

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**'Supporting people who shouldn't drink because of health issues is my main motivation'**

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Kate was still drinking after her second transplant until her kidney took a "nose dive" during Covid, which she caught three times, and now only functions at 7%.

She continued: "Eventually I'll need another transplant.

"Alcohol was such a big part of my life and kind of where it all went wrong a little bit, even though I drank for the social and confidence aspect of it.

"Since coming away from alcohol I've found that confidence in myself.

"But I also just don't like alcohol. I never have. But I drank because it was always a social thing. I was never around a binge drinking culture.

"I think helping people with health issues and supporting people who shouldn't drink because of health issues is my main motivation because I have a personal connection to it."

SOBR is the perfect spot for anyone who wants to go out but not be around rowdy people, to enjoy a calmer, quieter atmosphere to socialise and have conversations.

Aside from a huge variety of drinks which mimic the taste of alcoholic beverages, SOBR also offers what Kate describes as "functional drinks".

From ones designed to clear brain fog – which Kate jokes she needs a "bucket" of – to "liveners" to make you happy

and giggly, CBT-infused chill out drinks, and one called Nightcap to make you sleepy, SOBR has something for everyone.

As SOBR is the first of its kind in the country, Kate has been asked why she decided to set up in Aberdeen as opposed to somewhere like Edinburgh.

She explained: "Expanding is something I'm keen to do in the future for sure, but Aberdeen is my home. I grew up in Turriff and I've lived here now for almost as long as I lived there.

"It's a place I've grown to love. There's so much going for the city right now, there's so much regeneration and amazing things that are coming into the city. With Tall Ships last year it was such a hive of activity.

"I think having something as a first for Scotland that's in Aberdeen is just really cool and I wanted to give something back to the community that I've been part of and the city that has grown me."

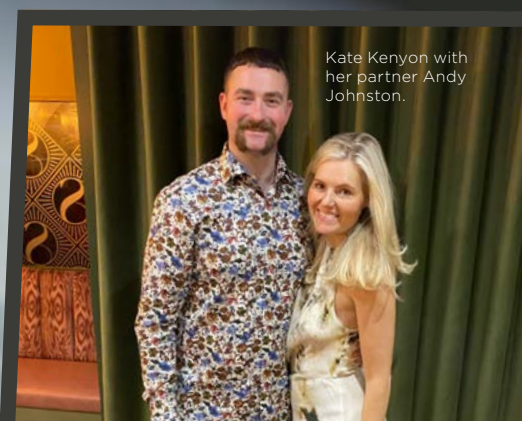
As SOBR is still a new business, Kate and the team are still fine-tuning things such as their opening times and looking to grow with partnerships and pop-ups planned for this year.

Kate added: "We're a community space. We do private functions, bridal showers, baby showers, etc.

"We do external catering and pop-ups at corporate events and come to offices."



SOBR interior



Kate Kenyon with her partner Andy Johnston.

# BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



**Philip Mowatt,**  
*Managing Director*  
ITWORX

## **Who has been the biggest influence on your career?**

Our customers. I've been extremely fortunate since founding ITWORX UK to have formed so many long-term relationships with great local leaders who I've been able to listen to and learn from (often borrowing their favourite mottos too). Joining them on their journey, listening to their advice and feedback (positive and negative) over the years, has very much shaped me individually and our whole team at ITWORX UK as well as our collective values.

I was once told being clever isn't knowing everything, it's knowing where to look. Wise words!

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

The Business Gateway company creation courses. They taught me very quickly that succeeding in business requires lots of different people with wildly different skillsets for differing roles. No one person has them all.

Instead, I like to take time to find the right people for each role in ITWORX UK so I can let them play to their strengths within the IT industry. That way everyone enjoys the journey and contributes along the way.

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

The harder you work, the luckier you get, but don't forget what you're working for – balance matters.

IT and communications is a very dynamic industry, and I don't like to go home at night until I'm proud of what we've achieved and have nothing more to give. We always do our best.

I'm a great believer that "leaders lead from the front", so if I don't set that example how can I ask it of my team?

