

# EXECUTIVE

NOVEMBER 2020

The North of Scotland's leading business magazine



## BUILDING BRILLIANCE

We exclusively reveal the winners of the 2020  
Inverness Architectural Association Awards

### CAITHNESS FOCUS

News from Caithness  
Chamber of Commerce

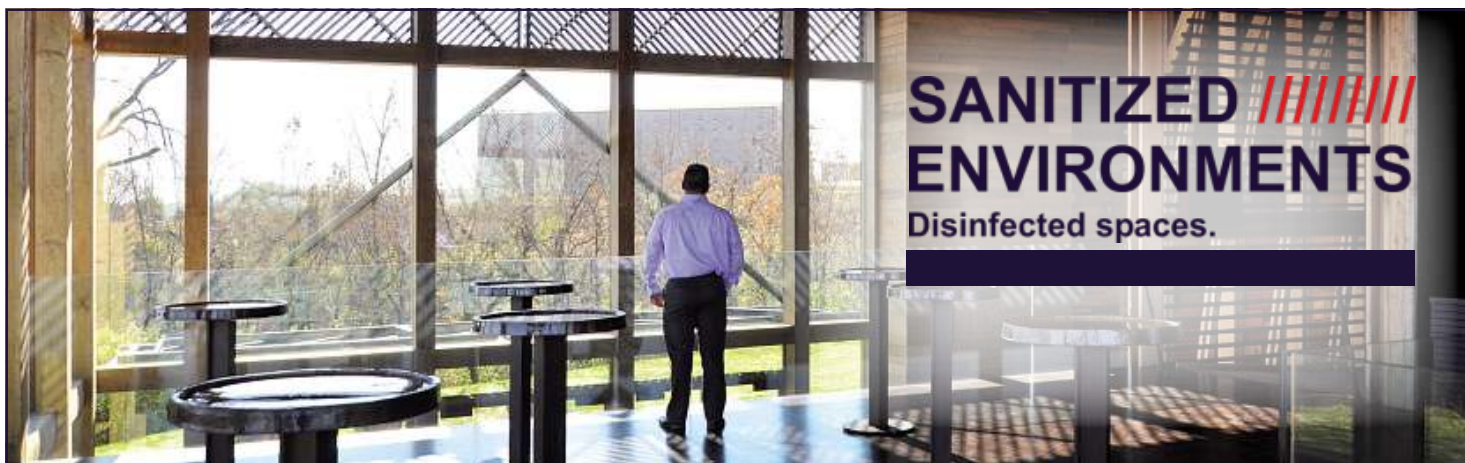
### SCHOOL SPECIAL

We look at what Scotland's independent  
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

SOMETIMES we forget, but there are a lot of people who look to the Highlands and Islands to take their lead from the pioneering work which goes on here.

The obvious example is in renewable energy and especially, but not exclusively, the wave and tidal power innovation being developed in Orkney.

In tourism too, many others look to the Highlands for examples of how to balance sustainability and a developing tourism industry.

House and homebuilding is also an area where the Highlands and Islands lead, as Inverness Architectural Association president Karen Anderson tells us on page six.

In the main, this is in the area of individual homes, but as another contributor this month, architect Neil Sutherland suggests, why cannot the virtues of these homes – sustainability, sympathetic design and integration into their environment – not be upscaled for new diverse and exciting settlements for the future?

Create those and there will be many more regions which follow the Highlands' lead.

Calum



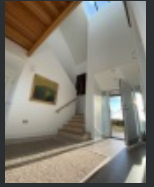
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Unlike previous years, 2021's IMPACT30 group may have less opportunity to meet.



The young business leaders listen to a talk from Mark Bell, of AAB Consulting.

# Wider impact for £100k project

## A BUSINESS support programme aimed at developing the next generation of entrepreneurs is to be extended across the Highlands and Islands.

IMPACT30 is currently operated by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) in the Highland Council area, as part of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal.

Delivered on HIE's behalf by AAB Consulting, it offers bespoke support from industry specialists to people age 35 and under who are in key decision-making roles in young ambitious businesses.

The young business leaders benefit from 12 months of personalised coaching and mentoring, just-in-time training, and collaborative learning with other participants.

HIE has approved a further investment of £100,000 to make the programme accessible to businesses in the Northern and Western Isles, Moray, Argyll and Bute, and North Ayrshire.

The investment will be targeted at helping young people develop commercial and employment opportunities as part of the region's economic recovery.

IMPACT30 forms part of the Northern Innovation Hub, a project led by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) with £11 million from the UK government and £1.7 million ERDF support as part of the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal.

So far, the programme has run four times in Highland, with 49 businesses taking part, including 19 currently in the programme. The average age of participants is 30 and the average age of their businesses is less than a year.

Extending IMPACT30 across the

region is expected to benefit at least another 10 businesses over the next year in addition to those in the Highland Council area.

Claire Munro, HIE's senior project manager for the Northern Innovation Hub, said: "Entrepreneurship is a key driver for successful business development and economic growth. Supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs is essential to future job opportunities, inward investment and community resilience."

"IMPACT30 is about strengthening entrepreneurship to create a more robust and resilient economy, as

well as improving business skills and supporting a confident workforce.

"By extending the programme, we'll be able to build on its success so far and widen the impacts across the whole region. We look forward to welcoming the next cohort for onboarding in January."

Mark Bell, director of economic development at AAB Consulting, said: "IMPACT30 welcomed 19 new businesses in August. It was great to feel how energised they all are about fighting the uncertainty head on. Our immediate task is to help them focus their energy on the things that are most important today, and that they are building their resilience in a way that they can respond to disruptions tomorrow, of which there will be many. Each business benefits from having an individual coach, a network to share and learn from, and other subject matter experts on hand to help with discreet challenges."

More information about IMPACT30 is available on the HIE website, [www.hie.co.uk](http://www.hie.co.uk)

By extending the programme, we'll be able to build widen the impacts across the whole region.

Claire Munro, HIE



Last year's IMPACT30 intake.



Gairloch Museum has turned what was an eyesore into an award-winning community asset with its impressive laid out interior (below right).

# ‘Eyesore’ building earns top Highland award

**THE Highlands and Islands are leading the way when it comes to good architectural design – and Highlanders are being encouraged to check out some of the best examples for themselves.**

Inverness Architectural Association (IAA) has revealed the winners of its 2020 Design Awards, and association president Karen Anderson is keen for local people to go to the IAA website and see the winners for themselves.

The five winners include both new builds and renovations, with the overall award for 2020 going to a building that was once considered an eyesore – a concrete former Cold War nuclear bunker – which has now been recognised as one of Scotland’s most exciting new museums.

“The awards cover a big area in the Highlands and Islands, so what has been nice this year has been the opportunity, because we are online, to open them up to more people,” Karen said.

“All the entries are online and we would be delighted if people went to the website and had a look.”

There are five categories in the design awards, with a sixth award going to the overall winner.

This year’s awards attracted entries from throughout the region from Lerwick to Ardnamurchan, and from the Western Isles to Nairn.

The overall winner was Gairloch Museum, which also won the award for new life for an existing building.

Mill Studio in Portree won the best new build award with an extension at Albert Street in Nairn taking the prize for best small project (under £175,000 or £1750 per square metre).

The place making award, for new or renovated buildings which help

create a sense of place, went to An Talla, which has transformed the former village hall at Dochgarroch into a shop, café and ticket office for cruise company Loch Ness by Jacobite, and created a popular canal-side destination for locals and tourists.

The final award, for best use of timber, went to new build home Carra in Badachro.

IAA vice-president and award-winning designer in her own right, Catriona Hill, believes this year’s awards have set a new standard.

“The standard of entries has been higher than ever before and there is no doubt that the quality of

architecture in the Highlands and Islands is exemplary,” she said.

Karen agrees.

“There is a real sense up here that we are ahead of the game, particularly in the number of beautiful modern homes on the islands and the mainland,” she said.

“We want to build on that so we see the architecture of our public buildings reflect the high quality of the Highlands because it is very precious.

“When we see development in the Highlands that isn’t sympathetic – and there is quite a lot – it really does stand out as a real negative, but there are certainly good examples among the winners that people should look at.”

Top prize winner Gairloch Museum – one of two winning entries for LDN Architects – was particularly deserving of attention as an example of the way a community can bring an old building back to life.

“And not just any old life – it’s actually not just an award winner architecturally, it has also been recognised for the way the content has been displayed in a fantastic, engaging way,” Karen added.

The eight-year and £2.4 million redevelopment project is one of only two Scottish winners of Art Fund’s prestigious Museum Of The Year award, winning £40,000 as its share of the £200,000 prize fund.

“The interior of the building is really very exciting and attractive backdrop for the collection,” Karen continued.

“It’s like taking a slightly forgotten, but important part of our history that no-one knew quite what to



Loch Ness by Jacobite’s An Talla visitor centre at Dochgarroch is a popular destination.

There is a real sense up here that we are ahead of the game, particularly with modern homes

Karen Anderson





Carra's interior use of timber and light particularly impressed the judges.



