



## Work around

People management in the new normal

## Space out

What's moving in the property sector?

## Trade off

The international impact of coronavirus

# Back to business



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JULY 2020

Focus on **Trade**



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Two sides to every story

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## Our partners

As well as helping our member businesses to be better through a range of activities, the Chamber is committed to investing a significant amount of energy in moving forward the economic growth agenda and lobbying for change on key issues to create the conditions for success. Our regional renaissance.

Without the support of our Premier Partners, we would not be able to undertake much of the good work that we do. Their engagement is hugely valued and appreciated.

If you'd like to find out more contact our membership and events director, Seona Shand

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# We're in this together

**AS OUR editor is so organised, I'm penning this piece for July's Business Bulletin on June 8. Now it might be something of a euphemism to say we are living in pretty dynamic times but I've tried to capture a flavour of the priorities as the Chamber sees them today and the things we are focusing on for our members and the wider North-east business community.**

Lots of technical and (sometimes) science-based work is going on to restart the economy so the Chamber's energy is going into how quickly it can recover. There is little point in businesses making - often expensive - plans to re-open if no one wants to buy what they are selling. Our population has been scared by the coverage of COVID-19 and so the messaging now must quickly shift to re-establishing consumer confidence and demand.

To make progress towards a return to normal life and business as we knew it, it's vital that governments, businesses and our citizens learn to manage the situation together, not to hide from it. A combination of corporate and personal responsibility will be required if we are to move forward. Policy must support the key interdependencies of employee safety and trust, transport; and schooling and childcare. If all of these don't work together, the recovery will be patchy at best.

The Chamber network has been at the heart of securing and refining many of the support packages put in place, including the extended and more flexible Job Retention Scheme.

Right now our policy and lobbying work is focused on:

- Looking beyond the current support schemes to identify further measures necessary to protect the worst impacted sectors and their supply chains
- Getting clarity from Scottish Government about a timetable for its four-phase route map to lift restrictions. Business desperately needs visibility to allow forward plans to be made
- Asking that Scotland and the wider UK come in line with World Health Organisation guidance that one metre represents safe physical distancing as is the case in many other countries. Making this change is transformational in making businesses

viable. For example a study in the hospitality sector shows that at one metre, premises can operate to 50% of capacity. At two metres, it's 12%, making them simply unprofitable to operate

- Ensuring that the oil and gas sector deal is delivered at pace to support this region's role in leading an accelerated energy transition
- Maximising the opportunities from the temporary part-pedestrianisation of Union Street; and ensuring the plans are clear and well communicated
- Continuing our calls to ensure this region is strongly connected to the rest of the UK and beyond by air and fast rail and working with government to ensure quarantine measures do not put UK business at a competitive disadvantage

Four years of Brexit have been replaced by four months of COVID but the former hasn't gone away. It seems increasingly likely that we will leave the EU on December 31 without any deals in place, impacting all companies that import from or export to Europe. The number of customs documents required each year will increase from 50 million to circa 300 million. The Chamber team is on stand-by to help.

As I said last month, we are all in this together and are all part of the solution. One way we can do this is to make sure we buy local, support regional companies and brands to put money back into the tills of our economy as quickly as possible. Please go to [Northeastnow.scot](http://Northeastnow.scot) and get involved.

In *Society and Economy in Modern Britain 1700-1850*, Richard Brown wrote: "Aberdeen had a number of striking characteristics one of which was its economic resilience based on the adaptability of business leaders who found new means of investment and employment when old ones faded".

Collectively, we need to write the next chapter now.



**Russell Borthwick**  
*chief executive*







Pitch day for the pioneers

## Four pioneers selected for TechX programme

THE Oil & Gas Technology Centre (OGTC) and Deep Science Ventures (DSV) have selected four pioneering start-up companies to join the OGTC's TechX programme, doubling last year's intake.

TechX's collaboration with DSV - TechX Ventures - aligns with the OGTC's vision to unlock solutions which position the industry as a valued part of a balanced low carbon energy mix, such as low-cost hydrogen production and direct air capture of CO2.

DSV combines deep science thinking and engineering to create start-up companies which are automatically offered the opportunity to pitch for a place in the TechX programme.

The companies selected through the TechX Ventures programme are Mission Zero, Mellizyme, Supercritical and SHYp.

The DSV spinouts join the eight previously selected companies of cohort three which were announced in February 2020. This brings the accelerator's third cohort to a total of 12 pioneering companies, six of which align with the OGTC's Net Zero solution centre and Vision 2035.

## Scotland's best company for health and safety

INTERNATIONAL oilfield services company Expro has been awarded the Scotland Trophy at the RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) Health and Safety Awards and has been recognised with an Order of Distinction for 16 consecutive gold awards.

The Scotland Trophy recognises the company that has demonstrated the highest standard of health and safety management and performance of all participating companies based in or operating in Scotland, across all industry sectors.

Expro has shown commitment towards the continual improvement and raising of health and safety standards through outstanding service quality and safety initiatives.

The importance of health and safety is at the core of all activities, at all levels of the business, in all corners of the world, through 1,268 management led regional safety engagement sessions and Expro holding four global webcasts streamed to all 4,300 staff across 47 countries.

## Learning oil and gas skills by gaming

A NEW immersive scenario game that puts oil and gas worker's skills to the test has been launched by specialist energy e-learning company Norwell EDGE.

Players are transported to virtual rigs where they can explore the layout, equipment and systems needed to drill wells before being put through their paces with a range of tasks. Each task is aligned with the content and learning outcomes on Norwell EDGE's digital training platform. The 3D scenarios cover both onshore and offshore wells and can be tailored to specific company projects and activity.

Mike Adams, the co-founder of Norwell EDGE, said: "With the current limitations for face-to face training, digital learning is needed now more than ever. The gamification of learning not only significantly increases knowledge retention - especially compared to traditional classroom training - but also allows learners to practice their newly acquired skills in a safe environment.

"As the oil and gas industry embraces the digital transformation of its operational activity, it is now starting to explore how training could also be improved. Introducing gaming elements to our platform was the natural next step in the evolution of our courses to ensure they remain at the forefront of technical training in the industry."

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Queen's awards Andrew Robins, Enerquip

## Queen's Award for North-east companies

ABERDEENSHIRE energy industry equipment rental firm Hiretech Limited has been honoured with a Queen's Award for Enterprise for International Trade.

The company, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary, has been recognised for demonstrating significant achievements in establishing business in export markets around the world, specifically across Africa, the Caspian, Norway and South-east Asia.

Andy Buchan, Hiretech chief executive officer and founder, said: "It is tremendously satisfying to recognise that the rental equipment the Hiretech team designs, manufactures and services in Fintray, Aberdeenshire, has worldwide demand. This award reflects the hard work, enthusiasm and dedication the team employs to grow the business in international markets."

Also awarded a Queen's Award for Enterprise for International Trade for Outstanding Short Term Growth in overseas sales is Aberdeen-based Enerquip Ltd.

The company started trading in June 2015 and specialises in the design and manufacture of bespoke torque equipment for make up and break out of tubular goods. Overseas sales have grown to £6.7m in the past three years which is an overall growth of 544% and makes up 87% of all sales. Its main strategy is to continue to grow organically and open further sales and service offices in new regions. Its main markets are the USA, Middle East, Far East and Africa.

Director Andrew Robins said: "This prestigious award gives important recognition for all that we have achieved in just five years."

## Virtually visiting Aberdeen Art Gallery

VIRTUAL visitors to Aberdeen Art Gallery can enjoy 50 highlights from the collection on a digital tour thanks to an award-winning social enterprise which helps people make meaningful connections with art.

Named by the New Scientist as 'Shazam and Spotify for art', the Smartify app is an art guide that identifies 2D and 3D artworks in participating venues. On-site visitors can scan an artwork with their smartphone and the app provides instant information on it.

For visitors off-site – as everyone is during the current COVID-19 pandemic – Smartify's powerful search facility uses location and personal preferences to offer users thoughtfully curated stories and tours, such as the one offered by Aberdeen Art Gallery.

The Discover Aberdeen Art Gallery tour includes images and descriptions of 50 artworks, with audio descriptions by staff for selected works, providing accessible and informal insights into many aspects of the varied collection, including drawings, paintings, sculpture, decorative art and jewellery.

## Visit Aberdeen city and shire virtually

VISITABERDEENSHIRE has collated top interactive tours, experiences and classes in a bid to enthuse armchair adventurers to explore the North-east of Scotland from the comfort of home, as a prelude to an actual visit.

The 'Aberdeenshire will wait' section of the VisitAberdeenshire website is a culmination of the best virtual experiences from businesses in the city and shire area. Included in the online programme of activity are virtual art collections, cookery lessons, castle tours and stunning flyover videos of the region's best golf courses.

Chris Foy, chief executive officer, VisitAberdeenshire said: "We're leaving a light on for our visitors, encouraging them to take a closer look at our beautiful region from afar. Our interactive site pulls together virtual experiences from around the region, appealing to people's curiosity and inspiring them to plan a future visit.

"Aberdeenshire Will Wait' is also a reminder to our local community of what is so inherently brilliant about this area, our wild coastlines, incredible scenery and rich heritage. As we move closer towards an easing of restrictions, I can't stress enough how important locals will be to the recovery of the North-east's tourism and hospitality sector."

## Spirit contract for NHV Group

NHV Group has been awarded a new long-term contract with Spirit Energy to provide passenger transfer services in support of its East Irish Sea operations. The operations are expected to start in December and will depart from Blackpool.



# Next to normal



**FOR almost all of us the workplace as we knew it a few months ago will have changed significantly as life returns to the 'new normal'. For many it will remain a spare bedroom or a quiet corner of the family home for months to come - and may turn out to be permanent.**

Those returning to offices and industrial premises meanwhile are likely to be experiencing far less familiar surroundings. The group chat by the coffee machine is a thing of the past, your colleagues will now be sitting some considerable distance away. There will be marked out designated routes around the premises to avoid unexpected encounters, temperature checks and hot desking could have been consigned to history.

So will these changes, enforced by an invisible enemy, have a major impact - detrimental or otherwise - on businesses and their employees? Dr Claire Macaulay is a leadership and management consultant and provides practical and engaging training in advanced communication skills and creating compassionate workplaces. She is also experienced in remote working

and managing remote teams. "Leaders of organisations know the things which pre-COVID maybe were not working all that well, the bits of the business which needed attention," she said.

"If someone had said to them a few months ago 'let's just draw line and you can start all over again' they would have seen that as a huge opportunity. Yes, this has been a really difficult period and we are just beginning to move out of the 'react' phase of trying to deal with it - but if we stop and think a wee bit further ahead there are massive opportunities for organisations to create their own 'new normal' from the ground up."

Claire suggests that leaders keep a 'captain's log' of all the decisions they have made and why, because they will quickly forget the good as well as the less successful.

"It will be very easy for organisations to forget the big decisions they've made and the big wins. Why did you make a particular decision? Which things worked out and made you wonder 'why didn't we do this years ago?'. There is going to be a 'new normal' or series of 'new normals' whether you want it or not so why not

consciously design the future to be what you want. If the sky was the limit what would you create in terms of workplace and environment? What values would you choose for your company, are you really clear about your purpose and mission, on how you want the people in your organisation and your customers to feel?"

Claire said it is vital to take your staff on the journey with you and one way to help is by ensuring their 'psychological safety' - a term coined during Google's 'Project Aristotle' into the secrets of highly effective teams.

"We know that for people to perform at their optimum level there needs to be some level of stress but, if we pass the optimum level of stimulation, performance begins to decline. How do we keep people at that pinnacle point? Psychological safety is a well-recognised component of how you make a compassionate culture where everyone can flourish."

Drawing on the work of social scientist Tim Clark, she explained there are four stages of psychological safety. "The first is: 'Do I belong here?' People fear exclusion above anything else and





would rather feel included than loved for example.

“The second is: ‘Can I grow here? Can I learn stuff?’ So for people to be able to learn anything there needs to be a fundamental level of safety and belonging. The third is ‘Can I contribute? Is it safe for me to say what I think here?’ And the fourth is challenger safety: ‘Can I speak up when I think something is going wrong?’ People will not feel comfortable to challenge and take risks unless the other three building blocks are in place.”

She said consideration would have to be given to how psychological safety could be achieved for those still working at home, including those who might be new to the organisation and detached from the normal office environment where people chit chat and get to know their colleagues and what is going on in their lives. Social distancing in the office environment will also pose challenges.