## **What's been your proudest career achievement to date?**

During the last 15 years at ITWORX UK there have been so many memorable moments.

For me personally, I feel a huge sense of pride every day in working for an employee-owned business, especially when I see so many of my colleagues walking around the office enjoying what they do and where they do it.

It's a fabulous environment and culture I have the privilege to work within, and which delivers tangible business benefits for our customers every day.

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

The people. No matter what is thrown at us by global, national or local events, it cannot break the Scottish indomitable spirit. In business in Aberdeen, when you make friends, they are for life and that's something I'm grateful for.

## **What was your first job?**

Paper round.

## **Who or what inspires you most?**

My family, every day.

## **What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?**

It'll do.

## **How do you relax?**

Going on adventures (travel, sports, learning new skills).

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

Encouraging more people to do sport. It's totally undervalued. It helps people make new friends, improve health, wellbeing and maintain perspective on the rest of their lives.



## Bon Accord Care to be transferred back to council

The main provider of social care in Aberdeen is to be transferred back to the council to maintain service quality for service users and staff.

The move of Bon Accord Care, which was agreed at a meeting of full council, will happen in the next financial year, 2026 to 2027.

Council co-leader Councillor Ian Yuill said: "Having this key social care provider and its staff back under the council's direct control is the best option for the people for whom it provides vital care services 365 days of the year.

"This change will lead to savings and efficiencies in governance and systems. It will improve the overall financial resilience of these key care services."

Council co-leader Councillor Christian Allard said: "Staff will also benefit from bringing Bon Accord Care back into the council.

"They will have greater career progression opportunities and workforce planning will be easier."

A report to committee said Bon Accord Care is a key provider of statutory social care in Aberdeen, responsible for delivering contracted health and social care across Aberdeen, commissioned via the Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership.

The Aberdeen City Integrated Joint Board Strategic Plan is committed to supporting people to stay at home or in a homely setting (eg sheltered/very sheltered housing, in a community residence, or a care home), with maximum independence for as long as possible.

There is a significant focus on how people can be supported to remain at home and be supported to live within the community, which is also in line with the Integrated Joint Board's market position statement, Bon Accord Care's strategic objectives, and ACC's recently-approved Local Housing Strategy.

In addition, there has been a substantial rise in the number of people Bon Accord Care is supporting, often with the complexity of their needs increasing, whilst decreasing funding and increasing cost pressures.

Forecasting based on recently agreed pay awards, the current model of delivery, and increasing need among service users, indicates that Bon Accord Care's costs could rise by a further £2million in 2026/27. Further cost increases are anticipated year-on-year. In its medium-term financial plan, the Integrated Joint Board has identified a funding gap of £14.2million for 2026/27, increasing further in future years.

If it was to continue as an Arms' Length Organisation (ALEO) as at present, the report said Bon Accord Care would have faced significant savings targets for 2026/27 and future years, with limited options available to make those savings.

However, transferring back to the council means the advantages would be financial resilience, immediate savings through governance and systems consolidation, and efficiency gains.

There will be immediate savings as there will not be a requirement for separate governance boards as the business will be transferred to the existing Integrated Joint Board governance structures including delivery, clinical care, audit, and finance.

A unified governance and accountability structure would further enhance streamlined decision-making and resource allocation.

There would be opportunities for closer cross-organisational alignment and cost-sharing, enhanced partnership working arrangements, and improved digital transformation.





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## Bilfinger is one of first organisations in UK to commit to being both Menstruation Friendly and Menopause Friendly



Bilfinger UK has become one of the first organisations in the country to commit to accreditation for both Menstruation Friendly and Menopause Friendly workplaces – reinforcing its ambition to create an environment where everyone feels seen, heard and valued.

Through its partnership with Henpicked, Bilfinger is taking clear, practical steps to ensure colleagues experiencing menstrual or menopausal symptoms benefit from expert guidance, accredited training and helpful resources. This commitment is about making everyday working life better for everyone.