A detail from new building winner, Mill Studio on the Isle of Skye.



This extension at Albert Street, Nairn, has revitalised the clients' home.

entrances to the building it becomes something that can serve a number of users, whether they be on the canal or in the village or on the towpath, so that is hugely useful in times like now. It has been a real plus, the way it has been designed to accommodate people."

Smaller project winner, an extension to a house at Albert Street in Nairn for clients Steven and Karen Keenan, had also shown its worth during lockdown.

"The extension allows what is really a fairly straightforward house to become exciting," Karen said.

"The clients felt they had no real connection with the garden, and by dint of the imagination of the architect, Printie James Architecture, they now feel a fantastic connection. They have had – in relative terms – a really good time during lockdown because it has brought sun and light into the space. It was a fantastic way to take an ordinary house and make it very special."

Also impressive was a new design by Forbes practice LDN Architects for its Badachro commission, Carra.

This won the award for best use of timber thanks to its exceptionally well crafted timber ceiling.

"It not only performs what it was meant to, which is filter the light, but

it is actually aesthetically beautiful and the client was pointing out that they get wonderful light effects," Karen revealed.

"They particularly praised builders Simpsons because they took an immense amount of care in the detailing of the ceiling and it wasn't an easy task at all. It was a complicated installation, beautifully executed."

The 2020 IAA Design Awards were to have taken place at Eden Court following a conference organised by the IAA, the northernmost chapter (area organisation) of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS), and which covers the whole Highlands and Islands region.

As with many events planned for 2020, Covid restrictions ruled out the usual awards event, so the announcement, still overseen by usual host Nicky Marr, moved online.

However, this has allowed the ceremony to introduce new elements, such as interviewing the winning clients via Zoom.

Karen described this as a real game-changer and likely to become a feature of future awards.

"Finding out what the clients think is really important," Karen added.

"If we didn't have the clients, we wouldn't have any particular reason to be around."

### Inverness Architectural Association 2020 Design Award Winners

Best New Building: Mill Studio, Portree, designed by Rural Design

Highly Commended: Eric Gray @ Seafield, Richard Gibson Architects; Invisible House, Rural Design

Best New Life For Existing Building: Gairloch Museum, designed by LDN Architects

Highly Commended: Storehouse, Kirkwall, Leslie Burgher Architects, Beatrice offshore maintenance base, Wick, HRI Munro Architecture

Best Placemaking Award for buildings or interventions that enhance their location and/or create a sense of place: An Talla, Dochgarroch, designed by Colin Armstrong Architects

Best Smaller Project: 3 Albert Street, Nairn, designed by Printie James Architecture

Highly Commended: Croick Mission Hut, Ardgay, CH Architects

Best Use of Timber: Interior, Carra, Badachro, designed by LDN Architects

Best Project Over All: Gairloch Museum, LDN Architects

Highly Commended: Raining Stairs, Inverness, Traill Architects

do with because it was made of mass-concrete, and find a new use that actually celebrates itself and its history and at the same time becomes a really important part of the community."

Similarly the An Talla project had given new life and purpose to a building that had been a bit unloved, Karen said.

"It is a destination and has become a focus for people to come during Covid and sit outside because they have a nice sheltered courtyard," she continued.

"The client was at pains to point out that because of all the different





CIOB chief executive Caroline Gumble backed the creation of the new hub.



Ms Gumble planned to visit local projects such as work underway at Inverness Castle.

# Construction body restores local hub

**THE world's largest professional body for construction sector managers and professionals, the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), is to once again have its own Highlands and Islands members' hub**

The announcement was made at a virtual launch event by CIOB chief executive Caroline Gumble, along with contributions from John MacLennan of the Construction Scotland Innovation Centre, LDN Architects' Stuart MacKellar, who is currently involved in the restoration of Inverness Castle, and hub committee member Sharon Barrie of Highland Council.

Ms Gumble had originally planned to visit Inverness for the announcement and meet local members and see some of the projects they are involved in locally.

However, Covid restrictions led to the cancellation of her travel plans and forced the launch event online.

The CIOB, which has some 44,000 members in 219 countries worldwide, had a formal Highlands and Islands identity until a few years ago, when the CIOB reorganised its local centre structure.

This saw the replacement of its five local centres in Scotland with just two east and west Scottish hubs, based in Edinburgh and Glasgow respectively, overseeing the activities of its 2400 Scottish-based members.

However, the local membership in the Highlands and Islands remained very active in the community, and earlier this year a group from the area met Ms Gumble in Perth during her pre-lockdown visit to Scotland to put the case for the restoration of a Highlands and Islands hub.

The CIOB agreed to the proposal, which will allow the organisation to

refocus its support for members and the wider construction community in the Highlands, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland.

In her video message, Ms Gumble regretted being unable to travel to the Highlands in person, but told members: "I do hope the message has reached you that I am keen to support you and your work and the wider construction community in the Highlands and Islands."

"This is an exciting opportunity for us as your professional institute to further support, involve and represent members in the industry in your area."

"The Highlands and Islands hub team are already working in plans for 2021 and this is where you can start to get involved."

"I would very much welcome interest from members, and non-members, with a desire to contribute to the future success of our new hub, and of course, the wider construction community."

Alasdair Murray, Highland Council's principal building standards surveyor, has been appointed chairman of the new hub, with his council colleague Sharon Barrie taking the vice-chair role.

Officially open as of January 1 2021, the new hub will run a series of events to establish the network, welcome new members and provide events of specific interest to the construction and built environment community in the Highlands and Islands. These are likely to be online unless Covid restrictions ease.

To get involved with the new hub, contact regional manager Lynne McKay via [lmckay@ciob.org.uk](mailto:lmckay@ciob.org.uk).

This is an exciting opportunity to further support, involve and represent members.

Caroline Gumble



The new hub will support professionals in the region's busy construction sector with events and other activities.





# You name it, we probably ship it

BUSINESS owners may understandably have had their minds on other things over the past few months, but as we get closer to the end of the UK's European Union transition period on January 1, more and more are asking what a full, external border will mean for them. Which is why so many are turning to import/export experts to see what they need to do to ensure their business thrives and survives – experts like Drac Logistics.

"We have seen a huge increase in new customer enquiries," Drac Logistics director Charlotte Bowfield-Gray acknowledged.

The company, which has recently added an air freight division alongside its sea, rail and road shipping options, has already made a big investment in anticipation of the inevitable changes.

"We have been preparing for Brexit, bolstering our customs clearance team, and putting a new system in place that will give us a new basis for customs entries," Charlotte added.

"We have also been periodically training our staff throughout the year via BIFA, the British International Freight Association, the training body for the freight industry, because as you can imagine, customs rules and regulations can be quite complex. We've also been helped by HMRC, which has had a huge grant scheme this year to help with recruitment, training and the installation of new software and hardware, so we have been able to use these grants to help us prepare as much as possible."

However, she acknowledged that businesses did have concerns that the UK and EU had yet to agree terms.

"There is uncertainty, but we will just have to adjust if and when the agreements are made," she added.

"I think it is going to be a bit of a struggle at first, especially in January with any additional requirements needed for customs entries, but with Drac's expertise we will help you get through."

Customers who come to Drac Logistics for help in negotiating the new rules surrounding imports and exports can draw on the experience of a firm that for the last decade has been providing a seamless transportation service to clients in a number of sectors, and in turn drew on the vast industry expertise of its founders managing director Alex Hayes and directors Allan Donaldson and Gareth Evans.

Based at Stone in Staffordshire, Drac Logistics opened a second office in Falkirk in 2015 to develop Drac Logistic's growing customer base in Scotland, at the same time bringing on board new directors Charlotte and Craig Scrimgeour.

Food products have also been a mainstay of the Falkirk branch, primarily seed potatoes in season, and fish exports, including mackerel and shellfish, all year round.



We are a growing company, particularly with our air freight and road freight offering

Charlotte Bowfield-Gray



However, the company also works with clients importing or exporting a wide range of goods, from fruit and refrigerated products for export, to umbrellas and walking sticks.

"We pretty much ship anything and everything – you name it, we probably do ship it," Charlotte said.

"It's quite a variety and we like a challenge as well. We are a decent sized, well-established company, but we are small enough to care and have a good customer focus. If customers come up with some weird and wonderful problems, then we will always try and come up with solutions."

Drac Logistics' Scottish base may be in the central belt, but the business is looking north for further opportunities, especially with the thriving aquaculture and wider food

and drink offering of the Highlands and Islands.

"We are a growing company, particularly with our air freight and road freight offering, so if there were opportunities for more frozen fish or sea food to be exported into Europe, that is something we would really like to look into," Charlotte said.

"We have talked about opening another Scottish base. It is an opportunity we will look at down the line. It would be good to have another depot in Scotland."



Drac

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T: 01324 614065

Head office, Reward House, Diamond Way, Stone Business Park, Stone, Staffordshire ST15 0SD

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E: [info@draclogistics.co.uk](mailto:info@draclogistics.co.uk)

<http://draclogistics.co.uk>





## 01

OUTLANDER fans can now show their devotion to the hit historical fantasy series – and heartthrob star Sam Heughan – with a collection of jewellery inspired by the show.

