2016 Winners Review
Around 700 members of the North-east business community gathered on September 22 to celebrate excellence and entrepreneurship at the annual Northern Star Business Awards.

Every seat was sold for the ceremony at the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre, which is the flagship event for Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce and the highlight of the North-east business calendar.

Thirty-nine finalists joined the guests, all eager to find out who would lift the award in each of the 13 award categories.

Retiring college principal Rob Wallen was handed a lifetime achievement award for his outstanding contribution to the region.

Principal and chief executive of North East Scotland College (NESCol), Rob has been with the college for 25 years and announced his retirement earlier in the year.

NESCol has a major economic impact in the North East - £406.4million per annum, delivered from the £33.1million per annum invested by the government.

Aberdeen College merged with Banff & Buchan College three years ago to become NESCol and Rob was appointed principal and chief executive.

Winner of one of the top awards on the evening was Balmoral Group, which received the Overall Business of the Year award.

From 2010 to 2015, the company has more than doubled its turnover to £136.5million and almost tripled pre-tax profit to £31.9million.

Having worked through previous oil price drops, Balmoral is benefiting from its commitment to lean manufacturing. It says that efficiency has always been a priority and this has helped it weather the storm.

Chief executive of the Chamber Russell Borthwick said, “The Chamber is committed to celebrating business success.

“This is something that’s even more important when times are tough and it’s incumbent on all of us to accentuate the positive to offset the predominantly negative messaging that the outside world is currently receiving about Aberdeen.

“Despite the difficult economic climate, Northern Star entry levels remained high in terms of quantity but most importantly quality, making these awards a true benchmark of business excellence in North-east Scotland.”

Now in their thirteenth year, the Northern Star Business Awards are the Chamber’s annual accolades for successful businesses across the region.

They recognise companies in the North-east for their exceptional accomplishments across a range of fields from energy to innovation, people development to customer service.
Student Placement

This special award recognises the important contribution business makes to students through their participation in RGU’s Aberdeen Business School student placement programme

Winner

Aberdeenshire Council

Aberdeenshire Council was nominated for the award by Katie Shaw who is studying for a BA honours degree in management and described her placement as “an award-winning experience”. It allowed her to acquire and advance numerous skills.

She worked as part of a “fantastic team” in ICT at Aberdeenshire Council who instantly made her feel supported and comfortable. She was encouraged to participate in training workshops such as Effective Project Leadership, Decision Making and Problem Solving and Building Resilience in order to build and develop her skills.

She found these workshops particularly valuable and one even touched on theory learned at university.

Fortnightly one-to-ones with her placement supervisor made her feel supported and ensured her progress was tracked.

It also provided an opportunity for Katie to raise any questions or make any requests regarding projects which she wanted to become involved in.

She was able to develop her skills in leadership, communication, time management, problem solving abilities and of course ICT – all key for a career in ICT Project Management.

The council entrusted her with considerable responsibilities in projects such as Ellon and Alford Academies and she worked alongside the stakeholders onsite to complete tasks.

“The more responsibility I was given, the more I learned,” she said “but I always knew there was support from my supervisor and the rest of the team if I needed it.

“When I began my placement, I had no idea about the variety of tasks and projects the council is involved in. I have been involved in three major projects in ICT - school builds, unified communications and mobile telephony.

“Each of these projects has had different aims, stakeholders and different problems to solve. I never imagined having such a large involvement in these projects, particularly the school builds.

“Seeing children and teachers turn up on the first day at their new school and seeing their reactions was absolutely priceless and I feel so proud to have been part of the projects.

“I feel ICT at Aberdeenshire Council have gone above and beyond with my placement as they have always taken into account what I wanted to learn.

“During reviews I was asked what I would like to get involved with and then solutions were made to accommodate that.”

Award Sponsor

With a 97.7% employment rate, Robert Gordon University has a global reputation for producing highly skilled graduates in a number of sectors. The professional education provided by the university from undergraduate level through to PhD owes much to RGU’s long-standing and close relationship with business. With work placements featuring on 93% of our undergraduate courses, we are proud to sponsor this award in recognition of the contribution North-east companies make to our students’ learning experience and to the content of our courses.