It will be important to try to recreate some of the social interactions perhaps using communication platforms like Microsoft Teams or Slack.

“You may have a channel just for socialising and fun and it is

important for leaders to engage in it personally so others know it is OK because the boss is doing it,” she added.

Managing staff who are working at home requires some managers to re-think their management style. Many managers adopt a ‘command and control’ style, which does not translate easily to a remote team. A more helpful style may be to focus on empowerment and trust. Focus on accomplishment, not activity.

“You need to be really clear with team members about what their goals are, what they need to achieve and the timescale in which it needs to be completed. It doesn’t matter whether someone chooses to do that at 7 o’clock at night, outside conventional working hours because they are helping with their kids’ schoolwork in afternoon. It is about accomplishing the goals, not necessarily sitting at a desk at home from 9-to-5.

“Leaders also need to explain to staff how what they are doing fits into the bigger picture of the organisation. You cannot over-communicate when you are working with a remote team. If you feel that you are bored of hearing yourself say the same thing, then

you are probably getting it about right.”

Mark Fraser, chief executive officer of Nucore Group, agrees and says new communication channels he has created at Nucore have been vital during the COVID crisis.

“Over the last year we have been trying to diversify from oil and also internationalise our business and from 2018-19 we doubled our profit,” he said.

“Pre-COVID there were three new locations, including Kazakhstan and Australia, where we had identified partners to work with but all that has gone on hold and we don’t know how quickly it is going to be resumed, with international travel one of the main obstacles.”

Mark is trying to ensure the welfare of the company’s 140 staff who work offshore, in offices, in engineering workshops and overseas. He said good communication was vital and having identified that as a weakness when he took over his current role 18 months ago, he had worked to improve it.

There is now an employee platform in place through which they can administer all their HR tasks like sick





leave and holidays but they also use it for HSE and CSR communication and 'current situation' updates for all staff, including those on furlough.

"I personally put out a weekly update and tell everyone what's going on in the business with an indication on trading. We include key safety updates and if, for example, the Scottish Government issues guidelines we include a clear note as to how we have interpreted them. We let them know of any decisions we have made on the back of that and constantly review these. We are giving them as much certainty as we can and a number of employees have commended us for that because at one stage they were receiving contradictory messages from a variety of sources, including their peers.

"Over the last 18 months we have been trying to reverse an old-school trend for information on a need-to-know basis only and COVID has accelerated that and has given the opportunity to show that we are transparent and open and honest.

"We partnered with Mental Health Aberdeen at the turn of the year, our official charity partner, and

have been working closely with them. In my bulletins I highlight the advice which is available. We are trying to head off problems. We are all experiencing the same pressures and we are trying to be proactive and ensure people are aware of the support and advice which is there for them. These helplines are confidential and the onus is on the individual to contact them but I hope they are using them."

Nucore staff offshore are on essential maintenance contracts and Mark said they work closely with Oil and Gas UK and the International Association of Drilling Contractors to ensure their safety.

"This a very safety conscious industry and we are pretty comfortable that with the procedures and safeguards our customers have in place when we pass over the duty of care our staff are going to be well looked after."

Measures have already been put in place in the company's workshops, where work hasn't halted, with new safe working practices documents drawn up and workstations cordoned off to ensure social distancing.

"We have invested in a thermal

imager at the front door so no-one is allowed on the premises if their temperature is not within tolerance. Everyone is also allocated with a sanitiser on their desk as well as snoods which they will automatically put on if they leave their workstation. We considered issuing gloves for when they leave their workstations but decided it wasn't a practical solution and installed more sanitisers instead."

He said the cleaning company was also now regularly cleaning all touch points such as door handles and taps.

Donna Gibb, head of client services (Aberdeen) at Law at Work, agreed it will be crucial for employers to engage with their employees to ensure clear messaging, to give some comfort it will be safe for them to return to work if required.

"Line manager's clear communications with their teams will be vital both for those returning to the workplace and for those remaining working from home. As we move to return, employers will need to ensure the organisation culture is all inclusive and every employee feels they are returning to a safe environment. The pandemic has had an unequal impact across



the workforce, with different employees going through all sorts of different scenarios at home. Some may be juggling childcare, looking after shielding relatives, or

“

**“For those businesses which have closed down over the last few weeks, it is going to be quite a transition convincing and reassuring everyone that it is now safe to get back into the workplace. From an HR perspective, obviously safety is key, but it is important to communicate to the workforce the different measures you’re introducing and how their health, safety and well-being is top of the list to provide the reassurance they require.”**

**Donna Gibb,**  
head of client services,  
Law at Work

directly affected by bereavement.

“Others may be close to burn-out having been left with an increasing workload as their colleagues have been furloughed, so there are many different individual needs to consider.

“For those businesses which have closed down over the last few weeks it is going to be quite a transition convincing and reassuring everyone that it is now safe to get back into the workplace. From an HR perspective, obviously safety is key but it is important to communicate to the workforce the different measures you’re introducing and how their health, safety and wellbeing is top of the list to provide the reassurance they require.

“It could be difficult for the employer to reject requests to work from home because homeworking has been so successful. Undoubtedly there will be some roles which just can’t be performed from home but, if an employee has successfully operated from home and fulfilled the jobs they need to do, an employer may struggle to demonstrate why they need to get on a bus and come to work.

“Companies will be relying on strong people managers taking on a key role during this transition. Not all line managers may be equipped to deal with difficult multifaceted conversations in these current times. As quite sensitive conversations may sometimes be required, businesses may want to think about workshops for managers around leadership, communication and conflict management.

“Managers must be open, collaborative and compassionate to ensure an inclusive and health culture within their teams. This does not always come naturally and some thought on coaching and training in this area could make the difference to a smooth transition back to work.

“Informal communication between line managers and staff is also critical. The wrong comment at the wrong time can have a big impact on employee relations. Employers are reliant on their line managers to support and drive through the right culture for their organisation and to develop positive employee relations.”



# North-East

# NOW

North East Now pulls together lots of great information, directories and blogs in to one central place to make it easier for you to make sure you are supporting local businesses. It's always been important to support businesses in the North East of Scotland, but never has it been more important than it is right now.

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# Lost property..?

## **DEMAND for Aberdeen commercial property may change significantly in the months ahead fuelled by the COVID-19 crisis and its knock-on effect on the oil and gas sector.**

Many occupiers are starting to rethink how they use office space, however, according to Dan Smith, director and head of office at Savills, it remains too early to determine whether that change will result in smaller offices, bigger offices, or perhaps a combination of the two.

He anticipates some tenants will look to reduce their office size and perhaps even give up their offices entirely by allowing or encouraging staff to work from home. Others will feel home working is not something they want to continue and will seek larger premises to facilitate safe social distancing and to ensure staff feel comfortable returning to an office-based environment.

"I have heard many different views about what the office environment of the future might look like," he

said. "Naturally, it is an extremely hot topic in our industry at the moment and we are being asked by many clients to input to their workplace strategy and to assist with their plans for return to the office.



**"I believe that following the coronavirus a new flexibility will be embedded into many of our working lives. Office occupiers may not necessarily take less space but office design is likely to become less dense, better respecting health and wellbeing as well as social distancing."**

**Dan Smith,**  
director,  
Savills

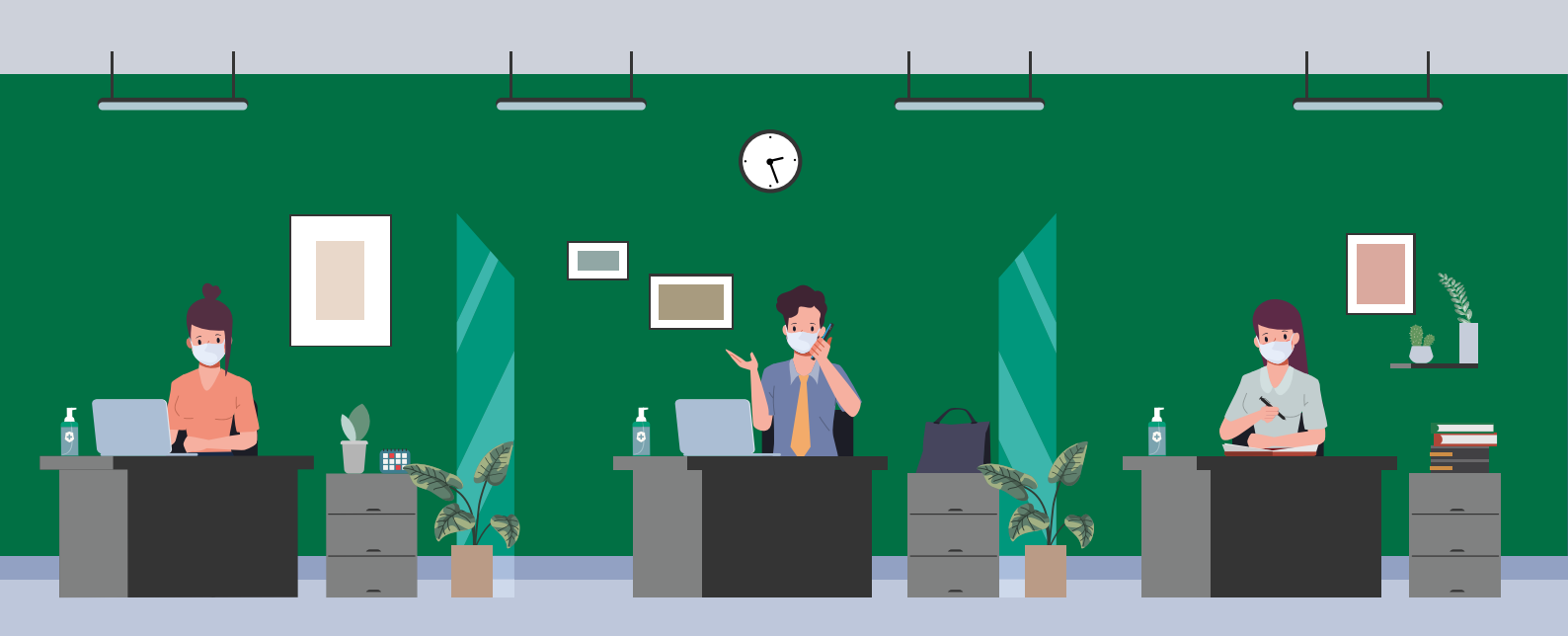
"When you have such significant disruption as we have witnessed over the last few months, people will start to think what might happen and what 'the future' may look like but it is unlikely we will see the true extent of the impact until the restrictions are fully lifted, we are legally permitted to return to our offices and everyone is able to take stock.

"My view is that it is still too early in the cycle to accurately determine what the overall trend may be and I think the reality will be that some occupiers will take entirely different approaches to others. There will be no 'one size fits all' solution.

"COVID-19 has provided the ultimate home working experiment however, for many, the office retains an important role as a hub for creation, learning and the spontaneous sharing of information and ideas.

"I believe that following the coronavirus a new flexibility will be embedded into many of our working lives. Office occupiers may not necessarily take less space but





office design is likely to become less dense, better respecting health and wellbeing as well as social distancing.”

He said many large corporates and professional services companies over the last few years have provided desks for 60-70% of staff because that is the percentage who were likely to be in an office at any one time. This is perhaps set to change, in the short term at least, as the need for social distancing will create a drive away from hot desking and desk sharing to fixed desking.

“Many corporates have permitted flexible working for years but the large proportion of employees working away from the office in the wake of COVID may be the catalyst for accelerating flexible working patterns.”

He explained that historically the view amongst property professionals was that companies should typically provide between 70ft<sup>2</sup> and 140ft<sup>2</sup> per person but this may change as the focus shifts more from efficient space planning toward staff wellbeing.