Aurora Jewellery, based at St Ola on Orkney, has launched a new line based on the hit TV show, through a collaboration with Sony Pictures Consumer Products.

Owner Steven Cooper said Orkney's abundant links with the past had led to agents for Sony contacting Aurora "out of the blue".

"Our existing range of jewellery and tartans are greatly inspired by the islands' history and culture, so the Outlander theme was the perfect fit for us," he said.

"And, since we are also fans of the series, it has been an absolute pleasure to work on the new range."

Aurora Jewellery, which has 12 employees, has been operating for 22 years and its other collections include those inspired by the islands' famous prehistoric Ring of Brodgar.

Mr Cooper said it had already had inquiries for its new range – based on the Craigh na Dun stones in Outlander – from around the world.

## 02

NAIRN BID has launched a video campaign showcasing all the town has to offer in the run-up to Christmas.

More than a dozen Nairn businesses are spotlighted in the feature advert, which is being shown alongside smaller films on BID's media channels as local shoppers prepare for Christmas.

Lucy Harding, BID manager, said: "The videos really do put Nairn and our fantastic businesses in the spotlight and show that we have such a vibrant and varied offering.

"It was important for us to not only focus on the product, but the people behind the businesses as well, as people buy from people and if it wasn't for these business owners being so creative and, in this difficult time, adaptable, we wouldn't have such a great offering.



## 03

THE biggest new hydro power scheme in the UK in the last 30 years has been approved in the Highlands.

SSE Renewables has been granted consent for a 1500MW project at Coire Glas near Loch Lochy in Lochaber. It had previously gained consent from the Scottish Government for a 600MW scheme at the site in December 2013, but revised plans were submitted in April 2018.

If it gains commercial approval, the project would see the UK's first new pumped storage hydro scheme in over 30 years.

It would be capable of a power output of up to 1500MW for 24 hours non-stop and a pumped storage capacity of up to 30GWh. SSE Renewables says it is one of the most flexible storage technologies and the output from Coire Glas could power around three million homes for periods of up to 24 hours.



**04**

PROPERTY consultancy Galbraith has appointed two new graduate surveyors in Inverness as part of a nationwide expansion of its rural business division.

Claire MacDonald (above) and Rachel Urquhart who have respectively completed a BA (Hons) Rural Business Management at SRUC Edinburgh and a BSc Biochemistry at Glasgow University and MSc Rural Estate and Land Management at Harper Adams University.

Ian Hope, Galbraith's rural department head, said: "Our rural division has continued to grow. Rural businesses face a high degree of uncertainty but there remain significant opportunities for estates and farms."

**05**

ELGIN'S new Travelodge hotel officially opened to guests, eight months after the pandemic scuppered its planned big Easter opening.

Hotel manager, Ann Howie (53), from Forres, said: "We were all set to open in March with quite a big fanfare – but then the UK was officially shut down. It was very sad, disappointing and very strange and surreal."

"I had recruited and trained my full team and we were mega-excited. The news that we were going into a lockdown was a big blow."

The hotel on the Barmuckity Business Park will offer 61 bedrooms.

**06**

HIGHLAND Hospice plans to turn a high profile Inverness unit into a flagship store.

The charity is to move its Inverness shop from Queensgate to the former home of Laura Ashley in Falcon Square.

Andrew Leaver, hospice head of fundraising and development, said: "We are a local charity committed to the city centre of Inverness and it is in our interest to make sure the Falcon Square shop is of the highest standard, both to ensure we make good income and to maintain Inverness city centre as an attractive and thriving shopping district. We look forward to welcoming customers in the New Year."

**07**

MULTI-NATIONAL consulting, technology and outsourcing services giant Capgemini is to create up to 250 new jobs in Inverness and Nairn.

The move follows Capgemini's success last June in landing a five-year contract to run the Ministry of Defence's IT service centre.

Innis Montgomery (below), head of the firm's Inverness command centre, predicted a "real growth period" for the company in the local area.

**08**

ONE of the Highlands' best known landlords' has promised to take a break – but not to fully retire – after selling Inverness's Phoenix Ale House.

George MacLean has owned nine pubs, bars and hotels in the Highlands over his career in hospitality, and part owned and managed two more.

**09**

THE owners of Loch Ness Spirits, Dr Lorien Cameron-Ross and Kevin Ross, have won the fight to retain use of the name.

Although the UK Intellectual Property Office (IPO) ruled in December that Duncan Taylor Scotch Whisky Limited had failed to provide "convincing evidence" that it had an earlier right to use the phrase, the Huntly-based whisky merchant lodged an appeal. This has now been dismissed. Dr Cameron-Ross (right) said the support she had received was amazing.



# NEWS DIGEST.





Caintech operates a variety of drone types, both fixed wing and multirotor.

There is a lot of demand and I think everyone is playing catch-up. For example, we are seeing a massive surge in housing at the moment.

Jim Main

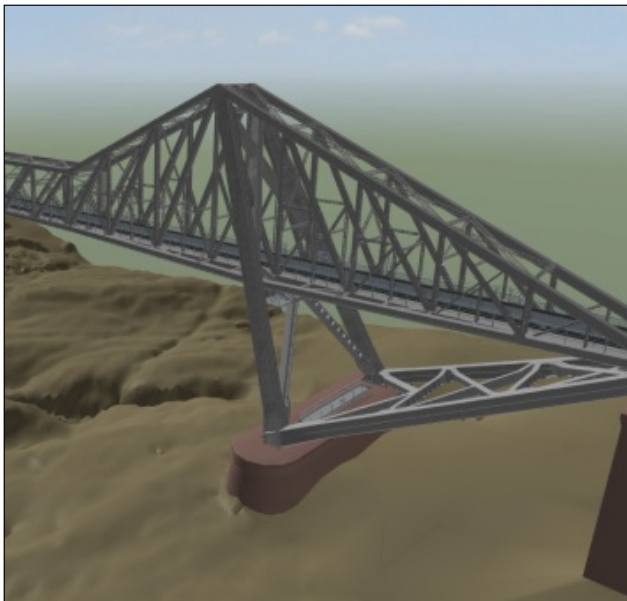


Drone images are a vital tool for many of the sectors in which Caintech operates.



Caintech's expertise is in demand across Scotland.

## SURVEY FIRM'S BUSY FUTURE AS DEMAND GROWS



A laser scan of Connel Bridge in Argyll

**AS with most businesses, 2020 has been a challenge for Inverness-based Caintech. But with new staff, new kit and a flurry of new inquiries from potential clients, the prospects for 2021 look more than positive for the surveying and site engineering specialist.**

Although lockdown did bring a brief halt to Caintech's activities, its close involvement with the utilities sector meant that its services were soon required once again, with the 32-year-old business having to adapt quickly to the new ways of working required in the midst of a global pandemic.

As restrictions eased, clients from the other sectors Caintech serves – such as construction, energy, survey and marine services – also resumed their call for the company's expertise.

"We are finding now there is a lot of demand and I think everyone is playing catch-up," director and business founder Jim Main said.

"For example, we are seeing a massive surge in housing at the moment, although it is the utilities sector which keeps us busiest."

Caintech is not only busy, but continuing to grow with the recent addition of five new members of staff, bringing the Caintech total to 29.

They include civil engineering technician Calum MacLennan, who has been brought on board to assist with civil engineering and drainage design, further expanding Caintech's growing civil engineering department. Fellow recruit Nicky Young, Caintech's BIM (building and information modelling) manager will add to its cutting edge technological offering.

"A BIM model is 3D modelling and design in the construction industry," Jim explained.

"The technology has been used in the oil industry for years. It has been slower to be adopted in the building industry, but it is now quite crucial and we are finding we have more and more projects where laser-scanning is involved."

BIM has become a vital tool of the construction and engineering process,

from initial design to construction management and maintenance, and Jim decided there was a need for a full time member of staff to quote, manage and deliver the scanning service to clients.

Laser scanning allows vast amounts of data to be collected in a much shorter time than using conventional survey techniques.

This can then be manipulated using a variety of software packages in order to produce anything from 2D CAD drawings to 3D models and animated fly-throughs.

The firm also received a commission to carry out a laser scan of Glasgow's Kingston Bridge, creating a digital model to showcase the bridge as it marks its 50th anniversary.

Another vital component in surveying, as it is in so many other sectors, is the UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle), more popularly referred to as a drone.

Information from UAVs is often used in conjunction with Caintech's laser scanning and topographical surveying capabilities to create a complete and accurate 3D model of any site or structure, providing invaluable information to assist with visualisation and detailed design.

This has allowed Caintech to carry out surveys for a wide range of projects throughout Scotland, from fire-damaged and unsafe structures, to overhead power lines, manufacturing plants and sea walls.

Caintech operates both fixed wing and multirotor UAVs, and increasing demand for this service has resulted in the recruitment of trainee UAV operator, Lee Avis, who was picked from 240 applicants for the role, to join Caintech's unmanned operations manager Craig McDonald.