Carol Dalgarno, senior project leader, ICT and Katie Shaw on placement with Aberdeenshire council
Rising Star

Awarded to an individual employee who has shown outstanding potential and is proven to have made a major impact and contribution within the company

Winner

Stuart Common, Mackie’s of Scotland

Stuart Common joined Mackie’s of Scotland in 2006 as an enthusiastic 20-year-old intern while doing his university degree and, as commercial director, is now a key member of the management team.

His intern year was a particularly busy one for the business and that brought considerable pressures like stock shortages and delivery problems.

However, it also gave Stuart the opportunity to demonstrate his ability and an extraordinary degree of dedication and commitment.

He was often the last one to leave the office, unwilling to depart until he was sure distribution was under control.

He accepted the offer of a permanent position after the internship and went on to demonstrate his keen interest in all aspects of the business, a willingness to learn and considerable enthusiasm.

He took a year out to travel in Australia but shortly after his return successfully applied to rejoin Mackie’s.

He is the youngest member of the management team and is manager for five key accounts and a further 10 secondary accounts across two different sectors – ice cream and chocolate.

He contributes to both strategic and daily management of the business and is always willing to take responsibility for making things happen.

He has grown in confidence and ability and has established good working relationships with national retailers across the UK and has sought and found new market opportunities including a very successful partnership with a supermarket chain.

He agreed on the development of a new range of ice creams under its own brand name and had to negotiate a minefield of sensitive marketing, pricing, product development and production issues which involved months of delicate negotiations both with the customer and internally.

The ice cream range is now well established as a top seller in all the supermarket’s stores in Scotland and is being trialled in England. It is a major contributor to the overall business turnover and Stuart is now in discussions about selling the new Mackie’s chocolate range.

Stuart also enjoys working to develop Scottish food and drink as exemplified by his active role in Grampian Food Forum and his appointment as the youngest member of the ONE (Opportunity North East) Food, Drink & Agriculture board.

Award Sponsor

Young talent is the future of our industry and the Rising Star award represents an opportunity to celebrate a valued individual who has shown exceptional skills, enthusiasm, energy and innovation.
Lifetime Achievement

Gifted by Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce and Barclays Bank in recognition of outstanding, ongoing commitment and achievement

Winner

Rob Wallen

Rob Wallen's career at Aberdeen College got off to a traumatic start in 1991.

Having just moved his young family from the south of England, he was told the job to which he had been appointed no longer existed.

Fortunately for Rob, his family, and education in the North-east there was another position and over the last 25 years he has made an outstanding contribution to the area.

Before joining Aberdeen College, Rob, who has degrees in English literature and applied linguistics, had worked in secondary, further and higher education in Egypt, China and England.

At Aberdeen College, he held posts as head of quality assurance, associate principal and director of learning and teaching before being appointed to the post of principal and chief executive in 2009.

Under Rob’s leadership a regional curriculum with progression pathways between all campuses was very quickly stabilised and to facilitate new and improved courses the required facilities have been built, updated or extended.

Links with Aberdeen’s two universities have also been strengthened so students now have a progression pathway to university, something of which he is particularly proud.

Robert Gordon University awarded the college “associate” status, the first in Scotland.

NESCOL has a major economic impact in the North-east - £406.4 million per annum, delivered from the £33.1 million per annum invested by the Government and a far greater return on investment than is usually achieved from government expenditure.

Rob and his wife Jenny, whose family home is in Garmouth, have two sons and a daughter who are currently spread out in China, West Africa and Southampton.

He is a keen sportsman with an apparently encyclopaedic knowledge of football trivia.

He is an outdoor enthusiast and man of courage being prepared not only to swim regularly in the North Sea at Aberdeen beach but also to risk playing football with his staff.

He enjoys reading, especially by a pool in the sun, gardening, especially on his ride-on mower, and history and culture.

Award Sponsor

Business growth in companies from start up through to multinationals is the lifeblood of the Scottish economy and the communities we live in. Whilst we are experiencing challenging times currently there are also significant opportunities with the North-east being the most entrepreneurial region in Scotland creating great inspiration. Barclays sees supporting the SME market across all industry sectors as key and are delighted to support the Northern Star Business Awards which are an important recognition of success by companies as well as the organisations and individuals that make all this possible.