Deborah Garlick, CEO of Henpicked, said: “Bilfinger UK is showing leadership that makes a real difference. Menstruation and menopause are part of working life and with the right support people can feel understood, empowered and able to thrive. Bilfinger’s commitment sets a powerful example of the leadership needed to improve lives, workplaces and long-term wellbeing. The company is helping to lead the way for others, and we’re delighted to be supporting that.”

Sue Rice, director of HR, UK region and group talent, at Bilfinger, said: “Menstruation and menopause can impact physical, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing. By committing to these accreditations, we’re joining over 500 UK employers who are Menopause Friendly – and going further by being among the first to also commit to Menstruation Friendly accreditation.”

### Why menstruation and menstrual health matter at work

Menstruation is a normal part of life for millions of people in the workforce, yet stigma and silence can mean many don’t get the support they need:

- 15 million people in the UK menstruate, and 72% of them are in work.

- 13.8% report taking absence during their period.
- Symptoms account for an estimated 8.4 lost working days per person per year.
- A quarter say menstruation has impacted their career progression.
- Around 8% of women say they’ve either left or are considering leaving a job because their menstrual-health symptoms weren’t supported.

These figures highlight why support is so important and how simple changes can make a big difference to wellbeing and confidence at work.

### Why menopause matters

Menopause affects people often at the peak of their careers and the need for supportive workplaces is clear:

- three in four experience menopause symptoms, with one in four reporting serious symptoms.
- 45% say symptoms negatively impact their work.
- 47% who need time off don’t feel able to tell their employer the real reason.
- one in four consider leaving work due to symptoms, and one in 10 actually do, leading to talent loss and widening the gender pay gap.
- one in 10 leave their jobs due to unmanaged symptoms.

When workplaces understand the impact and provide the right support, colleagues can feel more at ease and better able to get on with their day.

Bilfinger’s decision to pursue both accreditations strengthens its wider work on wellbeing and inclusion. It reflects a practical, everyday approach to making sure colleagues have what they need and that conversations about menstruation and menopause are part of normal working life.

## NHS Grampian and Western Isles stroke patients to benefit from rural healthcare innovation



Stroke patients arriving at Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin and Western Isles Hospital in Stornoway are benefitting from the use of innovative new rapid genetic testing devices which can determine whether they are resistant to the routinely recommended drug for stroke patients – Clopidogrel.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines currently recommend that people who have a non-cardioembolic ischaemic stroke are prescribed Clopidogrel to reduce their risk of having another stroke, but it is estimated that around 28.7% of people are resistant to it.

NHS Grampian consultant in stroke/acute medicine and clinical lead for the project, Petrus Eloff, explained: "Using a mouth swab which is placed inside a test tube and then into the point of care device, the test can tell healthcare specialists within just 70 minutes whether a patient would benefit from being prescribed alternative antiplatelet medication in the first instance. Clopidogrel is most effective in most patients, but this allows us to best tailor treatment for the smaller group who are resistant to it.

"We are introducing the Genedrive® CYP2C19 ID Kit test as a test of change in Elgin and Stornoway at the same time as samples are sent for lab-based testing. We'll look at how results compare over the next year. It's the first time a device of this kind has been tested in remote and rural settings, and we're extremely proud to be working with colleagues across the two health boards as well as the national Centre for Sustainable Delivery."

Collette Melaugh, who was recently in the care of the stroke team at Dr Gray's, welcomed the innovative new approach to supporting patients and said she was delighted with the treatment she received.

"The staff were absolutely brilliant and I couldn't be happier with the care I received," Collette commented.

While all health boards have access to laboratories, remote and rural locations sometimes have to transport samples over long distances for specialist tests which can cause delays in receiving test results. This proof of concept project is the first of its kind to be coordinated by the NHS North of Scotland Innovation Hub on behalf of both NHS Grampian and NHS Western Isles.

NHS Grampian programme manager for innovation, Lorna Cameron said: "This is the beginning of being able to offer more in the way of immediate, precision medicine – ensuring we offer the right treatment at the right time.