“We would have previously thought 200ft<sup>2</sup> per person was an incredibly sparsely populated office but I have recently heard a rumour that Google are talking about increasing that provision to 400ft<sup>2</sup> per person

“

**“This can be quite challenging because offices and business premises have not been designed to have the luxury of two metres of spacing between people. For example, in our own office at a typical six-person workstation with three on one-side and three on the other it would mean a maximum of two.”**

**Colin Campbell,**  
managing director,  
Langstane Press Ltd

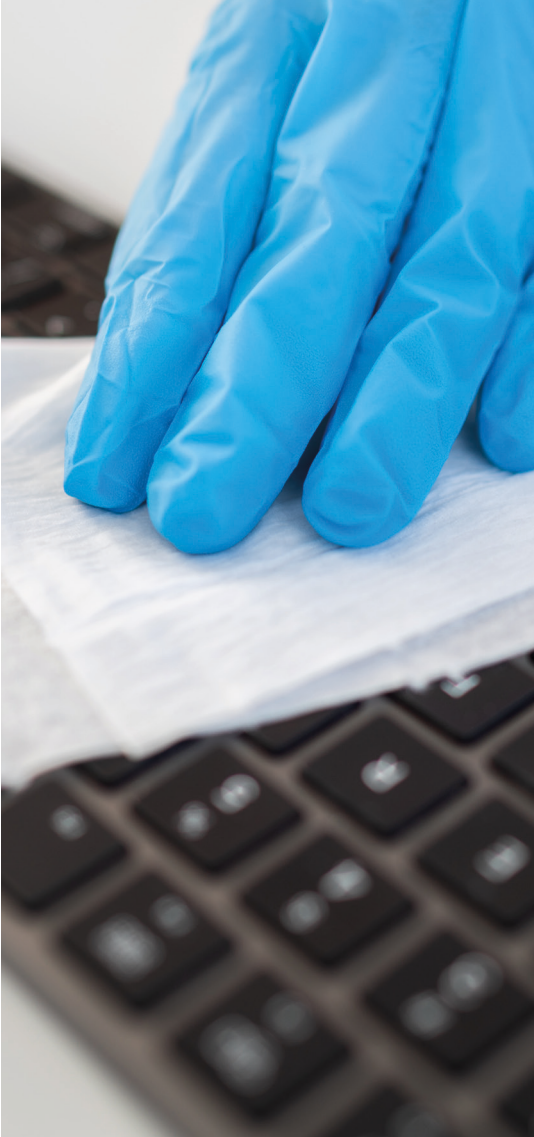
in their corporate headquarters. This is a massive amount of space and is simply not practical for the majority of businesses.

“The pandemic has accelerated existing thinking in many respects when it comes to the property industry and I believe there will be huge opportunity for those who are able to plot future trends accurately.”

Colin Campbell, managing director of Langstane Press Ltd, said they had been talking to customers for several weeks about enabling them to create a workplace which respects social distancing.

“This can be quite challenging because offices and business premises have not been designed to have the luxury of two metres of spacing between people. For example, in our own office at a typical six-person workstation with three on one-side and three on the other it would mean a maximum of two.”

He said that when lockdown began they delivered everything



from chairs and desks to laptops, desktop accessories and stationery to an increased number of locations with so many people working from home.

Many of the deliveries were of equipment to enable safe and comfortable home working.

“Manufacturers of desking and office equipment are already marketing various types of screens to adapt workplaces and a massive range is being conjured out of nowhere which we can now source for customers. However, the problem is the same as it was with PPE with demand outstripping supply and there can be a delay in obtaining Perspex for the separation of desks.

“As well as carrying out risk assessments, redesigning the layout of their offices to accommodate social distancing and installing screens businesses will have to adopt new hygiene standards which will involve individuals taking some personal responsibility. As well as hand sanitiser dispensers at stations around premises personal

sanitisers will probably be standard issue and businesses may issue personal protection kits to staff with hand sanitiser, a mask and a pair of gloves.

“We have also had several requests already for ‘fogging machines’ -

“

**“As well as carrying out risk assessments, redesigning the layout of their offices to accommodate social distancing and installing screens businesses will have to adopt new hygiene standards which will involve individuals taking some personal responsibility.”**

**Colin Campbell,**  
managing director,  
Langstane Press Ltd

portable sanitisers which expel a fine mist of disinfectant into the atmosphere which settles on all surfaces to prevent cross infection.

“I think one of the biggest legacies of this whole coronavirus lockdown will be that businesses will learn how to operate in a different way and sometimes that might be a better in terms of the cost of space. For most city businesses, especially in the Aberdeen area, the biggest cost is rates. Many are discovering they can operate effectively and efficiently with all their staff at home and could save thousands of pounds in rates.”



# Where do you see an opportunity to do things differently?



“During the COVID-19 outbreak we have learned that the team like to be informed more frequently but in smaller measures. Traditionally we would give the organisation a monthly information dump which was probably not meaningful or even relevant. Moving forward we will have meaningful short and frequent updates, possibly using video messages, which the team can watch at their leisure.

“Operationally, we will have a contingency plan in place as well as a growth plan. This has taught me to expect the unexpected. Thankfully, we had solid business continuity plans in place but this does not always consider reduced demand or changing customer needs. The importance of having locally based personnel will also become more of a factor in business planning. Lastly, the key piece of the puzzle means a strong balance sheet and solid liquidity will be at the forefront of all future decision making.”

**Bruce Melvin**, *chief executive officer, READ Cased Hole*



“Our volunteers are the heart of the RNLi and we want to continue to show them how much they matter – together we save lives at sea. We usually have lots of fundraising events and open days underway but our volunteers have embraced online meetings and been really enthusiastic about ways to fundraise from home.

“We have introduced more digital and virtual options including campaigns such as Mayday and RNLi Fish Supper as well as online shopping and training courses. Lifeboats are continuing to answer calls for help throughout this pandemic so we need to ensure that we have sufficient funds and volunteers to enable them to do so to save lives now and into the future. We look forward to being able to hold face to face events again but the development of digital and online options, as well as contactless payment, are undoubtedly going to become permanent features for the future.”

**Anne Scott**, *RNLi community manager in Scotland and lifeboat operations manager, Buckie Lifeboat Station*



“This crisis has brought many opportunities for operating differently as we move forward. We’ve had to move our business online and have been able to continue to operate without too many issues. The opportunity to save travelling time, fuel and venue fees means that a number of previously in-person coaching programmes will be held online in future. I would encourage all businesses to consider online operations where time, money and carbon efficiencies can be made, but not to the detriment of the service offered.

“Also, flexible working now has the potential to become the norm. Giving employees the option of working from home or office will have a significant positive impact on employee engagement and productivity. I hope businesses don’t just return to their old ways but can see the benefits of retaining some of the activities they were forced to undertake during lockdown, they can bring significant benefits.”

**Brenda Hector**, *business growth specialist, ActionCOACH*



Mike Masson

## Orca exceeds annual target in three months

ORCA Oceanic Systems Ltd (OOS) has secured significant contract awards adding more than £1.75m to its order backlog for 2020.

Mike Masson, managing director, said: "It is a monumental achievement by the OOS team during these exceptionally difficult trading conditions to secure three highly significant contracts. The contracts will be carried out by OOS's operations support project team in Aberdeen, our dedicated dive service centre and our mobilisation team.

"OOS has now exceeded our turnover and revenue targets for the whole of 2020 in Q1 and is on track to more than double our forecasted turnover for 2020."

## £1.6m investment creates 40 jobs in Aberdeen

SUBSEA clean energy specialist EC-OG has received £1.6m from an investment consortium led by Par Equity.

EC-OG will use the funds to support its growth plans, which focus on the exploitation of its innovative Halo battery storage system designed for subsea applications. The investment will create up to 40 jobs in Aberdeen over the next 12 months.

The investment in EC-OG is the first that Par Equity has made since its recent partnership with the British Business Bank. The funds were allocated as part of the Regional Angel Programme. This £75m programme supports some of the fastest growing technology companies across the North of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and is designed to provide early stage capital to smaller businesses with high growth potential.

## Mental health support for staff and students

NORTH East Scotland College (NESCol) is increasing the ways its students can access mental help support.

It has joined forces with Big White Wall, a digital mental health support service which is available online, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is completely anonymous so students can express themselves freely and openly under the supervision of professionally trained Wall Guides.

The guides monitor the community to ensure the safety and anonymity of all users. The service will also be available to all staff at NESCol.

Once registered, members can access a range of tools and services including online talkabout sessions, a personal journal, help in identifying and planning how to achieve goals; and opportunities to express themselves creatively and self-assessments to get a better understanding of what they're experiencing.

Neil Cowie, principal at NESCol, said: "Supporting our students and staff with their mental health is an ongoing priority at NESCol and we feel it is important, especially at this moment in time, to provide access to digital services which are available at all times. This will complement an ever-evolving range of online and offline options we already support our students to access."

## All-Energy rescheduled

REED Exhibitions has announced that All-Energy, the UK's largest renewable and low carbon energy exhibition and conference, and the co-located Dcarbonise 2020, are now scheduled to take place on November 4 and 5 at the Scottish Event Campus.

## Research grant for lockdown impact

RESEARCHERS at the University of Aberdeen have been awarded £52,000 to investigate the impact of lockdown on patients with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions - specifically psoriatic arthritis, axial spondyloarthritis, also known as Ankylosing Spondylitis, and chronic pain conditions including fibromyalgia.

The charity Versus Arthritis and the British Society for Rheumatology (BSR) are funding the study led by Professor Gary Macfarlane, clinical chair in epidemiology, which will shed light on the effects of lockdown on people with long-term conditions and on how their health may have been affected. The study is funded by an extension to an existing study of Versus Arthritis and an award from BSR.

Around 2,000 patients across the UK with variety of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions - who have been involved in long-term studies with the university - will be sent questionnaires in the first instance, with in-depth interviews set up with some of them afterwards.





The winning concept

## More awards for SIGNAL2NOISE

DIGITAL media production company SIGNAL2NOISE has won a Gold 'REMI' award, at the 53rd Annual WorldFest-Houston Film Festival. The international film festival received more than 4,500 entries, with only a small number winning an award. Established more than 50 years ago, it is the oldest independent film and video festival in the world.

'Mariner - A Digital Frontrunner' was commissioned by Equinor to promote its commitment to innovation and digital technology. The film was shot on location, in Aberdeen and offshore on the Mariner platform.

SIGNAL2NOISE won a further two awards as part of the 'Wimbledon Rematch 1980' team which secured a gold award for 'Creative Event of the Year' and a silver in the 'Game Changer' category at the Campaign Experience Awards, beating Airbnb and Google.

'Wimbledon Rematch 1980' was an immersive event which reproduced the legendary Wimbledon Final between Bjorn Borg and John McEnroe. The show used a combination of actors, dancers, music and newsreel to recreate the experience of being at Wimbledon in the 1980's.

SIGNAL2NOISE created all of the video content and large-scale projections required to deliver the unique immersive experience.

## University's global success for impact on society

THE University of Aberdeen is among the top 100 universities in the world in terms of its positive impact on society.

It has been placed as 73rd in the world in the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings, which recognise universities for their social and economic impact based on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This year's rankings place Aberdeen among the global top 50 for five SDGs, including responsible consumption and production (11th), which considered the university's action on waste management, ethical sourcing of food and supplies; and reducing the use of disposable items.

Across the board, the university has improved its score in all but one SDG that it submitted data for in last year's rankings. Furthermore, it has now expanded its submission to cover all 17 SDGs.

This year's rankings have considered 766 higher education institutions (up from 462 last year), allowing institutions to demonstrate their commitment to the SDGs through teaching, research and knowledge transfer, as well as their internal practices, policies and procedures.

## New omissions reduction service

DATA science and predictive technology service provider, OPEX Group, has launched a new emissions reduction service in response to demand from the oil and gas industry, as operators seek to cut costs and achieve ambitious net zero targets.

Following significant investment in technology development, OPEX Group has launched X-PASTM Emissions - a new data science service which enables operators to reduce CO2 intensity and emissions from their oil and gas operations. The new service aims to help customers reduce annual CO2 tonnage by 15%.

## Record year for Blue Water Shipping

BLUE Water Shipping achieved a €25m profit last year, its greatest ever.

This is an improvement of just over €24m compared to the previous year, when the result before tax was €1.3 m. Turnover increased by €112m to €858m, a 15% rise.

The Blue Water Group's energy and projects division is the primary reason for the record result. This division is in the process of executing several major logistics contracts in connection with the extension of the Tengiz Oil Field in Kazakhstan.



A look at the screening guide

## Texo's screening stations for key sites

TEXO Accommodation has launched a guide to setting up and installing modular coronavirus screening station concepts for airports, heliports and ports as lockdown conditions to prevent the spread of the virus ease.

Working in partnership with specialist aviation sector advisers and architects, Texo Accommodation's guide provides owners and service providers at sites of critical national infrastructure insight into the design and deployment of temporary modular buildings designed to ensure the highest standards of safety, including employee and passenger testing facilities on departure and arrival.

The screening stations offer flexible, rapidly deployed facilities which are uniquely designed for sites such as ports, airports and heliports, logistics centres and major construction sites where people are required to go to work to deliver essential services in the UK.