Rob Wallen, principal and chief executive, North East Scotland College
Commitment to Innovative Use of Research & Development

In recognition of the company which has demonstrated an innovative use of research and development to create commercial growth and gain competitive advantage

Winner
COREX UK Ltd

COREX was established in the 1970s and provides specialist services, primarily in the analysis of geological samples, for the oil and gas industry world-wide.

A combination of COREX technology and the knowledge of expert geologists and engineers provides detail which allows COREX to provide data with the potential to reduce drilling costs, optimise recovery and increase the production life of a field.

The company is based in Aberdeen but has laboratories in Egypt and Libya and associations with laboratories in Malaysia, Spain and Columbia.

At the heart of COREX strategy and daily operations is continuous improvement through research and development and this is supported by COREXPLORE which was launched in 2014.

One of the components of COREXPLORE is to allow employees time to explore innovative products and services as well as new applications for existing COREX IP and technology which keep them engaged, intellectually challenged and inspired.

Many COREX innovations are a result of specialists identifying a particular client or industry challenge and focusing on developing a targeted solution.

COREXPLORE regulates that R&D goes through an extensive range of testing, analysis, quality control and verification processes as well as a staged gate process to ensure that technical and commercial aspects are considered and understood and to minimise the risk exposure to stakeholders.

One of the main outputs over the past 12 months from its R&D programme has been the development of its Micro-CT programme.

Micro-CT has been used in core analysis for around five years but in 2013, COREX introduced the scanning technique to formation damage analysis.

It allows COREX to “see inside” reservoir rocks at the crucial rock structure and pore networks to understand how best to unlock more oil by avoiding man made damage to reservoirs during drilling and production.

Micro-CT, and more recently Nano-CT, enable the company to gain a better insight into what is physically occurring inside the rock at each stage of drilling and production, allowing operators to make more informed decisions and reduce risk.

One operator estimates it can increase profit by £250,000 per well per year.

Micro-CT analysis is used in several other industries, including aviation, and by archaeological labs which can construct 3D renders of ancient Pharaohs without removing delicate and protective wrappings.

COREX aims to double company turnover within five years through expanded the use of these innovations.

Graham Robertson, chairman, COREX UK Ltd

Award Sponsor
Scottish Enterprise recognises the North-east of Scotland as a key driver for Scotland’s economic growth. The companies we work with across the region’s growth sectors including energy, food & drink, tourism and life sciences make a hugely important contribution to national economic growth. Companies in the North-east are renowned for their international outlook, innovation and jobs growth - critical for Scotland’s economy to grow further. We are therefore proud to support the Northern Star Business Awards in recognition of the leading role played by some of Scotland’s top performing companies.
Excellence in Customer Service

Awarded to the company which consistently delivers outstanding customer service and can demonstrate, through structured assessment and satisfaction measurement, that meeting customers’ needs is a priority throughout its entire business.

Winner

Thorpe Molloy Recruitment

Amanda McCulloch, managing director, Thorpe Molloy Recruitment

In the 19 years since Judith Thorpe and Karen Molloy established their independent accountancy and finance recruitment consultancy it has grown into a £12million business serving clients across 10 specialisms.

It advises clients from entrepreneurial start-ups to locally-based international conglomerates and job seekers taking the first step into employment to board level appointees.

Thorpe Molloy believes that placing service delivery above profitability in its business plan has been fundamental to the year-on-year growth until 2014, and pivotal to sustaining the business since the oil price crash.

Relationships are critical to the success of the business which takes pride in developing them within the mission/culture statement of “set the standard, improve each day and have some fun”.

In the past year, an online customer feedback tool has been introduced which has trebled the number of feedback surveys received and substantially increased constructive commentary.

Following a suggestion by a candidate, it led directly to the introduction of a new tool to assist in keeping candidates better appraised of a vacancy’s status.

Thorpe Molloy believes that recruitment is best delivered with as high a level of human interaction as possible but, because people increasingly rely on technology, invested in an enhanced, fully mobile optimised and responsive website.