This aspect of the business is becoming steadily busier and Caintech is currently working with the Civil Aviation Authority's Pathfinder programme to receive clearance for BVLOS (beyond visual line of sight) operations.

"These are required when you are flying a UAV beyond what the operator can see, so there are a lot of additional safety features and procedures you have to be aware of," Jim explained.



Historically BVLOS flights are used for a variety of applications, such as long-distance aerial surveys of infrastructure including power lines or roads, or in circumstances where it might be dangerous to carry out a physical inspection in person.

However, Caintech will make use of its BVLOS accreditation to seek out marine life – specifically, jellyfish and kelp, which can be an unlikely but expensive hazard for the power sector.

"Jellyfish can be quite costly to facilities like nuclear power plants which use seawater for cooling," Jim explained.

"They can block the filters in the water intake, causing shutdowns. If the plants know they are coming, they can take appropriate action. A staged shutdown costs a lot less than an emergency shutdown."

However, not all Caintech's unmanned vehicles fly over the water. Two years ago the company invested in an unmanned surface vessel (USV), which uses multibeam sonar equipment to identify and inspect underwater features in sea and river environments, becoming the first Highland surveying business to have its own underwater surveying capability.

Caintech is now building a second, smaller unmanned marine survey vessel. This time the company has been designing the USV itself, starting by creating the fibreglass hull from a 3D mould.

"The marine side has been very busy, including assisting major construction projects, so we have been doing various surveys for that, but also we have also been carrying out various other projects dotted around Scotland," Jim added.

Indeed, the demand for this and other Caintech services, takes Jim and his team across Scotland and even further afield.

At the same time, Caintech is also involved in work as far south as Lincoln in the English Midlands, where two members of staff are permanently based.

Caintech's all round capability is enhanced by the ability of its land survey works team, under manager Gordon Noble, to undertake land surveys for private and commercial works all around Scotland.

These can range from single houses up to large commercial developments.

"Historically that has always been a strong side to the company and that has continued through lockdown," Jim said.

"Because we offer that service, that allows our civil engineering design team to carry out their work knowing the data they have is accurate and current."

This in turn ensures that the setting out works team, led by site engineering manager Ryan Miller, also works from the most accurate information. In addition to working to Caintech's in-house designs, the team will also work to other designs on a range of other projects such as setting out roads, drainage, earthworks structures and commercial buildings.

Being able to draw on its own expert staff and specialised equipment means that on even on complicated tasks such as mapping out cables for wind farms, Caintech can be involved in all stages of the process from the initial survey on.

As a busy and forward looking company, Caintech is also investing in its future not only by investing in the latest technological tools, but by investing in people and recently employed a new trainee surveyor, who will be studying part-time at Inverness College UHI.

Although this represents a considerable investment in time and resources before he is fully qualified, Jim believes this is justified by the advantages nurturing your own staff can bring.

"It is not a quick process, but developing our own staff is a good thing because you then get staff exactly how you need them," he explained.

"While it is important to take on staff with existing experience, there is a risk they may come in with their own pre-conceived ideas or a different way of doing things."

If current trends continue, Caintech's new recruits and the established team will continue to be busy for some time to come. While others were on furlough, Jim spent much of his time during lockdown preparing quotes for new contracts and the business is starting to reap the benefits.

"We have quoted for a huge amount of work across a number of sectors for new and existing clients and I'm hoping that will continue to come in," Jim said.

With prospects also positive for Caintech's sister company Northern Survey Supplies, the Highlands' own survey sector supply company, Jim hints there will be further good news to come from the company in the new year.

"We are advancing in all directions and in all departments," Jim said.

"But the important thing for me is having the staff to do that. If you were micromanaging all the time, it just wouldn't be doable.

"You have got to have people you can trust and I'm very glad to say I've the staff I can trust very well."



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Caintech's van fleet is a frequent sight on roads in the Highlands.



The Inverness firm has staff at work from the Midlands to the Shetlands.



Caintech's USV (unmanned surface vessel) allow surveyors to inspect hard to reach places.





Founder and director Makar Homes ■

# Neil SUTHERLAND

[www.makar.co.uk](http://www.makar.co.uk)

[@makameil](https://twitter.com/makameil)

## Future settlements must meet today's needs

**B**uilding well is a concept relating to sustainable development which relates to everything around us, from clothes to infrastructure, from individual homes to villages.

In last month's article I claimed that the Highland region was ahead in relation to other parts of Scotland when it comes to one-off custom built homes. This is thanks to an informal collaborative approach across the private and public sectors.

The next logical stage in this positive evolution is with the mainstreaming of this attitude at a larger scale, a scale that includes new and additional settlements across our region.

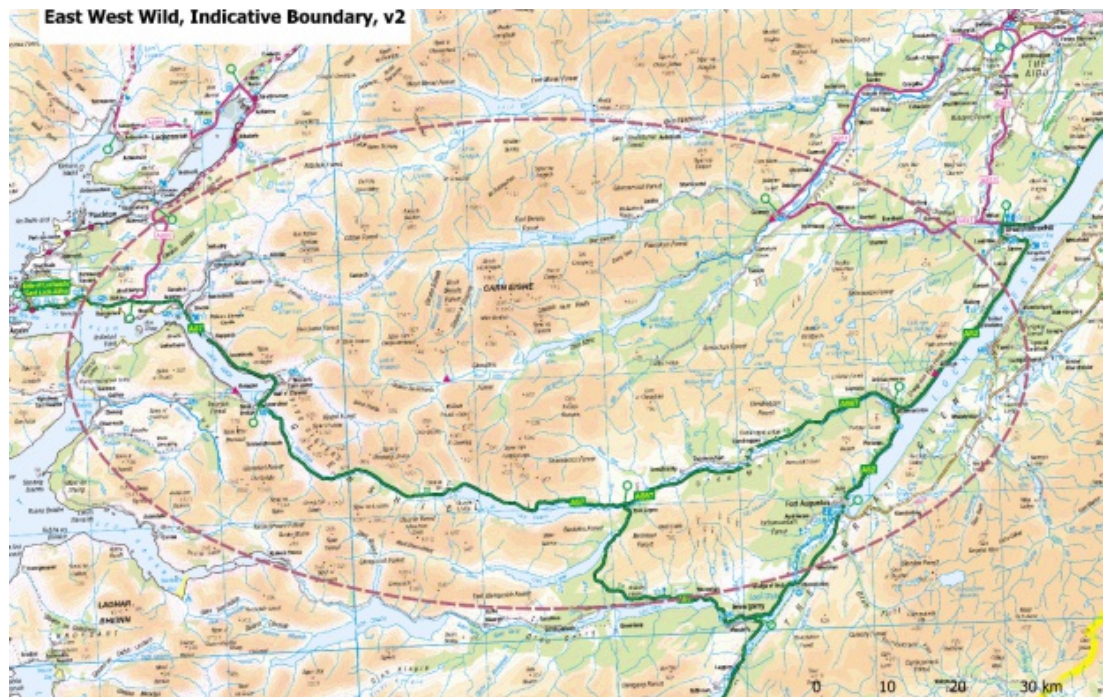
Many of the towns and villages now revered are 200 years old. Not to be confused with medieval settlements such as Tain or Inverness, towns including Beaulieu, Grantown and Wick were planned settlements which have emerged in relatively recent times. These new places borrowed the mix of functions found in their medieval predecessors; places to live, work, learn and gather.

Set out on a grid, the axial routes are terminated by a church, bank, harbour or jail etc. There are perhaps 250 such settlements large and small in Scotland, mainly in the Highlands and Aberdeenshire.

These result from the disruptive economic dynamics of their times affecting industry, infrastructure, improvement, displacement.

So if we were in a position to create 21st century places what would be our present day drivers and what would their expression be?

My belief is that authentic village extensions and new settlements have



Trees for Life's East West Wild project takes a fresh approach to land use in the Highlands.

to respond to the big issues of our times. As quality places they need to represent social, economic and environmental responsibility and, in addition, inspire.

By necessity this present day challenge in place-making will be functionally mixed-use, supporting diverse economic activity and enterprises. It would be mixed-tenure, displaying a range of scales of individual homes both for sale and rent. These would require to respond to the need for decarbonisation by being net-zero and generating more on-site power than they consume.

Green infrastructure by way of natural and engineered water flows would be integrated within the topography of the sites, along with structural landscaping and tree planting for biodiversity, shelter and delight. Space for community and amenity facilities such as allotments, bowling and village greens or tennis courts, would be incorporated from the outset. Mobility would be carefully planned and implemented allowing pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles to function in balance safely with streets taking the form of

shared and delightful places. With IT connectivity improving year on year, nowhere is remote in relation to communications. So places planned and delivered for the future seven generations – 200 years – would be distinctly Highland, taking their form from historic and contemporary precedents and sourced from short local material supply chains such as the timber industry.

Such a break from the monoculture of the single use developments of the 20th century is relevant to rural and edge of existing settlement sites.