## Gasunie joins green hydrogen project

ENERGY infrastructure company Gasunie will join Neptune Energy as a new partner on the PosHYdon pilot, the world's first offshore green hydrogen project.

PosHYdon integrates three energy systems in the Dutch North Sea: offshore wind, offshore gas and offshore hydrogen and will involve the installation of hydrogen-producing plant on the Neptune-operated Q13a platform.

Gasunie, which manages and maintains infrastructure for large-scale transport and storage of gases in the Netherlands and northern Germany, is the latest to join the PosHYdon consortium following NOGAT B.V. and Noordgastransport B.V., both owners of large gas transport pipelines in the North Sea.

# A word of advice



**Nicola Alexander,**  
*director,*  
Bethan Customs Consultancy Ltd

### Area of expertise:

We have built a strong reputation for providing clear, practical and impartial advice to businesses in relation to their customs compliance and supply chain requirements. Our team of customs consultants and managers provide reliable, professional support via a friendly and collaborative service.

### What should people know:

With Brexit on the horizon, change is inevitable. In relation to customs requirements and responsibilities, securing Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) status is one step that will consistently help your business to trade internationally. The benefits include the potential for self-assessments in relation to customs transactions, simplified access to special procedures and customs simplifications, as well financial advantages.

### What's the biggest mistake companies make?

Applying for AEO status without being fully prepared. We would advise businesses to ensure that they meet the AEO criteria, in full, in advance of applying. Businesses need to take into consideration the timeframes involved in terms of both preparation and the length of the approval process.

### What's your top tip?

Carry out a self-assessment of your company's procedures to align with the criteria of the AEO application. Remember to ensure that your written procedures accurately reflect what you do. Seek advice, attend relevant training, and engage with key members of your organisation, so that you are best placed to achieve AEO status.

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# Supporting future experts of industry

**John Cairns,**  
*community benefits advisor,*  
Balfour Beatty



**AS A member of 'The 5% Club' Balfour Beatty is dedicated to inspiring, educating and retaining young people to take up earn-as-you-learn positions while making them aware of what a rewarding career in construction looks like. Innovative technologies are changing the way in which we work – many jobs will change and new skills will be required in the future, providing a great opportunity for apprentices to thrive in the industry.**

Having worked in youth employment and the community development arena in the North-east of Scotland for 11 years, I am part of Balfour Beatty's community investment team who drive support for foundation, modern and graduate apprenticeships in the North-east. We aim to ensure that the generation who will be responsible for delivering Scotland's future infrastructure projects are suitably qualified.

Balfour Beatty supports a wide range of apprenticeship opportunities as well as a wide range of roles varying from project management to engineering, digital interaction and skilled trades. We work closely with the local Developing the Young Workforce North East team

to engage with young people and promote our offerings to schools, colleges and universities.

Balfour Beatty regional Scotland and Ireland managing director Hector MacAulay has been very visible and vocal in this area. Hector is a member of the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board and has also recently been appointed as the first HRH Industrial Cadets Ambassador in Scotland by the Engineering Development Trust.

Hector states that 'Balfour Beatty must continue to work closely with schools, universities, business and enterprises to support their objectives and to assist in the development of our future workforce whilst strengthening the local community. The key is in presenting foundation, modern and graduate apprenticeships as viable routes into a successful career and reinforcing the significance of the infrastructure industry'.

We believe that the construction industry has a responsibility to support the communities in which we operate, as well as giving something back. In Aberdeen we deliver community engagement activities such as volunteering, mentoring and charitable fundraising alongside

creating opportunities for people to learn and develop.

In the heart of Aberdeen, Balfour Beatty is currently delivering the flagship Union Terrace Gardens project on behalf of Aberdeen City Council. The £25.7m Aberdeen City Council project is being taken forward as part of the local city centre masterplan and will greatly improve access, amenity and activity within the gardens when completed.

An important offer and commitment later this year is we will be supporting local pupils who are taking part in the North East Scotland College (NESCOL) Foundation Apprentice programme. Foundation apprenticeships are a work-based learning opportunity for senior-phase secondary school pupils and help young people gain valuable, real-world work experience and access work-based learning while they're still at school.

Young people we have employed on apprenticeship programmes have proved to be motivated, adaptable, enthusiastic and keen to learn new skills – qualities which every business will be seeking in the post COVID-19 journey which lies ahead.







John Reid of Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc

## Major contract for Elevator in net zero drive

MICHELIN Scotland Innovation Parc (MSIP) has awarded Elevator, a major contract to help lead the charge for Scotland's sustainable mobility and low carbon energy sectors.

Through a partnership with MSIP, a joint venture between Dundee City Council, Michelin and Scottish Enterprise, Elevator will expand its national accelerator offering with the launch of a specialist programme to support Scotland's net-zero carbon ambitions.

The Sustainable Mobility and Low Carbon Innovation Accelerator – part of a series of MSIP initiatives – has been designed to underpin Scotland's response to the global climate emergency.

John Reid, Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc chief executive officer, said: "This very specific accelerator is a real opportunity for companies in this space and I am confident Elevator will deliver a programme that will achieve great results for those companies to scale up and grow."

## RGU's £1.3m fashion project award

A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY research team from Robert Gordon University (RGU) is working with Shanghai academics and industry partners in Scotland to educate consumers about the sustainability, craftsmanship, heritage and value of traditional fashion and textile products.

The team of academics, from RGU's Computing, Art and Creative and Cultural Business schools, have been awarded £1.3m for the project titled 'Augmented Fashion: Immersive Interactions for Sustainable Heritage in Fashion and Textiles'.

Led by Dr Yang Jiang, of RGU's School of Computing Science and Digital Media, and working with Shanghai academics and industry partners as well as partners in the Highlands and Islands including Orkney, Shetland, the Outer Hebrides and Glasgow, the project will explore how immersive technologies could be used to preserve and promote the history and heritage of traditional fashion and textile products, while educating fashion and clothing consumers.

## Free to use SME research data

CLOSE Brothers Asset Finance has launched its free-to-use SME Data Hub, making available all research it has conducted - in partnership with Kantar research - since the start of 2016.

The company has been surveying SMEs for over a decade on a wide range of topics and it was felt that rather than archive the data, it would make it available to everyone, from researchers and students to journalists and finance professionals, none of whom have to sign-up or provide contact details to access the data.

In addition, both graphs and tables of the data can be downloaded by users. The only requirement the company has placed on the use of the data is that it must be credited by the user as the source.

## Kinetics bolsters research and development

KINETICS Controls & Innovation Ltd has bolstered its research and development by launching a new company, KCI Engineering Ltd.

Kevin Watt, managing director, said: "The creation of this new company was essential to enable a creative space for the development of new products that will help the oil and gas industry. By creating a separate company, it provides breathing space from the busy day to day operations of Kinetics Controls & Innovation."

## Exploring COVID-19's impact

THE true impact of COVID-19 on some of society's most vulnerable people and their caregivers is being explored through an international survey from researchers at the University of Aberdeen.

In collaboration with Queen's University Belfast, the project hopes to provide rapid feedback to the NHS and charitable organisations about the current needs expressed by patients with cancer, precancerous conditions and rare diseases and those who help to care for them.

It is understood that caregivers and patients are experiencing a major impact of COVID-19 on their lives with health services forced to change to ensure the safety of patients.

The survey will assess the impact that these and other changes due to the coronavirus pandemic have had on caregivers and patients.

Working with healthcare providers, patients and researchers it is hoped that the immediate, medium and long-term impact of the coronavirus pandemic on caregivers and patients with cancer, pre-cancerous conditions and rare disease can be identified.





# Two sides to every story

**THE fortunes of two North-east companies which are dependent on international trade highlight the vastly differing impacts which COVID-19 is having on the economy.**

World Cargo Logistics enjoyed the best month in its six-year history in April while Neutron Fire Technologies sales dropped off by about 65% from the same month last year, with May looking even bleaker.

World Cargo Logistics, which is based at the Midmill Industrial Estate in Kintore, is part of the World Cargo Alliance network (WCA) which has more than 400 offices worldwide, including seven in the UK.

“Aberdeen is the oil and gas hub for World Cargo,” said general manager Crawford Hendy.

“We deal with cargo not only from Aberdeen but from all over UK and also cross trade. We deal with shipments from Canada to Baku and Baku to Canada and many other similar scenarios - some of the cargo we never see or touch - we can fully manage the process remotely.

“People have gained confidence in what we are doing locally so when they place orders from China to America, for instance, they get us to control within our global network.”



**“The biggest change during the COVID crisis has been the reduction in capacity of flights. There have been so many flights to key destinations cancelled by the airlines. For example, Singapore Airlines used to operate five flights a week from Manchester to Houston but they suspended that service so cargo may have to be routed via Dallas.”**

**Crawford Hendy,**  
general manager,  
World Cargo Logistics

Around 90% of the company’s business relates to oil, gas and renewables with the food sector and marine industry making up the remainder.

“The biggest change during the COVID crisis has been the reduction in capacity of flights. There have been so many flights to key destinations cancelled by the airlines. For example, Singapore Airlines used to operate five flights a week from Manchester to Houston but they suspended that service so cargo may have to be routed via Dallas. The biggest challenge is simply finding the space because the capacity has been cut by probably 75%.”

He explained that around 75% of their normal activity relates to airfreight although the remaining 25%, which goes by sea, may account for a higher tonnage.

“With the lockdown beginning to ease it is looking brighter now. Many of the key routes are opening up again such as Baku and Lagos. Our biggest market is Azerbaijan and that has been good for us. April was our best month ever and that was predominantly down to our partnerships in Azerbaijan and Houston. I expect it to be





August or September before the air cargo infrastructure gets back to anything resembling normality and I think one of the biggest losses to the Aberdeen market has been the fact that both SAS and Widerøe suspended their flights to Stavanger and Bergen – it will be great when the Norwegian flights are fully back on schedule.

“The Sea-Cargo weekend service from Aberdeen has been a real lifeline into Scandinavia. Although dependent on weather it is extremely reliable and a lot of the traffic which might have gone by air is being diverted to the vessel.

“People are having to think smarter and order earlier so they can deliver the transit time. In instances where that isn’t going to work for the customer, we can arrange a charter aircraft which is relatively inexpensive. There are always solutions out there and we pride ourselves in finding a cost-effective fix.”

Crawford’s own business travel itinerary has been severely disrupted. He normally visits Houston twice a year, the company’s second biggest market, and would have been there in May if OTC had not been cancelled.

“I like to meet face-to-face with customers because at the end of the day you develop friendships which helps get you through the hard times. I am champing at the bit and as soon as the flights open up and the risk factors reduce, we will be going back to visit our customers and friends in Houston and Baku.”



**“People are having to think smarter and order earlier so they can deliver the transit time. In instances where that isn’t going to work for the customer, we can arrange a charter aircraft which is relatively inexpensive. There are always solutions out there and we pride ourselves in finding a cost-effective fix.”**

**Crawford Hendy,**  
general manager,  
World Cargo Logistics

He is also looking forward to having his team of seven back together as, although two have been required to work in the office, the rest have been operating effectively at home. Crawford added: “The whole team have been a fantastic support during these troubled times and our thanks go to the customers who have supported us and our operations team for adapting effectively to the challenges that COVID-19 has presented.

“Our success in April surprised even the directors. It was our best month in the six years since we opened and it was a combination of existing customers being busier and also picking up some new clients. We hope to build on that as the year goes on.”

Luke O’Keefe is managing director of Neutron Fire Technologies, a group of three companies which specialise in passive fire protection which is incorporated in the structure of buildings around the globe.

While the oil and gas industry has continued to function through the COVID crisis and provide a market for its suppliers, the building and construction industry, Neutron’s primary customer, has been halted.





“The drop off in sales was around 65% in April and in May was actually worse,” said Luke. “We are 95% export orientated and in almost all the world the building and construction industry is in either complete torpor or very low levels of activity. We hope that when we start to get out of this we will see a gradual return to normal trading levels but my fear is that is going to take a lot longer than we would like and probably around 12 months for us to get back to normal levels of activity.

“

**“The phone hardly rings and there is very little email traffic so we are in the lap of local authorities and governments everywhere relaxing back to work restraints, ”**

**Luke O’Keefe,**  
managing director,  
Neutron Fire Technologies

At the company’ base in Laurencekirk, where 80% of the employees were placed on furlough, only two remained working to deal with a ‘trickle of inquiries’.