However, it was designed “as the antithesis of the faceless, generic recruitment site with the objective of enabling simple, quick communication”.

It includes an online registration form which allows consultants more time to review the information and identify possible vacancies before meeting a candidate who previously would have filled in a hard copy at reception.

Just how far the firm will go to make a difference is demonstrated by the fact that around a year ago it introduced tissues to its candidate interview rooms.

These were simply not required before but are now extremely gratefully received in light of the many lives which have been turned upside down by the widespread and unexpected redundancies across the area.

Thorpe Molloy believes the very essence of a recruitment business is its people – be it the clients and candidates or the staff who work within and for it to be successful it must retain the highest standards of customer care.

Award Sponsor

At James Gibb residential factors, our aim is to provide customers with an exemplary service package in order that, together, we can maintain and enhance the communities in which they live. Integrity is at the heart of everything we do; transparency, honesty and open communications serve to enhance the trust built between us and our customers. Professional relationships are built on trust and this is enhanced by the clarity we offer in all aspects of our business. Our goal is to ‘get it right first time, on time, every time’.

Sponsoring the Excellence in Customer Service category is a perfect fit for our company, we are honoured to be sponsoring an award which will be given to a company which excels in customer service.
Outstanding Contribution to Society

In recognition of the organisation or company which can demonstrate a significant, ongoing commitment by aligning its values and strategy with the greater needs of society

Winner

Score (Europe) Limited

Score is an engineering service company based in Scotland and operating throughout Europe, primarily in the supply, overhaul and testing of valves and associated equipment.

It employs 900 people in the UK, including 280 modern apprentices undertaking a six-year training programme.

More than 750 of its employees work directly from the Peterhead and Fife facilities.

Score regards supporting the local community, local business and providing skilled employment for young people as key social responsibility objectives which are integral to its business model.

It engages extensively with schools and also works with school age children on activities outwith school.

For example, it runs a free maths club on a Saturday morning to ensure that even those who have not achieved the best school grades, possibly due to a deprived background, still have the opportunity to access its MA programme and transform their life opportunities.

It is often one-to-one and could only be rivalled by expensive private tutoring.

Score is the largest employer of 16-22 year olds in Aberdeenshire and Fife on its multi-award-winning Engineering Modern Apprenticeship Programme and has adopted a long term view and continued to employ young people into its apprenticeship programme despite the downturn in the oil industry.

Score has also purchased two acres of land on the outskirts of the village and donated it to the Crimond Charitable Trust for a new community medical centre which will open this year.

Score is providing financial support and personnel to help the trust in its efforts to build the centre to replace the existing one which is no longer fit for purpose.

The new centre will have a pharmacy, community café and physiotherapy suite as well as a GP surgery.

In December 2013, Score purchased the former HM Prison in Peterhead and saved it from demolition.

The prison now forms part of its Admiralty Gateway Facility which includes training workshops and a museum to remember the committed work of the personnel employed there.

The museum is creating employment and it is hoped it will become a significant attraction for tourists and benefit other businesses in the area.

Score is a business which is heavily involved in supporting the community in which it is based and particularly supporting young people.

Conrad Ritchie, managing director, Score (Europe) Limited

Award Sponsor

Balmoral Group strives to deliver the best quality products and service complemented by an enduring progressive impact on the communities in which it operates. Business plays an increasingly important role in civic life and corporate goodwill is vital in maintaining and improving the services provided by charities and other community-based organisations.

We are proud to support the Northern Star Outstanding Contribution to Society award in acknowledgement of the often-unrecognised work and dedication shown by individuals and groups in the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce region.

Balmoral Group www.balmoral-group.com
Achievement in International Business

In recognition of the company which has been the most successful in growing its international business value and market share

Winner

John Ross Jr (Aberdeen) Ltd

John Ross Jr is one of the last remaining commercial companies to produce superior Scottish smoked salmon in the truly traditional way using brick kilns which date back 150 years.

It was established in 1987 with a £10,000 loan and has grown to be a worldwide brand with a multimillion pound turnover which exports to 32 countries, but remains a family-run business.