The health of our rural and remote rural places is dependant more than ever on resilient and diverse economies. Many opportunities are opening up in rural Highland, based on renewal, re-peopling and regenerative approaches to land.

One exciting project launching this month exemplifying this trend has been developed by Dundreggan based Trees for Life. East West Wild represents a vision for nature, people and business to come together with a shared goal on a landscape scale. This partnership initiative aims

to take a fresh approach to land and its people across one of the Highlands' most special landscapes, encompassing the Glens of Cannich, Affric, Moriston and Shiel.

The partnership is based on two convictions. Firstly, that everyone with a stake in these places has a shared interest in the health of nature, communities and business and that they can use this common ground as a basis for improving all three cornerstones of life there.

Secondly, that collaborating on such a shared agenda will benefit everyone more than working in small groups under the status quo.

As we rapidly approach the five year anniversary of the Paris Agreement on December 12, we need to take stock. This powerful agreement backed by 197 nations set the world on a course of decarbonisation. Fossil fuels have had their day. Five years in and I am clearly not alone in believing that the real power and opportunity lies with ourselves in implementing this brave new world into our own lives and into our current and future Highland communities.

Village extensions and new settlements need to represent social, economic and environmental responsibility and, in addition, inspire.





One of Makar's designs for a new Highland settlement.



Neil Sutherland is calling for a fundamental rethink of our approach to communities.

# New thinking for new communities

IN planning for the future, the Highlands should take some lessons from the past, architect Neil Sutherland believes.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw the creation of a wave of new towns and villages across the region, Grantown, Helmsdale and Ullapool among them, to support industry, fishing or agriculture.

They were creative, diverse and in Neil's view far more inspiring than the "soulless" single use housing developments of our own time.

"Where are the conservation places of the future? Why can't we be as ambitious as the 18th and 19th century models that developed these places?" he asked.

For his own part, Neil does have that ambition as he turns the focus of his own award-winning design and home building business Makar from single house projects towards larger settlements.

"We are going to take the best parts of working at a relatively small scale at an individual house level and mainstream them to a much larger capability," he revealed.

"We have sites we are looking at across the Highlands, both in rural

and in village extension contexts, where we plan to deliver much more appropriate local development."

Makar, which is based just outside Inverness, is already working on plans for a major development in Easter Ross, with the aim of work on the site getting under way next summer, and Neil has ambitious plans to double Makar's workforce from 50 to 100 over the next five years to achieve this goal.

The driver is the creation of a more sustainable Highland community than the current model, which he believes has had its day,

and the need for a fundamental rethink of the approach to housing development in the region.

"It's clear that single use development doesn't work," he said.

"Creating car and energy dependent settlements in this day and age is just not acceptable. We need places that are safe for cyclists and pedestrians and safe for children to play, so what we need are much more diverse developments where people can live and work.

"We need opportunities for people to be enterprising and entrepreneurial within future

settlements. Certainly within any development there should be opportunities for home working or to walk to work. There is nothing new about this. Other countries do this well. And it's not just about cities or towns. It is relevant to rural areas as well."

The Covid-19 crisis had presented an opportunity to look at the creation of regenerative and diverse community models, he added.

The crisis had unveiled the dangers of an economy which was over reliant on tourism, but in order to diversify, the region needs to get serious about making use of its own resources, including its rich renewable energy assets, and create shorter supply chains for all the requirements necessary to live well in the Highlands, from food to building materials.

"There is so much more we could be doing in the Highlands if we decide to do it," Neil said.

To do so would also require a shake up of a planning system which is not yet fully engaging with the solutions required to make this fundamental change.

"Planning policy does not have an especially rural focus. It tends to roll out urban policies in rural areas. We need to change that," he said.

"The big issues of our time – climate action, ecological issues and a resilient economy – need Highland specific solutions. We can make the place richer again in terms of biodiversity and health and in doing so create employment opportunities and places for our children to live, work and develop."

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There is so much more we could be doing in the Highlands if we decide to do it.

Neil Sutherland



New settlements must offer green space and opportunities for work and leisure.





Measurement of the outside grounds.

# Call for apprenticeship support

**SURVEYING'S professional body is calling on government to improve the UK's apprenticeship system and create a better skilled workforce that will meet demand for future vital infrastructure projects.**

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) joined the Construction Industry Council (CIC), University College of Estate Management (UCEM) and the Technical Apprenticeship Consortium (TAC) in contributing to new report, Build Back Better, which is calling for improvements to take place in the apprenticeship system to better support infrastructure development.

Recommendations include the need for government to work with employers and professional bodies to recognise the value of apprenticeships leading to professional registration, join up and improve apprenticeship systems across the UK, and celebrate and promote apprenticeships to encourage more young people to follow this career path.

Aled Williams, who co-authored the report and is CIC champion on higher education and UCEM's director of research, innovation and partnerships, said: "The construction industry is integral to the UK's financial health and can provide the catalyst for an economic recovery accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Apprenticeships are hugely important for employers to train workforces with the appropriate skill set to achieve the ambitious infrastructure projects projected across the nation.

"However, both businesses and education providers need to have more input in how these are run.

"The research shows that there is a desire throughout the construction industry to get apprenticeships right and, if government listens and acts upon the recommendations outlined, there could be huge benefits for the UK."

Mike Cox, the RICS future talent manager for universities, skills and

apprenticeships, also contributed to the report.

"This research has confirmed what RICS and others have been saying for a while: that many employers in our industry are fully committed to apprenticeships and it is now time for government to work with RICS and others to build on our successes to date," he said.

The study found that two out of three respondents were already paying the apprenticeship levy, which was introduced in 2017 to fund new apprenticeships. The levy is only applicable to employers with annual paybills in excess of £3 million, meaning that only two per cent of UK employers will actually pay it.

The report states: "Our employers are now financially supporting apprenticeships like never before.

"For those involved in apprenticeships already, the levy itself is driving up the recruitment of apprentices with nearly 60 per cent of levy paying employers having increased apprentice recruitment.

This suggests that apprenticeships are gaining traction in our sector and are becoming a more popular career choice."

However, the report also noted there had been some criticism of the scheme, with respondents failing to secure the maximum benefit from their spend, and called for greater transparency in how the levy is used.

CIC chief executive Graham Watts believes the government should do more to promote the career opportunities within the sector.

"For too long construction has suffered with outdated perceptions of muddy boots and hard hats, often associated with low level jobs," he stated. "Now is the time for the government to work with our sector to showcase and promote the careers across the full spectrum of employers and occupational roles, showing the opportunity that future talent can have in driving forward innovation and technological solutions that will shape their environment for the better."

## RICS ethics survey launched



THE Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) is calling for its members to have their say on the new ethical standards required by the fast changing sector.

As demand grows for businesses that strive to be good for the planet and contribute positively to society, the RICS is updating its ethical standards to enable professionals to demonstrate how they can respond to these changing priorities and help make sustainable decisions.

Dame Janet Paraskeva, who chairs the independent standards and regulation board at RICS said:

"Society and the way we live our lives is changing – it's why we are now clearly embedding principles of sustainability and respect into what it means to be an RICS professional.

"Our professionals work tirelessly to overcome challenges no one could have thought of a decade ago – from Covid-19 to technological innovations that transform the marketplace – so it's only right we provide an updated framework that gives them the best opportunity to succeed."

The consultation will run until December 7 and will seek views

from RICS professionals, consumers and stakeholders on the new rules.

These are intended to ensure professionals are supported in maintaining their skills and expertise, including providing advice on wider sustainability to help clients make the right decisions.

The new standards will also promote decency, inclusion and respect in the workplace, as well as remove unnecessary complexity to allow everyone to clearly understand the high standards expected from members.





# Preparing to plug the north into the electric revolution

Energy consultant **Silvia Manzoni** looks at how the Electric A9 will bring new possibilities for Highland landowners and other businesses

**THERE is no doubt that Covid-19 has created a greener environment with a considerable decrease in carbon emissions within our towns and cities.**

Transport contributes a fifth of overall greenhouse gas emissions. And as the Scottish Government's deadline of hitting its net-zero target by 2045 draws nearer, with the UK ambition of eliminating the need for petrol and diesel cars by 2035, a surge in demand for electric vehicles (EVs) will be essential.

A key factor in the relatively slow uptake of electric vehicles has been a perceived lack of charging infrastructure. Yet the average daily mileage for a vehicle in the UK is just 21 miles, which is well within any plug-in vehicle (PIV) range so drivers can charge their cars at home themselves. A standard three-pin charge is okay once in a while, but it is not designed to sustain power for long periods of time.

A specially fitted home-charging point ensures faster charging speeds and built-in safety measures.

A key factor in the relatively slow uptake of electric vehicles has been a perceived lack of charging infrastructure

Silvia Manzoni

And EV infrastructure is developing rapidly. Transport Scotland is currently creating the Electric A9 in the north of Scotland, an exemplar project which will bring EV provision along the entire road, which at 273 miles is the longest in Scotland. The project will incorporate EV charging for long-distance journeys and local charging for businesses and residents within local communities, between Falkirk Stadium in the south to Scrabster Harbour in the north.