"It's a real collaborative effort and we're grateful to everyone involved. This includes our nurses and doctors already making use of the new machines, and our labs team in Aberdeen who put the devices through rigorous testing to verify their performance and determine their accuracy before sending them out. Their performance will continue to be monitored throughout the year and the results will also be verified by blood tests sent to our national testing centres. We're looking forward to sharing an evaluation of our findings with national colleagues."



# HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR BUSINESS?



By Dianne Gardiner, Training Manager at Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce

Most organisations are well-strategised but under-executed. When performance stalls, the instinct is to refine strategy, restructure teams, or invest in new systems. In practice, these interventions rarely address the real constraint: **Business Health**.

Business health reflects how effectively leaders and teams operate under pressure. It shows up in decision speed, quality of execution, risk management and the organisation's ability to adapt. When business health is compromised, even the strongest strategies fail to convert into results.

The primary drivers are human, not technical. Stress, misalignment and low psychological safety increase friction, slow decision-making and elevate operational risk. These factors directly impact productivity, engagement, customer outcomes and, ultimately, financial performance.

**Targeted training and empowerment** deliver outsized commercial returns because they address these constraints at the source. Small, intentional shifts in leadership behaviour — clarity of communication, trust, accountability, and emotional regulation — unlock performance already embedded in the organisation. Execution accelerates, resilience improves and organisational drag reduces without the cost and disruption of large-scale change initiatives.

High-performing businesses are not defined by better plans, but by healthier human systems. When Business health is strong, strategy executes faster, risk is managed more effectively and performance is sustainable.

**THE QUESTION IS NO LONGER WHETHER TO INVEST IN BUSINESS HEALTH — BUT THE COST OF NOT DOING SO.**

## What makes a healthy workplace environment?

In business, a healthy workplace environment is one where people can do their best work without harming their mental, emotional, or physical wellbeing.

It's not about being "easy" or conflict-free - it's about being fair, supportive, and sustainable.

Here is a selection of the core elements, clearly broken down and how our training at the Chamber can support soft skills training.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

#### People feel safe to:

Speak up with ideas or concerns

Ask questions or admit mistakes

Challenge or disagree respectfully without fear of punishment

#### Suggested Chamber training courses:

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome and Building Confidence

Personal Effectiveness

Improve Your Professional Confidence Communication

Interpersonal Skills

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**Want to discuss more? Get in touch with [training@agcc.co.uk](mailto:training@agcc.co.uk) to have our expert team discuss your dedicated training needs.**



## RESPECT AND FAIRNESS

**Everyone is treated with dignity, regardless of role. Respect shows up in daily interactions, not slogans:**

Clear boundaries around behaviour  
No bullying, harassment, or favouritism  
Fair policies applied consistently

**Suggested Chamber training courses:**

Dealing with Difficult Situations  
Essential HR Skills

**See all courses and book at [agcc.co.uk/training](https://agcc.co.uk/training) or email [training@agcc.co.uk](mailto:training@agcc.co.uk)**

## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

**Strong relationships improve both morale and results:**

Teamwork over blame  
Conflicts handled constructively  
Diversity of perspectives welcomed  
Mutual support, not competition that harms

**Suggested Chamber training courses:**

Emotional Intelligence for Business  
ColourLens Personality Profiling  
Cross-cultural Communication at Work

**See all courses and book at [agcc.co.uk/training](https://agcc.co.uk/training) or email [training@agcc.co.uk](mailto:training@agcc.co.uk)**

## PURPOSE AND ALIGNMENT

**People understand and can effectively articulate:**

Why their work matters  
How it contributes to bigger goals  
That company values are real, not performative

**Suggested Chamber training courses:**

The Basics of Business Finance  
Business Finance Skills  
Customer Service Excellence  
Writing for Business

**See all courses and book at [agcc.co.uk/training](https://agcc.co.uk/training) or email [training@agcc.co.uk](mailto:training@agcc.co.uk)**

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# BUSINESS LESSONS I'VE LEARNED



**Vasiliy Zbaraskiy,**  
Chief Technology Officer  
ZedraLab Limited

## What's the biggest lesson you've learned in business?

Network is king. Even the best product since sliced bread needs marketing and sales effort.