It supplies world-renowned hotels and restaurants in the UK as well as supermarkets, multiples and independent retail outlets and holds a coveted Royal Warrant.

It operates in Europe, the Middle East, Indian Ocean, South America, the USA and Caribbean and in the past two years has added Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Thailand, Mauritius, Bahrain, Doha, Korea and Jordan to the list of countries which import its goods.

It has also secured distribution deals with organisations in Switzerland and Paris which will be supplying hotels, restaurants and the catering trade; has developed an exclusive distribution partnership deal with a company based in Jordan and launched a new campaign targeting retailers and distributors in the Middle East.

Its presence has increased in the Caribbean and, by working closely with a German retailer, has developed a new product range specifically for its customers.

John Ross Jr has also started supplying the retail trade in South Korea and a large retail chain in four of the United Arab Emirates regions.

To enable these international developments, it launched a recruitment programme for sales team members who speak fluent German and French; developed a sales team which researches the international landscape; harnessed the power of online professional networking platforms; implemented a trade show programme; and established strategic international and distributor partnerships.

It continues to target emerging markets such as China and the Middle East which demonstrate a commitment to an association with quality Scottish and UK products and to capitalise on its Royal Warrant.

The company believes one of the most important lessons learned is how essential it is to fully understand a country’s culture before negotiating a sale.

Also important, because it trades in perishable goods, is understanding the importance of logistics in the context of different time zones therefore minimising the time products spend in transit.

It is committed to retaining its family values, to continuing to contribute to Scotland’s overarching “food brand” status from the heart of Aberdeen and to keeping history alive by using production techniques which have existed for centuries.

Award Sponsor

AlixPartners is pleased to support the Northern Star Business Awards, and specifically the category of Achievement in International Business.

As a leading global business advisory firm, we recognise the importance and power of being able to do business across borders. In today’s global marketplace things happen at a faster pace than ever before. At AlixPartners, we offer solutions across diverse industries for both healthy and challenged companies, in more than 60 countries around the world. Whether it’s the bottom line, revenue growth and productivity, digitalization, legal analysis and risk mitigation, or culture transformation and organisation design, we have the depth of experience to catalyse new successes.

Christopher Leigh, managing director, John Ross Jr (Aberdeen) Ltd
Big thanks to all at @AGCCevents and @chambertalk for organising such a fantastic night for the Northern Star Business Awards #TimetoShine

@KatieShaw_x

Fantastic night! Thank you to such a wonderful chamber @chambertalk & venue @AECC_Aberdeen - congrats to all winners! #TimetoShine

@READCasedHole
Excellence in Health and Safety

In recognition of a company which has demonstrated its organisation’s commitment, training and procedures having a positive impact on the overall health and safety of the business

Winner

Sodexo Energy and Resources

Sodexo develops, manages and delivers a diverse range of services designed to improve the quality of life for its clients and customers in a range of industries, including oil and gas.

These services include construction management, reception and food services through to asset maintenance, security and grounds maintenance for clients in offices, schools, prisons, hospitals, military bases, remote sites and at hospitality events.

Within the oil and gas industry specifically, Sodexo has been working in partnership with North Sea super-majors, majors and independents since the 1970s.

A world class health and safety performance is essential to Sodexo’s success and reputation as a responsible global business and the company is committed to achieving it by integrating health and safety into everything it does to minimise risk to people and property.

To help achieve a zero accident culture, Sodexo has committed to its first global roll out of a health and safety initiative called “Have a Safe Day”.

In Scotland’s energy and resources segment alone, the campaign has been rolled out to more than 75 units by way of staff presentations, an interactive WebEx, safety moments, posters, leaflets and tool box talks.

Carolyn Smith, account HSEQ manager, Sodexo Energy and Resources

Award Sponsor

There are many examples of health and safety excellence in the business community of North-east of Scotland and the Northern Star Business Awards are a fantastic opportunity to recognise and reward the very best.

IOSH introduced the Excellence in Health and Safety award category to recognise those forward-thinking organisations that care for their employees not only because it is their moral duty, but because they have identified it as vital to business success.