Savills energy team is assisting

investors, developers and landowners to establish a plethora of charging points alongside hotels, offices, petrol stations, retail parks, supermarkets and new residential developments all over the UK. The sector is preparing for this evolution and there are many opportunities to participate and take advantage within what is already a rapidly growing marketplace.

The largest cities in Scotland have already introduced low or zero-emission zones and many local authorities are switching their fleets from internal combustion engine vehicles to PIVs. Indeed, the range of vehicles available is growing year on year with car manufacturers increasingly swapping their internal combustion production lines to EV.

And options are not limited to cars: electric-powered utility vehicles, such as quad bikes, as well as traditional work vans and a handful of heavy- goods vehicles, have been introduced as well.



Savills energy consultant  
**Silvia Manzoni**

Although the average purchase price of an EV is slightly higher than an internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle, the overall lifetime cost is in fact considerably lower with cheaper fuel, road tax and MOT costs all playing their part. And as the second-hand market widens consumers will be able to access even more affordable electric cars.

The most significant development in the EV revolution will be improved consumer confidence and changing behaviours, and according to Shell Energy two-thirds of people are already considering an EV as their next vehicle.

For more information about utilising your property assets to participate in the EV revolution, please contact Silvia Manzoni on 01738 477 514 or [silvia.manzoni@savills.com](mailto:silvia.manzoni@savills.com)



The e-car revolution will present new opportunities for north businesses.

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Kerry and Derek Campbell of 8 Doors Distillery.

# Early buyers snap up dram offer

**A CAITHNESS couple are delighted with the public response to the first release of their whisky which sold out just 48 hours after launching.**

The limited-edition cask sale from 8 Doors Distillery of John O'Groats – Scotland's most northerly mainland whisky distillery – was launched last week and provided the opportunity to buy casks of Highland single malt whisky as part of an 874 Founders Club package available from £1600.

The initial launch was limited to 250 members, but whisky lovers still have the chance to join the 8 Doors Distillery 874 Club which is open to 1250 members.

Named after the distance in miles from John O'Groats to Land's End, the 874 club gives members the opportunity to own three 70cl bottles of single malt whisky, matured in first-fill tailor-made Spanish casks. Each bottle comes from a different variety of oak cask to showcase the influence of the wood type on the final whisky flavour profile.

This limited-edition collection has

been developed by renowned whisky master John Ramsay – who has over 40 years of experience in the industry – for the 874 club. The bottles packages are £420 (including VAT), and there is an option to pay £42 a month for 10 months.

Both packages have additional benefits, including a members' card entitling the individual and a friend to free tours for life.

The distillery is the dream of local husband and wife Kerry and Derek Campbell, who developed a passion for Scotch over many years. They are pressing ahead with their plans for a distillery, visitor centre and bonded warehouse with the aim of opening next summer.

The distillery will initially have eight positions, including a master distiller and a visitor centre manager who are still to be appointed.

The £1 million project will establish the first whisky producer in the village since 1837 and will utilise water extracted from a borehole on the distillery site. Its flavour profile will be

influenced by the local climate and its situation right beside the sea – hence its strapline "Whisky. From the Edge".

Mrs Campbell said: "It's great to see our vision of building Scotland's most northerly distillery in John O'Groats come even closer to reality now that we have sold all of our 874 Founders Club packages.

"We were confident our 874 packages would prove popular, but we were delighted to see the limited edition cask packages sell out within days of being offered. We still have 874 club bottle packages available, giving whisky lovers the chance to become part of our story. We see the packages as an ideal gift for Christmas, or any other occasion, or just for someone who wants to treat themselves to something different.

"We have a passion for whisky and for the local area in Caithness where we both grew up. We're so pleased to be able to bring them together with the development of our distillery and visitor centre."

The inspiration for the 8 Doors Distillery branding comes from the story of Jan de Groot, from whom the village of John O'Groats takes its name.

Mr de Groot, a Dutchman who once plied a ferry from the Scottish mainland to Orkney, built his legendary house in the area during the reign of James IV. Mr de Groot's seven descendants quarrelled about succession, so he decided to build an octagonal house with eight doors – one for him and each of his seven sons – and an eight-sided table so that nobody could sit at the head of the table.

Mrs Campbell said: "We couldn't think of anywhere better than John O'Groats to make whisky, partly thanks to the climate which we believe is perfect for distilling and maturation, and the great people who live here."

Anyone interested in buying 8 Doors Distillery 874 bottle packages should visit [www.8doorsdistillery.com/bottle-packages](http://www.8doorsdistillery.com/bottle-packages)

## Cyber crime award comes north

CAITHNESS cyber security expert Keith Nicolson has been named security specialist of the year at the 2020 UK Computing Digital Leaders Awards.

Dr Nicholson, the founder of Cyber Security Scotland, said he had not expected to win, but was pleased to be listed against finalists from the Bank of Egypt, Neustar and Simply Business at the online event.

"All large London-based multinational companies. And here's me sitting in the north of Scotland almost 700 miles away," the Mey-based businessman said.

"Then when my name was read out as the winner I actually gasped in disbelief. I just stared at the screen with my name under security specialist of the year. To be recognised for my expertise by my peers in the industry is very rewarding."

The nomination and award was for Dr Nicholson's work in creating a new security standard framework. This has now been adopted by the Scottish Government as a standard in cyber security which all public bodies are being encouraged to follow.

In making the award the judges said that Dr Nicholson had "demonstrated impressive work that could truly change the face of cyber security across the UK".

"That is a remarkable statement," he said. "The new framework was the product of over a year's work, so it's great to see this recognised with such an incredible accolade."

Dr Nicholson serves on the Scottish Government's National Cyber Resilience Advisory Board and is now carrying out a security review of every Scottish health board for the Scottish Health Competent Authority.







# CAITHNESS

## BUSINESS NEWS

November 2020 | [caithnesschamber.com](http://caithnesschamber.com)

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**forward to 2021**

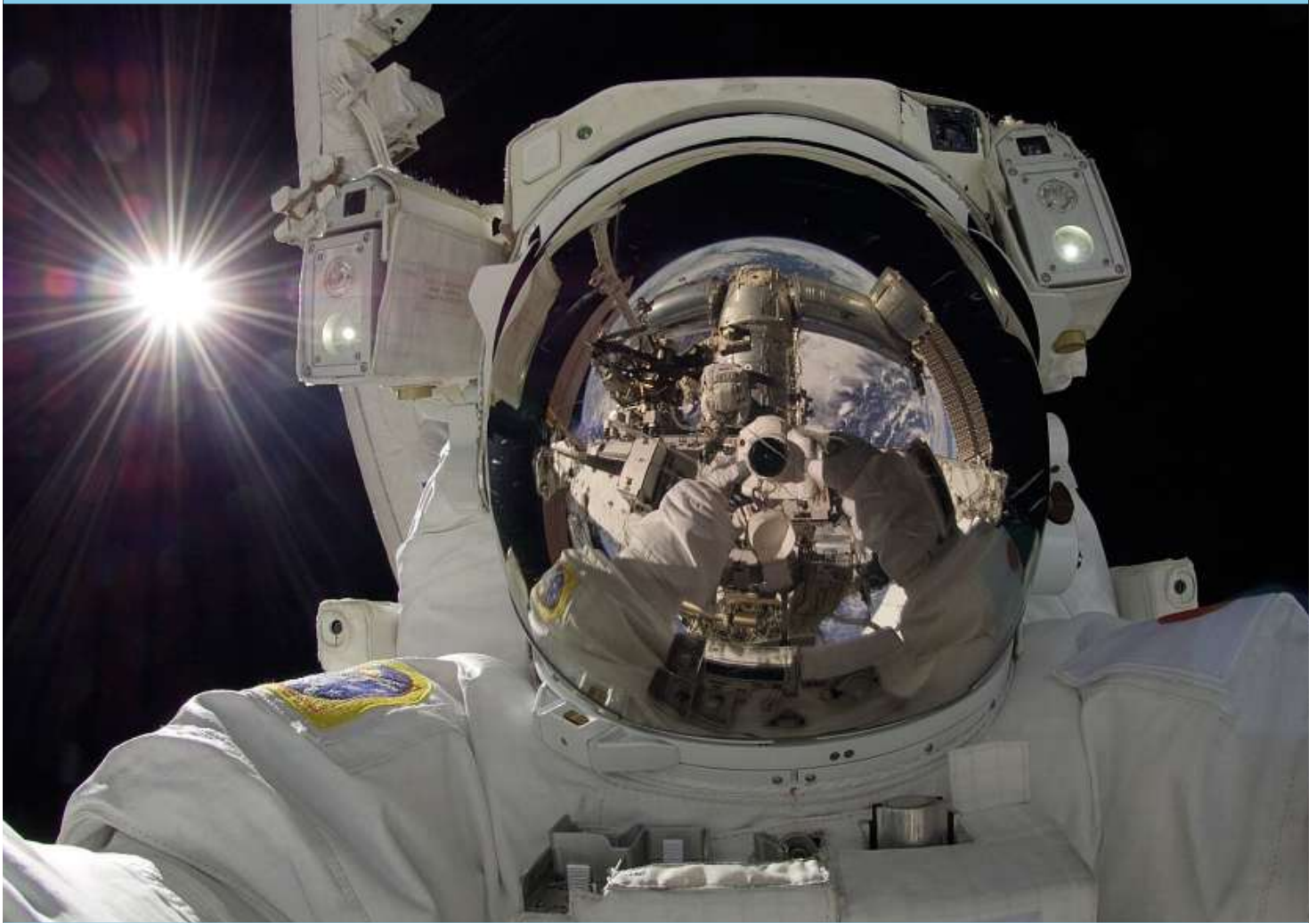
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STRONGER  
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# From Houston to the Highlands

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# Chamber Comment

In normal circumstances, I would use this introduction to our final newsletter of the year to look back over the ups and downs of the past year and look forward to what we can expect in the year to come. Yet, as we are all too aware, we remain in anything but normal circumstances.