## What's been your proudest career achievement to date?

Putting together ZedraLab team. The best team I've ever worked with and impossible to replicate.

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

Its people, skillset and the energy industry's global network.

## What was your first job?

At 13-years-old, I was part-time librarian at my school's library, all the way until I moved on to university at 17.

## Who or what inspires you most?

My better half.

## What word or phrase in business-speak exasperates you?

Where do I start? Low hanging fruit, revolutionary technology, touch-base, pivot, leverage. I can go on.

## How do you relax?

I cook for my friends and family on weekends.

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

First thing that came to mind is to eradicate cancer or hunger. But on a second thought I'd make quality education universally available to all.

## QUICK-FIRE ROUND

## VisitAberdeenshire launches new website for region

A new and improved visitabdn.com has been launched by VisitAberdeenshire.

Completely redesigned with improved user experience and seamless journeys, this is far more than a shop window for the region: it's a source of inspiration, information and insight for visitors, intermediaries, and local businesses alike.

For visitors, the site serves as a motivator to consider a visit, through to providing practical advice on what to do upon arrival.

For local businesses, the site means greater visibility and stronger promotion of experiences, events and offerings, helping drive engagement, bookings and footfall.

This is supported by a business community hub rich in market insight, and practical advice.

There are also new sites for the Aberdeen Convention Bureau including a new venue search function, dedicated resources for tour operators, and a new content hub that is bursting with free-to-use images, video, music, and prose.

Throughout the year, VisitAberdeenshire will be refreshing content across the sites with updated pages, improved copy and inspiring imagery as it continues to drive growth in the regional visitor economy.

## Occupational health with Integrity HSE

Integrity HSE is a QHSE consultancy based at 56 Queens Road, Aberdeen, and has established a reputation as one of the UK's leading consultancies, delivering a comprehensive range of services to a diverse client base across multiple sectors.

Within that offering, Integrity HSE provides occupational health services that are designed to protect employee health while also supporting employer compliance.

Integrity HSE's services are delivered both on-site and remotely, with its occupational health nurses travelling to client locations to ensure efficient, professional delivery.

These services enable organisations to manage health risks effectively, reduce absence, and maintain safe, productive working environments.

Organisations seeking such can visit [www.integrityhse.com](http://www.integrityhse.com), call 01224 679950, or email [enquiries@integrityhse.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@integrityhse.co.uk).



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### Emily Reid and Alex Milne

Onboard Tracker™ has appointed Alex Milne as senior business development manager and promoted Emily Reid to head of business development. The appointments reflect the company's continued expansion across domestic and global markets.



### Chris Brown

KPMG UK has promoted Chris Brown to the role of audit director in its Aberdeen office, as the firm continues to invest in strengthening its audit practice in the North-east of Scotland.



### Paul Smith

GEODIS has welcomed Paul Smith into the Aberdeen office as new country head of GEODIS Project Logistics for the UK and Ireland. Paul brings more than 35 years of extensive experience across multiple sectors.



### Sara Milne

Evolve iMS is pleased to announce the appointment of Sara Milne as its new marketing and communications executive. Sara brings more than seven years of marketing experience across a range of sectors, including maritime and property.



### Rachel Harris

Aberdeen Performing Arts has announced that Rachel Harris will join the organisation as its new programmer. Rachel will join the team booking shows and events for His Majesty's Theatre, the Music Hall and the Lemon Tree, as well as five annual festivals.



### Stacy Edghill

Jim Grimmer, founder of P3 Business Care, has appointed Stacy Edghill as a P3 business partner, strengthening the organisation's support for leaders and teams across the business community.



### Mandy Anderson

Northwood North East has strengthened its sales team with the appointment of Mandy Anderson, who brings a wealth of property expertise. Mandy has taken on the role of branch manager (Banchory) and residential property advisor in Aberdeen and Banchory.