We would like to congratulate this year’s winner and the other finalists, and thank all who entered this year’s competition.
Best Campaign of the Year

Awarded to the company which has planned and implemented a successful marketing campaign in the last year

Winner

Tricker PR

The staff at Tricker PR went bananas when they were asked to come up with a creative campaign for the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival which would capture the imagination of the press and public for a budget just a quarter of its previous total.

They found the perfect solution and one worthy of the company which has been awarded the titles of both the UK’s and Scotland’s Outstanding PR Consultancy as well as more than 30 other professional awards.

Their research uncovered the fact that bananas were a curse to superstitious seafarers – and there are a variety of possible reasons for that - so they decided on a “Big Banana Ban” for Portsoy to ward off any misfortune. The ban was imposed in the run-up to the biggest gathering of traditional boats in Scotland.

“Banana ban” signs were posted across the town and a banana amnesty was introduced to allow locals to swap their bananas for home-grown Scottish berries.

Portsoy’s most popular outlet – Portsoy Ice Cream Shop – even removed its banana-flavoured ice cream for the duration and publicised the ban with signage all across the frontage.

The ban was closely monitored by the local constabulary with community bobby PC Malcolm Smith entering into the spirit and featuring in striking photographs in which he was trying to locate a six-year-old boy hiding behind a boat with a basket of banana contraband.

One year on, constable Smith is still being stopped in the street and asked about bananas.

It was a simple, if perhaps risky strategy, which worked outstandingly well with just one press release, great photographs and an excellent list of press contacts.

It delivered 60 pieces of print coverage including a front page in The Herald and articles in The Daily Mail, Scotsman, Scottish Sun and Sunday Herald.

Broadcast included BBC Scotland, Radio 4 and TV bulletins. There were at least 435,000 digital views of the story and at least 1,750 shares.

Online tickets sales increased during the campaign.

The only prop which had to be purchased was a £7 bunch of bananas although local residents did turn up in banana suits creating excellent social media opportunities during the event.

Beverley Tricker, managing director, Tricker PR

Award Sponsor

Frasermedia delivers award-winning PR campaigns as part of our day-to-day business, so sponsoring the Best Campaign at the Northern Star Awards is a fantastic fit for our business as we know a good campaign when we see one!

It is one of the most prestigious business awards on the North-east calendar so it is a great branding opportunity for Frasermedia and, as a business, it allows us to support local companies that are committed to delivering strong PR and marketing campaigns.

We have been a member of the Chamber since we launched, so it is great to support both the Chamber and its members.
Commitment to People Development

Awarded to the company which has shown the most commitment to developing its staff through skills and personal development, investment and achievement programmes and outcomes

Winner

Scarf

For more than 30 years, the core aim of Scarf (Save Cash and Reduce Fuel) has been to alleviate fuel poverty.

It works with the Scottish Government and local authorities to deliver free and impartial advice on saving energy to householders, community groups and organisations in the private, public and third sectors.

The commercial trading arm delivers services offering City & Guilds accredited training and development courses, as well as providing a dedicated Energy Performance Certificate service.

It recognises that to achieve the world-class service it strives for employee development is the key because if they care the company succeeds.

Scarf recognises it must have a motivated, engaged and empowered workforce and that is facilitated by a programme called ASPIRE.

It gives staff the chance, with guidance from an experienced HR consultant, to produce a personal and professional development programme bespoke to Scarf which meets both their needs and the needs of the business.

ASPIRE aims to make Scarf employees feel highly valued and have their outstanding attributes and talents not only recognised, but put to best use within the organisation.

Scarf recognises that each member of staff is an individual with unique experience professionally, academically and personally and ASPIRE provides practical opportunities for employees to use that experience.

It has a policy of recruiting for attitude and training for skill.

Previously the company recruited through an interview panel but, as the majority of roles are customer-facing, a switch was made to a group recruitment process.

It focuses on group exercises which provide a clearer understanding of how people communicate and engage with others, what their personality is like and whether it will be a good fit with the existing team.

During the induction process, new staff are made aware of the ASPIRE programme and the door is then opened to development opportunities.

Members of staff receive ongoing support and are in constant dialogue with line managers and supervisors to identify gaps in skills and knowledge as well as ways to address them.

Also, learning resources and materials are freely accessible to all staff.