As with so many other organisations and businesses, the Chamber's plans for

2020 have been upended by COVID-19, and the outlook for 2021 remains uncertain. It is important, however, that despite everything the year has brought we remember that there are still substantial, long-term challenges and opportunities facing businesses in the North Highlands.

This year has seen the Chamber continue its fight for a Public Service Obligation from Wick John O'Groats Airport, which would ensure that the business community of the North Highlands has access to the air services it needs to sustain and grow our economy. Sustainability remains a key focus for the Chamber. While we have had to postpone a range of planned pilot projects with Zero Waste Scotland, we remain committed to ensuring that the economy of the North Highlands grows and develops in a sustainable fashion. With both UK and Scottish Government pushing hard for a net zero economy, this will be of crucial importance in years to come.

Last but by no means least, there are new growth opportunities

in the region in areas like renewable energy and aerospace. As a Chamber, we will be doing everything we can to ensure that this region – and our members – see the benefits of these opportunities. What you will see over the coming pages is a range of businesses which are surviving and thriving despite everything the year has thrown at them. We may not know what 2021 will bring, but we can be sure that businesses in the North Highlands will face down the challenges and grasp whatever opportunities may come.

**Trudy Morris**

Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce

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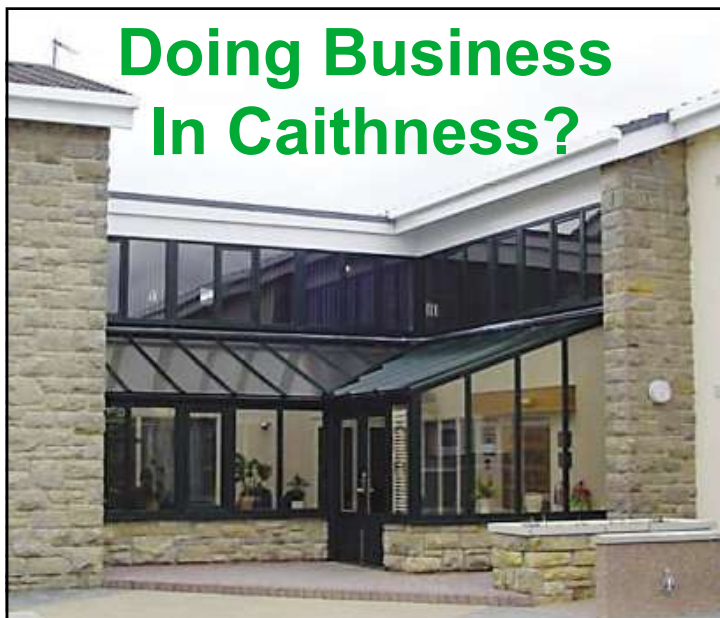
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## Decommissioning, Waste Management and Radiological Protection Capability



### Introduction

Nuclear Waste Management is a key area that Atkins/SNC-Lavalin has been developing and delivering for several decades. With a specialist Decommissioning, Waste Management and Radiological Protection team possessing a wealth of experience across the NOA estate, Atkins/SNC-Lavalin can provide Suitably Qualified and Experienced Personnel (SQEP) to solve the most challenging decommissioning and waste management problems.



To discuss how we can help, contact:

Ross Beveridge

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## Mackays Hotel celebrates 65th anniversary

Mackays Hotel on Union Street in Wick has been a leading accommodation provider and a cornerstone of local community life in Caithness for over six decades since being purchased by the first family member in 1955, Murray Lamont's maternal grandmother.

The hotel is now owned and operated by third generation of Lamonts, Murray and Ellie, along with their 34-year-old daughter, Jennifer, supporting 25 local jobs and welcoming around 54,000 global visitors to the North Highlands each year.

Murray and Ellie took over the management of Mackays Hotel in 1983 and went on to purchase the property from the rest of the family in the 1990s. Since then, the hotel has gone from strength to strength winning a number of industry awards and accolades, including 'Caithness Business of the Year' in the Highland Business Awards 2016, overall winner of the 'Developing the Young Workforce' category at the Highland Business Awards 2017, and a Gold Tourism Award as part of The Green Tourism Business Scheme.

The family-run hotel continues to go the extra mile to support those in need around the region. During the recent lockdown, the Lamont family worked with Legion Scotland project to provide Caithness veterans and pensioners with regular hot meals and companionship whilst self-isolating at home, as well as a meals on wheels home delivery service for people in and around Wick. Accommodation was also let out to key workers shielding from their families.

Murray Lamont, owner of Mackays Hotel, said: "We're incredibly proud to have reached this significant milestone for our family-run hotel and as an integral part of local community life here in Caithness. We pride ourselves on our warm Highland welcome to guests from across the world every single year and look forward to continuing that tradition for many years to come."



## Dunnet Bay Distillers unveil their 'Refill Rewards Club'

Hot off the heels of the launch of its innovative fully recyclable and freepost return Rock Rose Gin pouches, Dunnet Bay Distillers have unveiled a new reason for gin lovers to raise a celebratory glass. Not only are the recyclable pouches now available across all Seasonal and Signature Spirits, they are launching a 'Refill Rewards Club', a monthly subscription service of spirit pouches.

Either monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly, members will receive a pouch of their choice of Rock Rose Gin or of Holy Grass Vodka, designed to refill the distillery's now iconic ceramic bottles. What's more they'll receive a selection of mixers, garnishes and a lovely wee surprise gift in each delivery too. Plus, members can even change their pouch choice as often as they like - providing an opportunity to taste the full Dunnet Bay Portfolio.

These pouches were the very first in the UK to have a partnership with Royal Mail, meaning they can be sent back to the distillery via freepost. Once at the distillery, the pouches will be collected by a specialist recycling company and recycled into new items. To recycle, the pouches simply need to be popped into the post box - no stamp required!



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## ILM (Highland) pivots business **to launch online retail shop!**

ILM (Highland) is delighted to announce the launch of their new online Electrical Retail Shop. Like many businesses, lockdown and the impact of coronavirus has adversely affected us, so this news means that our offering can now reach the whole of the Highland community all day every day. The Electrical Retail Shop sells new and refurbished items such as washing machines, fridges and freezers, tumble dryers, cookers, etc.

ILM is a local charity and social enterprise based in Alness which delivers valuable services throughout the Highlands. Profits from the Electrical Retail Shop support our charitable services to help keep vulnerable people living independently at home through our Care & Repair and Handyperson services.

ILM's Business Development Manager Claire Weaver said, "Having the online retail shop means we can reach a much wider audience, where people can shop in the comfort of their own home. All of our stock is also available for home delivery throughout the Highlands – which can even be on the same day depending on where the customer lives. We want to make things that little bit easier for people."

For more information on ILM (Highland) or to browse their Electrical Retail Shop you can visit [www.ilmhighland.co.uk/shop/](http://www.ilmhighland.co.uk/shop/)

## BBM Solicitors **celebrates 10th birthday!**

BBM Solicitors celebrates its 10th Birthday on 22 November 2020!

The firm was set up to provide market leading quality insolvency, litigation and corporate legal services. BBM

was founded by brothers Eric and Alasdair Bajjal, and supported from the beginning by their friend and colleague Jennifer Simpson (then Hamill- a lot has changed in 10 years!). Alasdair left the practice in 2016 to undertake full time Christian missionary work in South Africa, but Eric and Jennifer still lead the practice.

The firm is still boutique but has grown over the years. The firm now employs nine solicitors, two trainee solicitors and four administrative support staff split between the two offices, and having brought and retained quality and graduate jobs in the Caithness area.

BBM are now recommended by the leading legal directories for their litigation and restructuring work, with Eric leading a team instructed from around the country and the world in relation to Scottish litigation and insolvency. However, the Highlands and Islands, and Caithness and the Northern Isles particularly, are critical to BBM's identity and success. Responding to market demands the firm now also offers quality legal services to private individuals and for those involved in property transactions.

BBM had planned a series of events to mark the occasion, but celebrations will have to be deferred because of the pandemic.