### Shilpi Jairath

Aberdeen Considine LLP has appointed leading contractual recoveries specialist Shilpi Jairath as operations director with its multi-award-winning Lender Services Practice Group.





Left to right: Ross Latham, James Griffin and Jan Stander

### James Griffin

High Performance Robotics (HPR) has appointed experienced energy executive James Griffin as project director, a new forward-facing role created to support the company's rapid expansion across oil and gas, drilling, and offshore wind markets.



### Roy Stenhouse

Leading engineering and advisory consultancy, Apollo, has appointed Roy Stenhouse as head of built environment within its sustainable infrastructure business unit. Roy joins from the Net Zero Technology Centre (NZTC), where he served as chief impact officer and board member.



### Lauren Patton

Nuvo HR has welcomed Lauren Patton to its team as HR advisor. Lauren joins with strong experience across HR operations and with a well-rounded understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by organisations today.



Left to right – Peter Stuart, Bob Bell, Claire Phillips and David Scalley.

### Montrose Port Authority (MPA)

Montrose Port Authority (MPA) has appointed Bob Bell, Claire Phillips, Colin Lawson and David Scalley to its board. With extensive experience across multiple industries, the new members will help guide the port's management and development as it enters a new phase of growth.



### Shepherd and Hardies

Affiliated chartered surveying firms Shepherd and Hardies has promoted 10 outstanding professionals across its growing teams, reflecting its commitment to recognising talent, fostering leadership, and delivering exceptional service to clients.





### Daniel Forbes

Creative printer XIC has expanded its team with the appointment of Daniel Forbes as sales and project coordinator, helping the business meet increasing demand for print, design and display projects across the North-east.



### Chris Forgan

Johnston Carmichael has strengthened its tax advisory team with the appointment of Chris Forgan as tax director as the firm targets continued growth among large corporate clients across Scotland and beyond.



### Rachel Corsie

The Denis Law Legacy Trust has appointed Rachel Corsie, former Scotland international and captain of the national women's football team, as its newest ambassador, marking a significant moment for the trust.



### Kirsty Irvine

Kirsty Irvine has joined Blackadders LLP as a senior solicitor in Aberdeen. Her role will include the purchase and sale of farms, security work, clean energy matters, partnership advice and succession planning, alongside the firm's private client team.



Left to right - Chris Grinyer, Ray Riddoch and Jane Barney.

### All Life Chances

Aberdeen charity All Life Chances has appointed three new trustees to its board: Ray Riddoch, Chris Grinyer, and Jane Barney. Together, they bring decades of leadership experience across energy, finance, and property, along with a shared passion for community development.



## Scottish businesses set sights on team training to drive growth in 2026

Scottish businesses are making upskilling their focus for 2026, according to research from Bank of Scotland's Business Barometer.

In the year ahead, nearly half (46%) of Scottish businesses will be focussing on upskilling colleagues. Another 44% will be looking to enhance their use of technology, while more than a third (37%) will be looking to improve their productivity.

Reflecting their priority areas, upskilling staff (42%) is the area where Scottish businesses say they'd most value extra support to achieve their 2026 goals, along with technology enhancements (30%). Just over a quarter (27%) would also value help improving their environmental sustainability.

The Business Barometer, which surveys 1,200 businesses monthly and which has been running since 2002, provides early signals about UK economic trends both regionally and nationwide.

Martyn Kendrick, Scotland director at Bank of Scotland Commercial Banking, said: "Scottish businesses are putting people at the centre of their investment plans – something that will benefit the national economy, as well as their own growth aspirations.

"Whatever businesses' ambitions for 2026, we'll be ready to provide our support to help them achieve their goals."

## ABZ Propeller Fund at Aberdeen International Airport awards £30,000 to worthy projects

Aberdeen International Airport is celebrating another successful year for the ABZ Propeller Fund, which has awarded £30,000 to 21 organisations across the North-east in 2025.

From music and sport to sustainability and social support, these grants have helped bring inspiring ideas to life in local communities.