The success of the Scarf philosophy is clearly demonstrated by the fact that this year it is listed in the Sunday Times 100 Best Not-for-Profit Organisations to Work for in the UK for a third consecutive year, rising five places to number 30.

Scarf is the highest-placed organisation in Scotland within the category.
Outstanding Contribution to the Energy Sector

Awarded to the company which can demonstrate an outstanding contribution to the energy sector within the North-east of Scotland

Winner
FIS Chemicals Ltd

It is now 36 years since Tom Cumming, the managing director and owner, established FIS Chemicals which formulates, manufactures and supplies specialised cleaning and maintenance chemicals worldwide.

It is Scotland’s fastest growing chemical company and its continuing success in a very competitive market is attributed to high quality in all areas of its activities, including product and people development, excellent customer service and a strong commitment to the environment and social responsibility.

There is an increased need for specialised chemicals for the energy industry to enhance efficiency, performance and limit operational downtime and FIS Chemicals is continually developing, evaluating and testing new chemistry applications to suit its clients’ needs.

FIS Chemicals believes it is the longevity of its relationships with these clients which differentiates it from its competitors.

Reputation and integrity are also key to its success and they take pride in promising “if we say we are going to do something, we do it and we deliver on time, every time”.

FIS plays a significant role in enhancing energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Around 90% of chemical processes involve the use of substances added to increase the rate of reaction, known as catalysts, and related products to enhance production efficiency and reduce energy use.

The firm has the ability to collaborate with its clients to solve complex problems.

By combining expertise – the 21 staff have more than two centuries of accumulated service – and robust technology it can evaluate data to see how processes interact.

This allows the delivery of targeted solutions supported by a fully integrated manufacturing capacity to ensure a consistent supply.

As the search for oil and goes more remote and deeper FIS Chemicals is partnering industry companies to meet the challenges of increasingly stringent environmental standards by designing innovative products and materials for the different stages of the chain.

This perhaps explains why, despite a downturn in the oil and gas industry, FIS Chemical continues to thrive.

Turnover last year increased by 11.3% and an additional manufacturing plant to enable it to meet demand is being installed.

Staff levels have increased and additional premises have been leased to store raw chemicals.

The company is proud to bear a Royal Warrant to Her Majesty the Queen which was granted for supplying water chlorination products to Balmoral estate for more than 20 years.
The Green Award

Awarded to the company which has implemented a strategy to reduce the impact its business makes on the environment or is involved in providing alternative energy supplies

Winner

Deeside Activity Park

Deeside Activity Park is “a farm diversification project gone mad”, according to the owners. It includes probably the most diverse range of outdoor activities on a single site in the north of Scotland ranging from a children’s all-weather sledge slope to a series of full blown teambuilding challenges.

There are traditional activities such as fly fishing and clay shooting, as well as more up to date quad bike trekking and power boarding (when there is snow).

There is also a busy restaurant/coffee shop.

When the venture was launched 13 years ago, the food offering was primarily to support the activity side but it has developed into an important income generator.

Deeside Activity Park has become a rural business hub, with three other successful firms on the site employing more than 10 people.

Environmental considerations were key to the project and were explored at the planning stage.

The log buildings have high spec insulation and recycling waste, including food composting, was key to the vision to create a low impact rural business.

The aim is for a zero carbon footprint for the businesses run from the farm and ultimately to hand over the land in a better state than when it was bought.

The Government’s Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme was the catalyst for the installation of a 170Kw biomass boiler which produces all the heat and hot water for Deeside Activity Park, three holiday cottages and three tenant businesses.

Wood pellets are sourced from Boyndie in Aberdeenshire.

A roof-mounted array of solar photovoltaic panels provides 20% of the electricity requirement and a small wind turbine was erected in 2011 producing 30,000 KWH annually of which 60% is used on site with the remainder going to the National Grid.

The staff walk, cycle and car-share to work and, as they all live in and enjoy Royal Deeside, and are enthusiastic supporters of the environmentally-friendly policies.

As much rainwater as possible is collected to fill the water bowers, so they have plenty to clean the equipment and water the animals and by buying their fruit and vegetables as well as meat, poultry and other produce locally, they keep food-miles to a minimum.