“The phone hardly rings and there is very little email traffic so we are in the lap of local authorities and governments everywhere relaxing back to work restraints,” added Luke.

“We sell to about 45 countries and I generally do business development by travelling myself to see potential and actual customers. We also exhibit at trade fairs in the UK and abroad, mainly Europe and the USA, and normally we sell to specialist distributors but we also sell to end users - people who install these products. They are all for non-domestic installations, typically hospitals, high-rise buildings, office blocks, banks and football stadiums.

In the meantime, I am having to make use of what we are able to do which is email, telephone and things like Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams until normal travel returns.

“However, our experience over almost 20 years is that face-to-

face meetings and discussions are essential to grow our business because these are not typical products, they do need a lot of discussion and explanation and training from us. That can’t really be given by simply looking at documents and websites and for most of our customers English is a second language so face-to-face meetings are really important.”

### Looking to increase your international trade skills?

Find out what you need to know about importing and exporting as the UK prepares to exit the EU by checking out the Chamber’s extensive suite of international training courses.



# Fundraising in the new normal

by Ross Gardner,  
*partner and head of corporate, Stronachs LLP*



**IT'S NOT so long ago that I was writing about the importance for young entrepreneurial businesses to plan for the future and protect themselves against the risks of a relationship breakdown. No one could have predicted just a few months later the extraordinary challenges which everyone has faced.**

For many entrepreneurs these times of crisis also present opportunities and as we gradually return back to the 'new normal', the availability of funding is going to be one of the crucial considerations, with more options than ever available. So what are the main options?

- Existing stakeholders: The first port of call is usually to speak to your existing investors. They will already be familiar with your business and the documentation is therefore typically less onerous. From the investor's perspective, they can de-risk by subscribing for convertible loans so that the debt they provide now can convert into equity in due course when there is more certainty around growth prospects. There may not be the same tax advantages and investors may instead be eager to invest for more shares now if they get the benefit of SEIS or EIS relief.
- Bank debt: There are more options available than ever with a number of well publicised government-backed loans designed to help SMEs through the stormy waters caused by COVID-19. There is the option of the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) with loans of up to £5m (80% being guaranteed by the government). For smaller start-ups, the Bounce Back Loans Scheme gives access to small firms of loans of up to £50,000 without the same eligibility criteria which applies to the CBILS. Those start-ups who focus on R&D also have the option of further grants and loans through Innovate UK.
- The Future Fund: For early stage businesses who have previously raised at least £250,000 in equity investment, the COVID-19 Future Fund allows qualifying companies to apply for convertible loans from the government provided they are matched by private investors. There is strict eligibility criteria and this option doesn't fit with private investors looking to get the benefit of EIS relief on any new investment but the early take up has been higher than expected, ultimately leading to a significant number of owner managed businesses becoming partly owned by the UK Government.
- Venture Capital: VCs will be on the look out to invest in sectors which are not as affected as others by the ongoing impact of the global pandemic. Whether that is renewable energy, technology companies who can thrive through remote working practices or others who are adapting their business to disrupt the landscape of their sector post-COVID there will be opportunities. Typically, this source of funding carries more onerous terms and controls but that is often a price worth paying depending on the valuation at which the VC invests.

We have been encouraged to see the resilience of many companies throughout the recent lockdown, with a number of equity investments completing despite the level of uncertainties posed by COVID-19 and the lower oil price. As many of these businesses start to return to the new normal in the months ahead, we expect to see a continued increase in investment activity so that entrepreneurs can pursue opportunities without immediate cashflow constraints.

# Stronachs



Michael Madden, marketing manager

## Fifth Ring's initiative to help customers

INTERNATIONAL B2B marketing specialist Fifth Ring has launched an initiative to help its customers and the wider business community by providing them with learning modules to improve their understanding of the transformative role marketing can play in preparing them for new market conditions post-COVID-19.

Over the last three decades the award-winning company has developed an advanced marketing training scheme, which it has up until now used exclusively in-house. With the business world changing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fifth Ring Academy has been opened up for customers and the wider community to help them overcome challenges they will face in what will inevitably be a new marketplace.

Fifth Ring marketing manager Michael Madden said: "More than 40 organisations have already inquired about signing up to the Fifth Ring Academy, with brand awareness, prospecting, staff morale and motivating sales teams just some of the challenges they have identified.

"Through the identification of these challenges, we have been able to create bespoke modules that will be most relevant to these organisations. Thanks to the experts across all our teams, we have been able to provide access to valuable insights to help businesses harness the most up-to-date marketing tactics and technologies in order to thrive in what is, and will continue to be, a challenging environment across the globe."

## Montrose has welcome upturn in agribulk tonnage

MONTROSE Port had a 33% increase in general cargo in the first quarter of 2020. This was mostly made up of agribulk which was unloaded and transported across Angus and Aberdeenshire. General cargo has traditionally been 30% of activity at the port so this is a big increase and a welcome upturn in tonnage.

The port is also the first in the UK to transition to a cloud-based software system, ION Marlin SmartPort, which allows port control to be controlled remotely. The transition to digital working was made at the start of the year and has been invaluable during this time as staff can now work from home, with the exception of pilots who still go out to bring ships in. It also means that social distancing protocols are followed as safely as possible.

Work has started on the initial phases of the operations and maintenance base at the Port which will service the new Seagreen offshore wind farm. The Port was awarded a 25-year contract at the end of last year by SSE Renewables and when completed this will be Scotland's largest facility of its type.

## Mentoring programme conquers pandemic

ONE of the UK's most successful mentoring programmes for project managers in the oil and gas industry, which is co-ordinated by the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB), has launched for its sixth consecutive year.

A total of 15 mentees and 14 mentors from 17 oil and gas companies are taking part in the annual Oil and Gas Industry Project Management Mentoring Programme 2020, which is going ahead despite the current COVID-19 pandemic.

An online event was held for those involved in this year's initiative, including members of the Offshore Project Management Steering Group (OPMSG), as well as participants from previous years, who offered top tips on how to get the best out of both the programme and the relationships they will be forging in coming months. Mentors and mentees will continue to meet virtually on a regular basis until December.

## Wellpro's Australian collaboration

GLOBAL well intervention company Wellpro Group has secured collaborative agreement with Australian-based Inflatable Packers International (IPI), a leading manufacturer of inflatable technology for the oil and gas industry.

The agreement enables the Aberdeen-headquartered thru tubing and well intervention provider to significantly enhance its existing portfolio and offer IPI's best in class products along with operational design, technical support and field personnel to run and deploy the technology at the well site.





## Vegaroonitooon - by bike

AWARD-WINNING social enterprise and charity, Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) launched a 'Vegaroonitooon' – or 'Veg around the town' - fruit and vegetable box delivery.

The fresh and affordable produce boxes are available in four different sizes. CFINE delivers orders directly to customers' doors around Aberdeen using the enterprise's eco-friendly fleet, four electric cargo bikes and CFINE's new hydrogen car, wherever possible.

The profit generated by CFINE's enterprise activities is reinvested into maintaining and developing a holistic support system for vulnerable people. With every box purchased, customers support the essential development work that CFINE does in the priority communities throughout the city.

Details are available at [www.cfine.org](http://www.cfine.org)

## Northern Isles extension for Serco

SERCO, the international service company, has signed a contract with the Scottish Government to continue managing and operating the lifeline Northern Isles Ferry Services for passengers and freight between the Scottish mainland and the Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands, providing essential access and supplies for the islands.

The new contract immediately followed the previous contract extension, which has ensured continuity of services for Orkney and Shetland.

Kevin Craven, Serco chief executive UK and Europe, said: "We are very proud of our performance since we first won the contract in 2012, during which time we have improved almost every aspect of the service while also significantly reducing the annual subsidy and thereby lowering the burden on the Scottish taxpayer.

"Serco will now build on that track record and success to bring further improvements in the coming years for the communities and businesses of the Northern Isles."

## Bertling extends in Mozambique

BERTLING is extending its office network in Mozambique to increase its presence in the market and pursue new business opportunities.

Located in the far north of Mozambique, Pemba is the main port for the Cabo Delgado province, which is rapidly becoming Mozambique's offshore oil and gas exploration hub, with its high-quality gas reserves.

The company has identified Pemba, the capital of the province, as the best location for a new logistics base which provides the best opportunity to offer logistics support in the area, particularly for gas and infrastructure development projects.

## Family opens third North-east pharmacy

A FAMILY-RUN pharmacy firm is providing essential services during COVID-19 lockdown after acquiring its third site in Aberdeenshire with the support of Bank of Scotland.

JMF Healthcare opened its first store in Newtonhill in 2008 and its second in Edzell six years later. Headed up by John Fowlie and his wife, the duo decided to expand the business and acquire a third branch in Aberdeen. Supported by a six-figure funding package from Bank of Scotland, JMF Healthcare took over the running of the E I Mackie pharmacy in the Garthdee area of the city in March.

## Local entrepreneurs can turn ideas into reality

LOCAL entrepreneurs can turn their ideas into reality through new online workshops at Robert Gordon University (RGU) which aim to support business creation and drive economic growth in communities.

The LINA Online Business Toolkit Workshop is part of the Libraries Innovation Network Aberdeenshire (LINA) initiative, which is designed to help existing and start-up businesses grow.

A partnership between RGU and Aberdeenshire Council, LINA was launched last year to offer libraries as modern co-working spaces and resources to support business creation and drive economic growth in rural communities through the development of new products, services and opportunities.

The Online Business Toolkit Workshop is expanding on the network's already successful workshops which were previously held in Banff and Peterhead libraries. However, due to the current ongoing COVID-19 situation the workshop will be solely online.

# Time to focus on connecting with the local community

**Keith Skeoch,**  
*chief executive,*  
Standard Life Aberdeen



**WHILE a coordinated global approach to tackling the virus is necessary, one clear trend coming out of this pandemic is 'localism' – a focus on local communities, local action and local support.**

At Standard Life Aberdeen we recently withdrew from the 2021 World Economic Forum at Davos and are instead dedicating these resources to high-impact causes closer to home. Our view is that with a significant global recession dawning and the virus creating real hardship in our local communities, we must redirect our time, effort and funds to those causes on our doorstep.

For example, in Aberdeen we have donated to FareShare's efforts to fight hunger among the most disadvantaged around the city and to Grampian's Women Aid, a hugely respected organisation continuing to do great work. We have also placed supporting elderly and vulnerable people who are living alone or isolating at the centre of how we are engaging locally.

The vast majority of Standard Life Aberdeen colleagues are now in our 10th week of working remotely. In being largely restricted to our homes, the social distancing policies to curb

the spread of COVID-19 could have been expected to weaken social networks. However, as I have seen both internally and in the community, the opposite has happened. Video conferences, the inspiring and highly-publicised efforts of NHS fundraiser Captain Sir Tom Moore and small acts of neighbourly kindness have certainly encouraged this theme of localism.

The work of Opportunity North East (ONE) has chimed closely with this in their efforts across the region, devising a strategy to support the North-east economy through this turbulent time. Refocussing efforts to encourage the promotion of locally sourced food and drink, marketing the North east as an ideal 'staycation' and, of course, continuing to position Aberdeen as the all-energy capital of Europe as we transition to a low carbon economy are essential for the North-east as it responds to the pandemic.

The role of investors like SLA also extends to offering a helping hand to those small and medium businesses currently being squeezed in a socially distanced world. For our fund managers running real estate mandates who have witnessed this squeeze first hand, they have, where appropriate, engaged with smaller

occupiers on practical measures to support them through this difficult time.

Across Aberdeen we have worked in partnership with some businesses in local commercial parks and trade centres, recognising their individual and collective value to the local economy. Offering breathing room where we can to such businesses will hopefully allow for the green shoots of recovery, however small, to show as economies reopen.

It is a blend of these actions that I hope the financial services industry will take on to heal the economy from the scarring of COVID-19. We regrettably do not know how long the tunnel back to normality is but it is the small community actions, generosity and greater sense of understanding which gives me optimism for the future.





Craig McKay

## Stewart Milne's gold award for customer service

STEWART Milne Group, independent home builders and timber systems manufacturers, has been awarded the 2020 Gold Award for customer satisfaction across all its UK divisions.

An independent customer survey found that 92% of those who have purchased from Stewart Milne Homes would recommend the homebuilder to others, based on the customer journey and delivery of a fantastic customer experience.