Since its relaunch in 2022, the fund has now distributed over £120,000 to 95 organisations, reinforcing its commitment to education, sustainability, and economic regeneration.

Bruce Watson, chairman of the ABZ Propeller Fund, said: "We're thrilled to have supported such a wide range of projects this year. From helping young people get outdoors to creating sensory spaces and promoting biodiversity, these initiatives make a real difference.

"Our fund is highly competitive but still a fantastic way for organisations to get financial support to get their projects off the ground.

"I want to thank the fund's committee members for all their continued hard work and I look forward to seeing how many of the projects we have supported progress in the future."

Jackie Dunbar, MSP for Aberdeen Donside and member of the ABZ Propeller Fund, added: "It's always great to see how groups are able to do so much with the funding they get from the ABZ Propeller Fund.

"There were some tough choices to make this year with so many applications from groups that do so much good in their communities. I've had the chance to see for myself how some of this funding is making a difference and it looks like people got the most out of every penny."

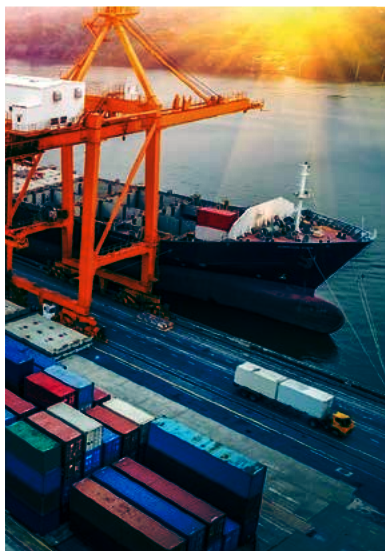




# International Trade Services



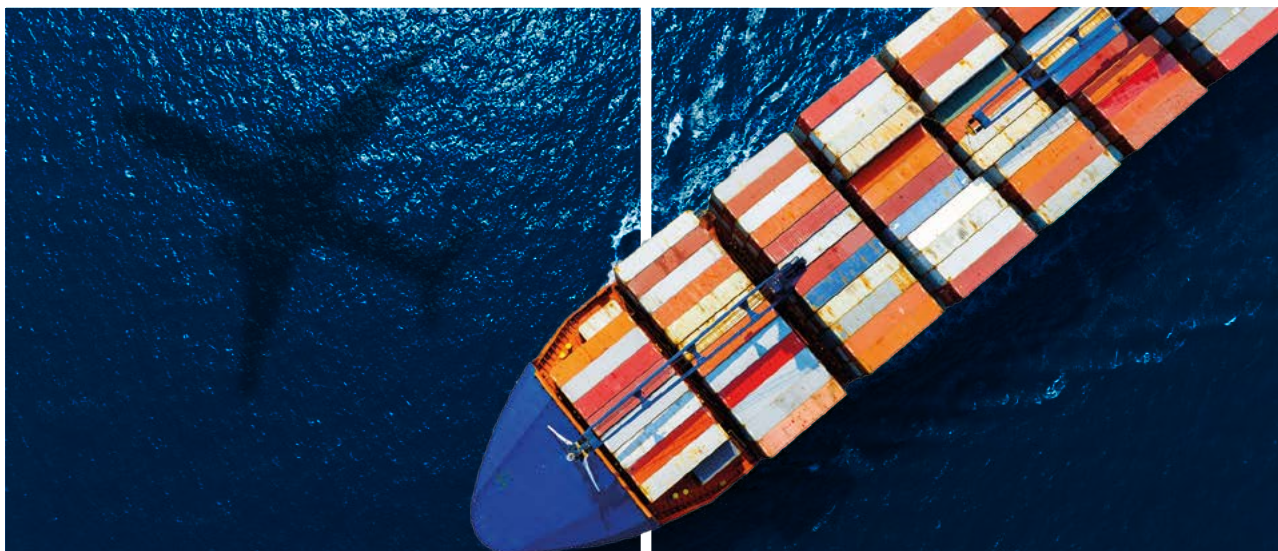
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