Green may not be the easy option and is not always the most cost-effective “but it’s the way we do it here,” they say.

Award Sponsor

The Northern Star Business Awards are firmly established as being the most prestigious recognition of excellence in the region’s business community. Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council are proud to be long term award sponsors and supporters of the event.

Competitiveness of businesses and the area as a place to live and work is increasingly dependent on energy efficiency, affordable energy and the ability to avoid energy use through transacting business electronically, making the council’s sponsorship of the Green Award particularly appropriate.

Cilla Wood, sales & marketing manager, Deeside Activity Park
Overall Business of the Year

Awarded to the company which is held as an example of excellent practice and an inspiration to all businesses by attaining market prominence

Winner

Balmoral Group Holdings Ltd

Jim Milne CBE, chairman and managing director, Balmoral Group Holdings Ltd

The Balmoral Group is a privately owned company, headquartered in Aberdeen and its various company divisions have been providing solutions to the offshore oil and gas, renewable energy and construction industries since 1980. It is dedicated to technologically-driven solutions for today’s demanding global markets.

In-house laboratory and hydrostatic and mechanical testing facilities enable the company to research and develop cost effective manufacturing materials across a spectrum of applications.

Although there has been a downturn in activity, global demand for hydrocarbon energy is driving the development of offshore reserves - especially in the deepwater markets of West and East Africa, Gulf of Mexico and Brazil. Balmoral identified these regions as key business development areas, ideally suited to its portfolio of specialised deepwater products.

The group operates a network of agents in Brazil, Canada, Ghana, India, Italy, Malaysia, Nigeria, Qatar, Singapore and the UAE and, because of the technical nature of its products, the company doesn’t work with distributors, preferring to deal direct or have fully trained agents represent the company.

Balmoral operates two internal learning facilities: The “Balmoral Skills Academy” in Aberdeen for Balmoral Offshore Engineering personnel, and the “Balmoral Tanks Leadership Academy” in Llantrisant, South Wales.

They are unique and were borne out of a need to align company strategy with a high performance culture and succession planning.

From 2010 to 2015, the company has more than doubled turnover to £136.5million and almost tripled pre-tax profit to £31.9million. International sales increased from £48.8million to £93.2million while employee numbers rose from 315 to 557.

Like every successful long-term business it has faced stiff tests in terms of market conditions, economic slowdowns and technical challenges.

Having worked through previous oil price drops, Balmoral is benefiting from its commitment to lean manufacturing.

Efficiency has always been a priority and this has helped it weather the storm.

There is a strong belief within Balmoral that businesses should contribute to the wellbeing of the communities in which they operate and it does so.

Balmoral’s chairman, James Milne CBE, is chairman of Aberdeen-based charity, Friends of ANCHOR, which has raised more than £8.25million since it was founded in 1997.

Balmoral employs three full-time PR and fundraising personnel for the charity as well as providing office accommodation and support ensuring the charity bears no administration costs.

Balmoral also supports a number of other organisations and projects and its long term commitment to and support of the region should not be undervalued in terms of jobs and wealth creation, community and social involvement.

Award Sponsor

As an Aberdeen-based business, we think it is essential to support the local business community, which is why we are backing the Northern Star Business Awards. Our business has benefited greatly from winning numerous awards and we feel it only right to help other businesses reap the rewards of such accolades.

The Overall Business of the Year Award celebrates the business that has performed outstandingly throughout the year. It recognises a company that has really stood out from the crowd, has developed a strong business presence and is universally admired for its commercial practice and dedication to success.

Jim Milne CBE, chairman and managing director, Balmoral Group Holdings Ltd
Thank you again for inviting me to the Awards last night. It was a great evening that I really enjoyed at a fun table!

Deirdre Michie, Oil & Gas UK

Fantastic night at the Northern Star Awards, so happy to receive the Commitment to People Development Award! @chambertalk @AECC_Aberdeen

@ScarfScotland

Well done @ThorpeMolloy! #worthywinners #TimeToShine Thanks @AGCCevents for a brilliant night! #NorthernStar #aberdeen #grampian

@SimbloxTech
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