All Stewart Milne Homes divisions across the UK picked up the top award, with both divisions in Scotland, Central and North scoring more than 90%. Sites in the North of Scotland scored particularly highly with almost 99% saying they would recommend the firm to others.

Head of customer services in Scotland, Craig McKay said: "I'm particularly pleased to report that almost 99% of Stewart Milne Homes North customers would recommend our services to others. This is an increase from our score of 97% in 2019 and we are extremely proud to be in touching distance of receiving 100% customer satisfaction."

## Optimal helps guide mothballing strategies

ABERDEEN-BASED Optimal has been instrumental in the technical drafting and editing of a guidance document, recently published by the Energy Institute in collaboration with its Ageing and Life Extension Committee.

The publication – 'guidance on the management and maintenance of the integrity of structures, equipment and systems taken out of service on either a temporary or permanent basis in the upstream oil and gas industry' – defines good practice and can be used as a starting point for potential considerations in terms of operationalising effective mothballing strategies.

## AI scholarships available

THE University of Aberdeen is offering eight scholarships for its MSc in Artificial Intelligence (AI), worth a combined £80,000.

The scholarships are available to pay tuition fees for the degree programme, which aims to cater for the need for AI-literate workers in a range of industries.

They are part-funded by The Data Lab, a Scottish innovation centre, along with the Scottish Funding Council and the European Social Fund and are available for applicants for the programme starting this September.

While AI is a broad field, the degree aims to familiarise students with those technologies most sought after in business, covering areas including: big data analytics; data science; machine learning; AI for decision support; and natural language processing.

## Free mindfulness course

THE University of Aberdeen launched a free online course in mindfulness, which can be accessed at any time, in light of the mental health challenges heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic,

The course provides an introduction to mindfulness and shares how to use tools and techniques to help build resilience and wellbeing. In the rolling 'always on' course, teaching is delivered entirely online and is free and open to all.

Ruth Taylor, vice-principal for education, said: "In these challenging times it is so important that we find ways to look after ourselves. I am delighted that we are able to offer a way to support good mental health and wellbeing. I would encourage everyone to enrol in this free course."

## Equality in the workplace have never been more important

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[www.equatescotland.org.uk](http://www.equatescotland.org.uk)

**EQUATE** Scotland  
For Women in Science, Engineering & Technology

# Forecast not foregone conclusion

by **Shane Taylor**,  
*research and policy manager,*  
Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce



**THE immediate impact of COVID-19 continues to rock the economy. The most recent ONS survey at the time of writing sees almost a quarter of businesses in Scotland reporting that their turnover has declined by over 50%.**

The British Chambers of Commerce COVID-19 Impact Tracker also highlights that cash flow is extremely challenged; and there continues to be a real risk that our region could feel the impact disproportionately. Research from the Centre for Cities illustrates that Aberdeen has one of the highest percentages of jobs exposed to the immediate impact of COVID-19, with only Crawley, Luton and Derby ranking higher.

Outside of the ongoing impact, in June's monthly economic briefing, the Scottish Government's chief economic adviser noted that if the recovery follows the more gradual path outlined in their scenario planning, the economy is unlikely to return to pre-crisis levels until the beginning of 2023.

These bleak statistics show that as governments across the UK begin to look to recovery, there's never been a clearer need for the business community to be active in driving the conversation. Forums such as the advisory group on economic

recovery brought together by the Scottish Government, and the themed working groups convened by the UK Government, present critical opportunities to do this.

In our discussions with members some clear priorities have started to emerge. Firstly, that this crisis represents a real opportunity to accelerate our ambitions to protect the climate. Ramping up our aims to hit net-zero targets will be a national effort which the North-east can lead. Ensuring that low carbon infrastructure investment is prioritised, that policymakers leverage the skills and talent present in our region to advance plans around CCUS and the hydrogen economy, and that the promised sector deal allows the oil and gas industry be a vital enabler of these plans are all points continually reflected in our ongoing conversations with members and government.

Secondly, the recovery needs to be seized on to make transformative changes to the systems that underpin our economy. As an example, the welcome business rates reliefs necessary to protect firms and support employment have taken £875m out of the system this year. Failing to seriously review the rates burden won't just restrain the private sector recovery, it'll impact on public sector finances too. We need to take this time to

strip out barriers to recovery, with a particular focus on removing upfront costs which are going to damage the ability of businesses to restart and keep our public services strong and well-funded.

Thirdly, that there will be some need for specific, sustained sectoral interventions further into the future. The most important thing is clearly getting firms back to work safely as rapidly as possible but key sectors for our region, such as hospitality, face a prolonged recovery which will necessitate targeted support. With economy-wide schemes like the CJRS now in the process of tapering off, government need to ensure that support is targeted to the regions and sectors that have felt the brunt of lockdown the hardest.

There's no ignoring the fact there are real challenges ahead but as one of the most adaptive, resilient regions in the UK, we've got a track record of genuinely innovating in response to economic adversity. In other words, we know first-hand that there's a difference between forecasts and foregone conclusions.

This crisis will cause many to constrain their future plans but there's also a real opportunity to accelerate our long-held future ambitions and protect our economy. The Chamber will be doing all we can to deliver the latter.





Nick Scott, Brodies managing partner

## Free seminars for newly qualified lawyers

BRODIES LLP has launched a training programme to give all newly qualified solicitors across Scotland access to quality learning opportunities and to connect with industry peers.

More than 120 newly qualified lawyers have already signed up to access the free 'Breakfast with Brodies' training, which has the support of the Law Society of Scotland. With an initial programme of 12 seminars covering a range of topics from family law and real estate, to corporate governance and electronic means of concluding contracts, sessions will run until mid-August to ensure lawyers at the beginning of their careers can continue to learn at a time when training and development opportunities may be limited.

Brodies managing partner, Nick Scott, said: "Ongoing social distancing measures mean that many of the traditional routes to training are no longer available. Our seminar series will allow newly qualified lawyers to access a wide range of educational and engaging topics and provide a platform for them to make connections with their peers."

## Commsworld wins Sunday Times ranking

COMMSWORLD has been ranked 23rd in the 21st annual Sunday Times Profit Track league table.

The Profit Track ranks Britain's private companies with the fastest-growing profits over the past three years. The industry recognition follows an incredible few months at Commsworld including investment from LDC in December and being recognised as 27th best performing technology company and 2nd best performing Telecoms Company companies in the Megabyte 50 Awards.

## Science Centre continues to inspire

ABERDEEN Science Centre (ASC) is continuing to share online resources across social media to inspire those into the world of Science, Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM).

The online programme is providing engaging content on a variety of subjects including chemistry, space, biology, physics and the weather.

Offering content which is suitable for all ages, the posts enable families to try easy yet exciting experiments, such as chromatography or discovering Centripetal Force.

Elaine Holland, head of operations at Aberdeen Science Centre said: "We have been sharing interesting and thought-provoking content from the likes of NASA, YouTube and other science centres across the country to promote ways of continuing STEM education at home.

"With the ongoing restrictions in place and school children continuing their lessons at home, we're also posting fun facts or inspiring information to keep the audiences mind engaged in the world of STEM."

ASC will continue to run online activities for the foreseeable future. The activities can be accessed on the Aberdeen Science Centre Facebook page.

## Aberdeen Cyrenians digital support

ABERDEEN Cyrenians is launching its own app and Let's Get Digital campaign to help support and connect people who are affected by homelessness and isolation through the COVID-19 outbreak.

The charity which runs homelessness, poverty, violence and abuse services across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, has been granted £49,978 from the Crisis: In this Together Fund to start its new Digital Connect initiative including the creation of a support app, a hardware-gifting programme and digital skills development project.

Lynda Reid-Fowler, community service lead, said: "During lockdown the need to be online to access vital support and services, as well as care for mental wellbeing by reducing loneliness and isolation, has never been more important. For our service user community, the digital connectivity gap has been heightened by COVID-19 - people often don't have the knowledge and confidence to get online safely, or they lack the devices and connections necessary to do so, leading to severe disadvantage."

"We will begin piloting our Digital Connect app with 25 individuals chosen from across our services and then begin rolling it out to our wider community over the coming months. We will be using the app to share advice and support from practitioners, send out key messages and build trusted relationships - similar to what we would do in a day-to-day sit-down appointment. Over time, we also hope to do more group work in a safe and secure environment online to complement our face-to-face services."

# WORKING SAFELY POST COVID-19

Employers have a duty of care to ensure their teams are secure and feel safe when they return to their place of work once the lockdown rules have been relaxed. This responsibility also extends to retail premises and hospitality sites, where the wellbeing of shoppers and diners is paramount.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has issued assistance to help everyone understand how to work safely, and specific workplace guidance is available to download here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Adrian George, MD of Eyecandy Graphics and Signs, says "The message is clear - communication is key, and my team is on hand to provide help and support in order to reduce some of the stress business owners and employees will undoubtedly face when Scotland gets back to work."

Planning in the following three categories is vital as the country embraces a new way of working:

1. Distance and separation
2. Movement and circulation
3. Hygiene and safety

And with this in mind, please note you will...

**need** a comprehensive range of signs and posters to communicate traffic flow to ensure social distancing guidelines are adhered to throughout – this can be achieved by using simple stencils, with arrows spray painted on concrete to more sophisticated distance reminder floor stickers on carpets and hard floors

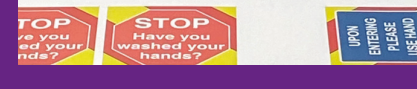
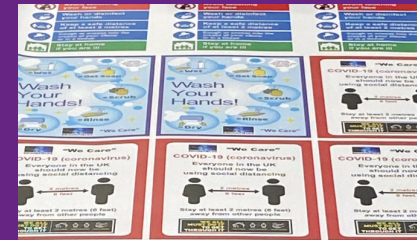
**need** COVID-19 public health posters on display and visible for all to see

**need** handwash reminders, free standing or wall mounted hand sanitiser stations alongside increased stocks of soap, paper towels and dryers for your kitchens and bathrooms

**need** reception screens, contact logbooks for visitors and anti-microbial pens for signing in

Using government-backed guidance, Eyecandy has produced a simple brochure for download [https://eyecandygraphics.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Eyecandy\\_WorkingSafelyDuringCoronavirus\\_Email.pdf](https://eyecandygraphics.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Eyecandy_WorkingSafelyDuringCoronavirus_Email.pdf) that explores the three categories above in more detail along with other areas of importance, in order to assist in the drive to get the UK economy moving again.

If you'd like to speak to someone who can help you with your return to work COVID-19 strategy, please call or email Adrian.



Adrian in need of a haircut



# August



Whether presenting a report to a client, management, colleague or supplier, this course will help you develop professional report content and style.

- 4 Tue**  
1 Day  
**Digital Transformation**  
Learn how to future proof your business
- 5 Wed**  
1 Day  
**Maximising Sponsorship Revenue**  
Discover how to drive sales and obtain great results for your clients
- 18 Tue**  
1 Day  
**Report Writing**  
Learn to produce clear, concise and effective reports
- 19 Wed**  
1 Day  
**Change Management**  
Learn tools to drive change and avoid challenging situations
- 19 Wed**  
1 Day  
**Essential Supervisory Skills**  
Bridge the gap between doing and supervising and become confident in delegating tasks
- 20 Thu**  
1 Day  
**Communication and Interpersonal Skills**  
Develop effective communication techniques
- 20 Thu**  
1 Day  
**Project Management - The Fundamentals**  
Understand the principles of project management and the complexities of scale
- 25 - 26**  
2 Day  
**Essential Management Skills**  
Become equipped with the knowledge and skills required of a manager
- 25 Tue**  
1 Day  
**Train the Trainer**  
Feel confident whilst developing and presenting different types of training
- 26 Wed**  
1 Day  
**Practical Content Management**  
Learn the skills needed to ensure contracts add value to your business
- 27 Thu**  
1 Day  
**Finance - The Basics**  
Develop a broad understanding of business finance
- 27 Thu**  
1/2 Day  
**Social Media Advanced - Using Mixed Media in your Digital Communications**  
Learn a range of media types and form the outline of an overall digital communication plan
- 27 Thu**  
1/2 Day  
**Social Media for the Uninitiated**  
Reduce marketing risk by understanding how powerful social media is and how to utilise it effectively
- 27 Thu**  
1 Day  
**Stakeholder Engagement and Relationship Management**  
Identify and engage with stakeholders to build effective and lasting relationships
- 28 Fri**  
1 Day  
**Assertiveness at Work**  
Learn to communicate your point of view without causing conflict
- 31 Mon**  
1 Day  
**Continuous Improvement**  
Essential tools to maximise workplace efficiency and achieve excellence

# September



Understand how you currently use your time, identify time wasting activities so you manage your time more effectively and see your job satisfaction, productivity and profitability increase.

- 2 Wed**  
1 Day  
**Time Management**  
Identify time wasting activities and make your day more effective
- 3 Thu**  
1 Day  
**Investigations in the Workplace**  
Plan and manage investigations effectively
- 3 Thu**  
1 Day  
**Talent Management**  
Get on top of your talent agenda and maximise potential
- 8 Tue**  
½ Day  
**INCO Terms 2020**  
Understand benefits of International Commercial Terms for buyers and sellers
- 8 - 9**  
2 Days  
**Finance for Non-Finance Managers**  
Gain an understanding of many aspects of finance and how it impacts business
- 9 Wed**  
1 Day  
**Improve your Professional Confidence**  
Promote a positive and confident self-image in a professional manner
- 10 Thu**  
1 Day  
**Interview Skills**  
Establish how to conduct effective interviews and hire the right candidate
- 10 Thu**  
1 Day  
**Presentation Skills**  
Deliver a dynamic and motivational presentation confidently

<b>15 Tue</b> 1 Day	<b>The Effective Director</b> Learn how to become an effective director and address responsibilities
<b>16 Wed</b> 1 Day	<b>Negotiating and Influencing Skills</b> Learn tactics and skills of persuasion that lead to success
<b>17 Thu</b> 1 Day	<b>Coaching Conversations</b> Learn how to coach others to improve and be their best
<b>17 Thu</b> 1 Day	<b>Essential Supervisory Skills</b> Bridge the gap between doing and supervising and become confident in delegating
<b>22 Tue</b> 1 Days	<b>Export Documentation Explained</b> Understand what is involved in documentation to save time and money
<b>23 Wed</b> 1 Day	<b>Customs Procedures and Documentation</b> Explore the various customs systems, procedures and documentation
<b>24 Thu</b> 1 Day	<b>Performance Management</b> Establish processes to improve employee performance in line with organisational objectives
<b>29 Tue</b> 1/2 Day	<b>Cash Flow Management</b> Maximise company stability with effective cash flow techniques
<b>29 Tue</b> 1 Day	<b>Winning More Bids</b> Creating successful bids and tenders
<b>30 Wed</b> 1 Day	<b>HR for Non-HR Managers</b> Understand responsibilities and techniques in relation to HR requirements
<b>30 Wed</b> 1 Day	<b>Marketing 101</b> Develop a successful integrated marketing strategy

THE safety of our delegates, visitors and staff is paramount. We have undertaken a deep clean for all areas of the Chamber offices, we have also invested in a new thermo-scan for anyone entering the premises; as well as providing hand sanitisers and wipes.

In addition to these steps we have reconfigured our classrooms to ensure there is ample social distancing room with a one-way system for all communal areas to provide the highest levels of safety.

We can also deliver virtual instructor-led training, delivered in bite size chapters and incorporating the values and ethos of the organisation. Our instructors ensure the courses are interactive learning sessions ensuring delegates gain many of the same benefits of classroom learning.

If you would like to know more please contact us at [training@agcc.co.uk](mailto:training@agcc.co.uk)







Andrew Sackey, partner, Pinsent Masons LLP

## Tax task forces quadruples takings

HM REVENUE & Customs' (HMRC) specialist 'task forces' have collected £540m in extra tax revenue for the UK authority in the last financial year according to research by Pinsent Masons.

The amount collected by the task forces in 2019/20 was broadly level with that collected in 2018/19, but marks a four-fold increase from just £138.1m in 2014/15. In total, HMRC has collected more than £2bn in extra revenues in five years.

Tax law expert Andrew Sackey of Pinsent Masons said the use of task forces allowed HMRC to deploy a wide variety of different compliance tools against a specific issue. He said the task forces also sent a strong message to those who were tempted not to comply with tax rules.

HMRC currently has over 200 active task forces focusing on sectors of the market where its intelligence suggests tax evasion and tax avoidance need addressing, including the London legal profession, the restaurant and takeaway industry, market stall traders, the tobacco industry, and the haulage industry.

## STEP accreditation for Stronachs

STRONACHS has been awarded STEP (Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners) Platinum Employer Partner accreditation, the highest of three accreditation levels awarded under STEP's Employer Partnership Programme.

To achieve platinum accreditation, a partner must show that the importance of learning and development is championed throughout the organisation. STEP was particularly impressed with the firm's commitment to excellence and the development culture.

## Text campaign for Charlie House

CHARLIE House, which supports babies, children and young people with complex disabilities and life-limiting conditions, has launched a text campaign to support its services.

Susan Crighton, director of fundraising for Charlie House, said: "For families in the UK, we have had to adapt to a very different way of life over the last couple of months. We have had to adjust to life without access to mainstream schooling, activity clubs, friends and grandparents, all of which help give us an opportunity to rest and recharge. But what if that was your normal?"

She said that Charlie House supported families the difficulties in accessing specialist care for a child with complex disabilities meant that the families often had to meet 100% of their child's care requirements with little or no opportunity for respite.

"It is critical that we continue to support these children and their families, now and in the future. We are currently doing this remotely by facilitating regular video calls with our children and family support manager for therapeutic and emotional support, creating and delivering isolation packs, providing online activity sessions from our activities coordinator, providing access to our community nurse, liaising with medical teams and advocating for child and family and providing pre and post bereavement support."

To support the Charlie House Support Our Services campaign, text CHARLIESOS to 70085 to donate £5.

## Counselling service during and after emergencies

RESPONSE Consultants has launched an on-call counselling service which can be used during and after emergencies. The service is geared towards the oil and gas industry, but could be utilised by the renewables, manufacturing, transport or any industry in which a death, serious illness, injury or trauma could occur in the workplace.

Through the company's team of duty managers, one or more counsellors can be mobilised to a number of locations. This will include offshore locations once COVID-19 exclusions allow for the necessary BOSIET training to take place.

The counsellors are all trained and experienced in grief and trauma therapy and have a variety of backgrounds and methods.

Managing director Claire Forbes said: "We'll make the service available for non-emergencies too as we know how stretched the NHS is and how long people can wait for referrals within the mental health system. It's a good way to expand the service and the right way to start."



**Colin Leonard,**  
*founder, Design and Code*

### What does your company do that others don't?

One thing that sets us apart from other agencies is our approach – we look to push boundaries and meet the needs of our clients in new and innovative ways. Another key ingredient is our unique team. We've assembled a talented group with diverse backgrounds and skillsets covering everything from brand, design and communications through to a range of digital services such as web, interactive and animation. This in-house capability, along with those of specialist partners, allows us to take on any project – large or small.

### What are the most pressing challenges that your industry sector faces today and why?

Like everyone, we have been impacted by COVID-19. The most pressing challenge it presents us with is the speed at which we need to be able to deliver for our clients. The creative process by its nature requires time for discovery and refinement to deliver high quality results. We are working hard to both adjust our own way of working whilst simultaneously helping others adapt.

### What is the hardest lesson you have learned in your career to date?

Some things are outwith your control. This can be a hard idea to accept and deal with – no matter how dedicated

and hardworking you are, there are outside forces that can impact your business.

### What is the most valuable piece of business advice you have ever received?

To never give up and keep moving forward no matter the challenges or setbacks. Very few things are certain but if you keep putting the effort into being successful, you're increasing the odds of achieving that.

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

Winning Agency of the Year at the Scottish Tech Startup Awards. The recognition of our work by prominent names and leaders in the digital tech sector was confirmation we are on the right track.

### If you could make one thing happen tomorrow that would benefit North-east Scotland, what would that be?

It would be to reduce adversity to risk. Due to one of our main industries in the North-east we have become, quite rightly, very sensitive to risk. Changing that mindset will help us grow and unlock the innovative potential of the region. We have great knowledge and experience in the North-east which we can focus in new directions to help move us forward and elevate us on the world stage.



## Quick fire round

### What was your first job?

Paper boy

### When would you like to retire?

Only just getting going here

### What did you have for breakfast?

Several cups of tea

### Who, or what, inspires you?

Our passionate team

### What's the last book you read / film you saw?

'Soonish' by Zach and Kelly Weinersmith



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## Aberdeen-Houston Gateway goes digital

THE digitalisation of a popular annual business event has significantly extended its reach and prompted plans to further explore possibilities later in the year.

The eighth annual Aberdeen-Houston Gateway was originally due to take place in its traditional format at the end of March but plans were curtailed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

However, in seeking to find a way of facilitating the international networking opportunities organisers Granite PR embraced technology and adopted an all-new digital format to deliver the event via a series of online sessions.

Six free podcasts, two webinars and assorted online discussions replaced traditional visits, face-to-face meetings and showcase lunch creating a unique opportunity for delegates to come together and do business in a virtual way.

Such has been the success of the new venture that plans are now in the pipeline to adopt a similar format for the Aberdeen-Norway Gateway which is planned for the end of August, during the week when ONS should have taken place.

## RGU backs innovative students

ROBERT Gordon University (RGU) is leading the way in producing innovative thinking students having become the first university in Scotland to be awarded Scottish Innovative Student Award (SISA) self-accreditation status from the Scottish Institute for Enterprise (SIE).

Created by the SIE, the SISA scheme works alongside universities to design and deliver courses which equip students with a forward-thinking and enterprising mindset.

The award is delivered through current modules as part of the students' regular degree programmes and has been designed in conjunction with Scotland's Innovation Centres, DataLab, Digital Health and Care Institute (DHCI) and Centre of Excellence for Sensing, Imaging and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies (CENSIS).

RGU is now the first university to be given SISA self-accreditation powers by SIE, which allows academic staff to identify innovative teaching and skills development practices within their own academic module framework.

## New Peterhead hub for Scott Direct

SCOTT Direct has opened a new site in Peterhead as a hub to service local businesses, including established customers in the oil and gas and fishing industries.

The Peterhead site, on the Sandford Business Park, has a trade counter and a warehouse and offers a range of workwear, tools and safety-related products and PPE, combined with a comprehensive range of supporting technical and procurement services.



Ross Murray

## Acumen makes Inverurie acquisition

ABERDEEN headquartered Acumen Accountants and Advisors has acquired Keltic Accounting in Inverurie. It is the second acquisition by Acumen this year after acquiring Aberdeenshire-based Carnegie Knox in January as the business strives towards a £5m turnover target by 2023.

Keltic Accounting, which was launched by Sheena Martin in 2009, brings more than 400 clients to Acumen, increasing the client base to 1,900 and the turnover to in excess of £3m.

A total of 10, including Mrs Martin, will join the Acumen team which is now 63 across Aberdeen, Inverurie and Peterhead. Mrs Martin will head up the Inverurie office and her team will remain operating from there to continue servicing the client base.

Acumen was launched in 1994 and was bought by directors Steve McKenzie and Ross Murray in 2010 and the pair, along with fellow directors, Lisa Bruce and James Smith, have achieved a 20% growth in the past three years to date.

Acumen, which invested £100k in new headquarters in Portlethen in 2018, manages clients across Scotland and in London. The business is sourcing further acquisitions in a bid to reach £4m turnover by the end of 2021 through both acquisition and organic growth.





Richard Foley, Senior Partner, Pinsent Masons LLP

## Pinsent Masons wellbeing initiative

MULTINATIONAL business Pinsent Masons has rolled out the ground-breaking wellbeing initiative, the Mindful Business Charter, across its Scottish offices as it ramps up efforts eradicate negative working practices which can impact mental health and wellbeing.

The Mindful Business Charter, devised by Pinsent Masons, Barclays and Addleshaw Goddard, brought corporates and their legal services providers together to reach a shared agenda for reducing unnecessary causes of stress and pressure in the workplace and thereby ensuring higher team performances.

All of the signatories committed to a set of principles centred on improved communication, respect for rest periods, and considerate delegation of tasks and management of deadlines. Performance against these principles is monitored as part of relationship review meetings between banks and the financial services legal teams.

Over the last 18 months, Pinsent Masons has rolled out the Charter across a number of its global teams and has now asked its entire UK workforce, including Scottish staff in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh to pledge to the Charter and adhere to the principles.

Pinsent Masons believes that in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic this has never been more important. Senior partner Richard Foley, said: "The mental health and wellbeing of our people has firmly been on the agenda for many years now and all the evidence suggests that properly rested, valued and respected teams will perform better.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted just how important it is to support our colleagues and clients as we all grapple with the reality of working through the lockdown. These are tough times for a multitude of personal and professional reasons and recognising and responding to this is crucial to sustaining wellbeing and maintaining performance."

# SME Spotlight



**Craig Donoghue,**  
*managing director,*  
One Stop Waste Solutions

### When was your business established?

In 2006, our aim was – and continues to be – that, through effective waste management, we can significantly improve the environmental performance of organisations through recycling and landfill avoidance.

### What does your business do?

We help companies meet their objectives of 'zero waste' to landfill by proactively managing all their recycling, waste, hazardous and industrial services. We measure, monitor and improve this through regular auditing, training, sampling and waste reporting.

### What sort of companies do you do business with?

We work with more than 300 businesses and organisations of varying sizes from across the North-east of Scotland in sectors including industrial, oil support services, hospitality, retail, education, sport and leisure

### What is the biggest challenge facing your business at the moment?

Our biggest challenge now is predicting the future! Many businesses face similar challenges in terms of how to communicate with – and grow – their customer base without the traditional channels of networking and face-to-face meetings. While we are confident that green issues will remain relevant, we must ensure we continue to be adaptable and nimble with a strong, resilient team; one that will not only survive the current situation but thrive as the local economy improves.

### And the biggest opportunity?

Short-term, it is to work with our existing clients and ensure that we can respond to their requirements as they come out of lockdown. As a local company, we are well-positioned to support them navigate the 'new normal'. Longer term, I believe this experience could really help kick-start our green economy with innovative reuse and recovery solutions being developed for a range of wastes produced here in the local area, including food production, agriculture and decommissioning.

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# COVID-19 tests freight forwarders

by Graeme Barron,  
*business development manager,*  
AMT Intercargo UK Limited



**LET'S be honest, as recently as January this year dealing with a highly disrupted supply and logistics chain due to a global pandemic is not a risk that most freight forwarders thought to add to their risk registers.**

In only a few short months forwarders have encountered multiple challenges in all modes of transport, aircraft capacity is significantly reduced and the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) has reported almost a 28% reduction in airfreight demand.

Despite the reduction in demand, there remains a shortage of capacity due to the lack of cargo space on grounded passenger aircraft. Sea freight has been impacted by shortages of containers in the UK and Europe, a record amount of the global container fleet is idle due to an unprecedented collapse in demand. Ships that are sailing have schedules disrupted as ports in some countries reduce operations, or in some cases close altogether. Road freight to and from Europe has been affected due

to reduced capacity, the road haulage industry body (RHA) reported that in April almost 50% of capacity in the UK was idle.

In addition to capacity issues, some operators have declared force majeure which essentially frees them from liability and obligation due to extraordinary circumstances beyond their control, leaving many shippers grappling to find alternative routes for their cargo, in many cases only more expensive options are available. COVID-19 surcharges are also being applied to add additional costs to shippers at a time when they can least afford the additional expense.

Many importers are facing severe cash flow problems, with payment of VAT and duty sometimes amounting to significant sums and adding to a company's headaches during an already challenging time.

To help alleviate cash flow problems for importers HMRC introduced a COVID-19 easement for importers scheme. If a duty deferment user is facing severe financial difficulties

as a direct result of COVID-19 and is unable to make a payment of deferred customs duty and import VAT they can contact HMRC to request an extension, or contact their customs agent / freight forwarder for guidance.

Freight forwarders have worked throughout the pandemic, designated by the UK Government as essential businesses. They have coped not only with the unprecedented disruption to the logistics chain but also with their own problems of staff shortages, home working, operating warehouses, yards and offices functioning safely and under social distancing rules.




Often shippers exporting goods do not see the significant effort and skill in moving cargo from door to door using multiple partners around the globe. Even in normal times it can be a complex operation - during a pandemic the complexity is multiplied. The fact that freight has continued to flow through the supply chain whether it be food, PPE or critical spares for the oil and gas industry is a credit to the industry and the people that work in it.



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# July



One of the largest tax reliefs available, a staggering 90% of companies eligible for the R&D Tax Credit scheme currently don't claim - many because they are unaware of their eligibility.

## 1 Jul

### Business Breakfast

09:00 - 10:00  
Online

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, global economic forecasts and local financial plans have been turned upside down. Join us for an informative discussion, debate and a lively Q&A, delivered via Zoom, as we hear from a leading global economist to hear about the impact on international markets, supply chains and business confidence; and a UK economist who will take a look at the future economic priorities and direction for the North-east as we emerge into the 'new normal'.

## 2 Jul

### Understanding R&D Tax Credits - are you missing out on cash you are entitled to?

10:00 - 11:00  
Online

Access cash and boost your bottom line by unlocking hidden money. Claim Capital, a market-leading research and development tax specialist is hosting an online workshop with chief executive, Max Raynor. Max will highlight how your company could benefit from R&D tax credits, one of the largest tax reliefs available to UK companies, including an overview of eligibility requirements, the claims process, and the potential benefits.

# August



## Maximise Your Membership

Book your free place at [www.agcc.co.uk](http://www.agcc.co.uk)

Don't j

How can the benefits and services your membership provides support your business?

## 21 Aug

### Maximise Your Membership

11:45 - 13:00  
AGCC

It can be a little overwhelming knowing where to start when it comes to taking advantage of being a Chamber member. We've developed our 'maximise your membership' events to help enlighten members about key information and ensure that their organisation and its employees fully understand and use the benefits of Chamber membership.

This event is also open to non-Chamber members who want to find out more about what joining the Chamber can do for your business.

## 25 Aug

### Speed Networking

12:00 - 14:00  
Revolution Bar

A fantastic way to grow your network and bring you new business opportunities within a short period of time, we'll match you with a potential new contact every four minutes during this fast-paced and fun networking event. To get the most out of the session we recommend you come prepared with business cards and your elevator pitch.

# Looking to run an online event?

KEEPING your company's profile high and continuing to win business in the 'new normal' comes with additional challenges: What software do I need? How do I get my presentation on screen? What about engaging with delegates properly? How do I reach my target audience?

If you are seeing your competitors forge ahead with online meetings and workshops delivered via webinar don't be left behind. Hosting webinars isn't part of running your daily business - but it is ours. Let us do the hard work for you so you don't have to.

Learn more about our new online event management package by contacting us at [events@agcc.co.uk](mailto:events@agcc.co.uk).

# Nominations are open!

THE COVID-19 outbreak has put incredible challenges on businesses of every size and across every sector. Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce believes that, as we start to come out the other end of the crisis, it is more important than ever that we come together as a region to recognise the hard work undertaken by hundreds of local businesses to make a positive impact on their people, their customers and their communities.

With an audience of around 600 guests, the **Northern Star Business Awards** recognise the exceptional accomplishments of organisations across the North-east. Open to both members and non-members of the Chamber, the winners of the 17th annual awards will be unveiled during a glittering black-tie ceremony on **March 11, 2021**.

From outstanding customer service to excellence in people development, environmental outlook and marketing prowess, the awards provide a high-profile platform for showcasing success. Nomination forms are on the Chamber website, the deadline for submissions is **5pm on July 24**.



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### Alasdair Green

Anderson Anderson & Brown LLP (AAB) has boosted its commitment to the energy sector with a key appointment. AAB has appointed Alasdair Green as head of exploration and production, leading the 40+ strong E&P team including energy partner John Black, head of upstream audit Ian McPherson and Graeme Robertson, senior manager, JV and contract audit.



### Maxine Krajniak and Jason Stretton

Maxine Krajniak has joined the senior management team of Crane Worldwide Logistics as vice president of cruise, marine and hospitality, to support the industries in their recovery post COVID-19. Based in Los Angeles, she is a veteran in the logistics industry with more than 30 years of experience in comprehensive account management, international sales, and global operations. Meanwhile Jason Stretton returns to Crane Worldwide Logistics to lead the future growth of the Europe, Middle East and Africa region. Well versed in the global operations, in his new leadership role, Stretton will focus on the client partnerships as operations continue production post COVID-19.



### Mehdi Bouguetaia

Mehdi Bouguetaia has joined Neptune Energy as managing director for Algeria. He joins from Shell where he was technical support and subsea operations general manager with the company's Rashpetco JV business in Egypt. Mehdi has a strong commercial and technical background with 20 years' experience having started his career in Aberdeen as a process and development engineer.



### Chris Collins

An academic who has just joined the University of Aberdeen as a head of school has been appointed president of the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM). Professor Chris Collins is leading the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture. He has been appointed as president of the Ism for the period 2020-21.



### David Kerr

AGR, a global provider of wells and reservoir consultancy delivering support for the entire field life cycle, has appointed David Kerr as health, safety, environment and quality (HSEQ) manager. In his new role Dave will work across the full spectrum of AGR's portfolio.



### Martin Gilbert

Martin Gilbert, one of the financial sector's most celebrated leaders, has joined Aberdeen social care charity VSA as honorary president. Martin, who recently stood down from the board of Standard Life Aberdeen, has agreed to help lead the charity into the future as it looks to emerge from the coronavirus crisis.



### Nikki Morris-Laing

Creative agency Hampton has appointed a head of strategy as it continues to strengthen its senior management team. Nikki Morris-Laing joins from VisitAberdeenshire where she was head of marketing. She will be responsible for leading client campaigns and marketing plans, while helping drive forward the agency's future growth plans.



### Andrew Dines, Ian Campbell and Vikki Venerus

Anderson Anderson & Brown Wealth Ltd has appointed chartered financial planners Andrew Dines, Ian Campbell and Vikki Venerus as directors and shareholders. Already established as key members of the senior leadership team at AAB Wealth, these appointments reflect Andrew, Ian and Vikki's contributions to not only the running of the business day-to-day, but also their involvement in enhancing the firm's service proposition and implementing the growth strategy. Andrew and Ian are both experienced chartered financial planners and

Vikki, has been with AAB Wealth since it was founded in 2010 and during that time achieved chartered financial planner status.



### Lauren Thomson, John Morrison, Alison Rochester, Lucy Hall, Neil Cowan and Gavin Charlton

Shepherd and Wedderburn LLP has promoted two lawyers to partner and four to legal director. The new partners are construction law specialist Lauren Thomson and corporate finance specialist John Morrison who have both been with the firm since traineeship. The four senior lawyers are also promoted to legal director are Alison Rochester, Lucy Hall, Neil Cowan and Gavin Charlton.

## Other recent appointments

The Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) has announced the appointment of five new board members to lead the organisation. They are appointed by the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, Gillian Keegan and are: **Jane Cooper**, senior manager for stakeholder relations and regulatory affairs at Ørsted UK; **Daniel Gear**, strategic programme lead at Petrofac Engineering & Production Services; **Cameron Gilmour**, vice president at Doosan Babcock; **Steve Hunt**, UK regional director for Stork; and **Paudie Somers**, CEO at Altrad for UK, Ireland and the Nordics.

UK law firm Brodies LLP has announced eight new partners in its latest round of promotions and appointments. **Kate McLeish** and **Karen Smith** become partners in real estate; **Andy Nolan** is made up to partner in the firm's corporate and commercial practice; while banking lawyer **Jack Moir**, solicitor advocate **Niall McLean**, family lawyer **Jennifer Wilkie** and litigator **Jared Oyston** also become partners in their respective fields. In addition, Brodies has promoted eight staff to the role of senior associate and 21 to associate. These include four promotions in Brodies' Aberdeen office where real estate specialist **Jenna McCosh** is promoted to senior associate, oil and gas lawyer **Lucie Hassell** and family lawyers **Rachael Noble** and **Garry Sturrock** are promoted to associate.

Tidy Green Clean has appointed two new regional directors, including its first in England. **Callum Cruickshank** is regional director for Aberdeen West and **Alex McCarthy** is the regional director for Northern England. Managing director Andrew Alleway said: "Our franchise offering is a unique and extremely attractive proposition that continues to draw in the right people who are willing to bring their own skill set to a business that holds exciting opportunities and rewards. Bringing Alex and Callum into the Tidy Green Clean family is further demonstration of our determination to thrive and build a highly sustainable and successful business for all our stakeholders."

Professor **John Speakman**, chair in zoology at the University of Aberdeen, has been elected to the National Academy of Sciences of the USA.

Members are elected in recognition of their distinguished and continuing achievements in original research. Membership is a widely accepted mark of excellence and is considered one of the highest honours a scientist can receive.



# Welcome to the Chamber

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