## Fibre 1 secures new affiliate partnerships

We are delighted to announce our new affiliate partnerships with Ross County Football Club and Inverness Caledonian Football Club

As an affiliate partner the Club's receive a commission for every contract signed with us for Energy (Ross County) Energy & Telecoms (Inverness Caledonian Thistle). A great way for local businesses to support the Clubs and make savings.

We believe strongly in supporting the community. We are currently the short sponsors for both League Two side Elgin City FC and Lossiemouth FC who compete in the Highland League. Both clubs have recently signed affiliate deals which will see revenues go back to each club to support their fundraising strategies and community development programmes and we are extremely pleased to add Premiership side Ross County and Championship side ICTFC to the mix.

These partnerships support Ross County's and ICTFC's strategies to diversify streams of income for the long-term success of the Clubs.

## OCA continues to deliver **despite COVID challenges**

Despite the challenges that 2020 has brought with the COVID-19 pandemic, Ormlie Community Association has continued to deliver vital services to those who need it most.

A Mums Group every Tuesday and Thursday with crèche facility gives access to a range of advice sessions and talks with professionals. Silver Citizens activities are delivered twice a week for adults over 65. With crafting, internet and social activities in a warm, friendly environment, these help combat social isolation and loneliness – a key need for many at this difficult time.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the "Fun, Young and Involved" and "Teen Scene" groups meet regularly to offer crafting, pool tournaments, cooking baking, games night and much more to young people in the area.

Last but by no means least, the Get It service operates three days a week to offer advice and support on employability, job seeking, training and accessing benefits. Service users can also access the internet, telephones and photocopying to assist with their activities and get other advice and support, for example on energy costs.

To learn more or find out about joining our Board of Directors, becoming a Member, Volunteer or accessing our services, contact us on 01847 891789.





## North Point Distillery brings the Caribbean to Caithness

A Far North distillery has launched after completing an international funding round worth over £250,000. Co-founder's Struan Mackie and Alex MacDonald aim to bring a taste of the Caribbean to Caithness, while showcasing the history and heritage of the region.

Struan Mackie, a former spirits industry advisor with PricewaterhouseCoopers stressed the significance of the investment, despite global uncertainty. "Completing a competitive fundraise during a pandemic is testament to North Point Distillery and the quality of our team. We've been blown away with the response from investors, and we are delighted to have secured valuable foreign direct investment for the region. Creating long-term jobs in the community is incredibly important to us."

Commercial Director Alex MacDonald said "the fantastic local support we have received since launching has been mirrored in our pre-order sales for the Christmas season, with our North Point Pilot Rum being lined up by overseas buyers too! Given the profile of our investment, we feel we are uniquely placed to use our brand ambassador network in North America to secure further sales which is an exciting opportunity for us. We hope that we can play our part in being a prominent exporter for the region going forward."

## Amentum – a new name, 116 years of experience

Amentum has been supporting governments with safe nuclear management, operations, decommissioning, waste management, disposal, and site closure for the past 116 years. We bring four decades of experience in supporting UK clients, regulators and communities to safely deliver complex nuclear missions. We are committed to continue this work and are currently actively involved at several nuclear clean-up projects in the Caithness area.

Our team consists of the most experienced engineers, technical experts, programme and project managers, having delivered the Windscale AGR decommissioning programme, implemented the national integrated low-level waste strategy, managed the low level waste repository, developed the waste strategy at Dounreay and executed the Plutonium Contaminated Materials decommissioning programme.

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- Overseen the full lifecycle of the two low level waste vaults at Dounreay.
- Saved more than £400m of the Sellafield Lifetime Plan.

David Batters, our UK Senior Vice President, says: "We continue to look for new partners -particularly local small medium companies as well as committed people to help deliver our mission". Please visit our webpage [www.Amentum.com](http://www.Amentum.com) and contact us directly if you will like to know more. We look forward to hearing from you.

Contact: [Lorraine.doran@amentum.com](mailto:Lorraine.doran@amentum.com)



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### Coffee and a Chat

**26 November 2020**

Join the Chamber team for an informal chat

### Coffee and a Chat

**- Festive Edition**

**17 December 2020**

Join the Chamber team for an informal chat - this time with a mince pie!

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Alternatively, email the team to be added to our mailing list.



# Rum launch for northern distillery

**LOCAL ingredients and an international outlook are the recipe for success for one of the north's newest distilleries.**

Struan Mackie left behind a career in London to pursue his dream of setting up a distillery in his home county of Caithness.

Distillery co-founder and fellow rum enthusiast Canadian-born Alex MacDonald put his background as a sales director and international connections to good use to secure a significant investment from North America in mainland Scotland's most northerly rum distillery. This seems only appropriate given North Point's trans-Atlantic inspiration.

"Rum is our drink of choice, and there are also incredible links between the Far North and the Caribbean," Struan explained.

"The more we looked into that, we realised very quickly there were so many stories which linked these two places, so rum was very logical for us in being able to share these stories about that period of navigation and exploration by creating a rum that is Caribbean inspired, but with our own unique Highland twist.

"We are trying to be as sustainable as we



Struan, Alex and marketing manager Laura MacKenzie.

can, so we have sourced the vast majority of our ingredients as locally as possible. Unfortunately, I'm yet to find a way to grow sugar cane in Caithness, so we take the raw cane and molasses from Jamaica and Barbados, but pretty much everything else comes from the immediate vicinity.

"We use ex-whisky casks from Highland distilleries, and a mix of traditional and local botanicals. It's nice to have that immediate relationship with the area and the land."

North Point Pilot Rum, named in honour of the pilots who guided ships through the Pentland Firth, will be the distillery's flagship offering, but it will also be joined by a limited-edition Distiller's range beginning with Skerra Spiced Rum and Crosskirk Bay Gin.

North Point's products, especially its rum, add another element to a region that is already known

as a hotbed of spirits production thanks to its mix of new and established whisky and gin distillers.

"It is fantastic to be a part of that community and while our path is very much about rum, I hope we will be able to work with other local spirit makers," Struan said.

North Point Distillery plans to welcome visitors to their site next spring to take advantage of its proximity to the North Coast 500 and the area's historic and natural attractions.

More immediately, however, is the delivery of the first completed product that will be ready just in time for Christmas.

"We were completely blown away by the response to our pre-order launch, but our main priority now is getting everything finished up so we can hit the shelves at Christmas," Struan said.

"It's really exciting for us because this has been a couple of years in fruition, so it will all become real when I see North Point Pilot Rum on the shelves."

■ The North Point range is available now for Christmas pre-order at [www.northpointdistillery.com](http://www.northpointdistillery.com)

We are trying to be as sustainable as we can, so we have sourced the vast majority of our ingredients as locally as possible.

Struan Mackie



Forss Business and Energy Park, Thurso KW14 7UZ

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Independent schools aim to challenge pupils in and out of the classroom.



More than a third of Scottish boarders come from overseas.

# Scottish education is still world class

**WITH a reputation for educational excellence that can be measured in centuries, Scotland's independent schools continue to be a draw for pupils and their parents from across the world.**

More than a third – 35 per cent – of the almost 2800 pupils attending Scotland's 19 mainstream boarding schools come from overseas.

Representing a total of 72 different countries, they help bring £30 million into the Scottish economy, a significant proportion of the £260 million total the sector is worth each year.

They are joined by boarders from elsewhere in the UK, as well as pupils from other parts of Scotland.

Parents have many reasons to choose a Scottish education for their children.

These might include family or personal ties with Scotland or the individual school, or they might be drawn by the nation's educational heritage, which by the middle 18th century had made Scotland one of the most literate nations in the world and helped fuel Scotland's major contribution to the intellectual, scientific and social revolution

created by the Enlightenment.

Others might be attracted by Scotland's reputation as a safe and secure environment in which to study. This has taken on a new dimension in recent months with reports that the rural surroundings and open classrooms typical of independent schools in Scotland have led to a major increase in inquiries from US families who are looking at sending children overseas to escape the impact of the coronavirus pandemic at home.

Scotland also enjoys easy access to cultural and natural attractions which

can enhance pupils' educational and personal development, while also providing convenient international links.

Scotland's Boarding Schools, a subsidiary of the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, acknowledges the environment as a big attraction for non-Scots boarders, commenting on its website: "Scottish boarding schools educate the whole child, offering an enviable range of outdoors pursuits with the incredible great Scottish outdoors always playing a part."

Scotland's independent schools

benefit from the resources, and locations which allow pupils to experience a broad range of activities, with some having their own golf or tennis facilities alongside the more usual sports pitches.

Others can offer more specialised outdoor education.

At Moray's Gordonstoun School, pupils can find their sea legs cruising in the Western Isles aboard the school's on 80-foot ocean going yacht, while all girl Kilgraston School near Bridge of Earn is unique in Scotland in having its own on-site equestrian centre.

But Scottish independent schools' commitment to outdoor education by no means comes at the expense of academic achievement.

For example, at Kilgraston, 100 per cent of the girls in this year's S6 class were accepted into their first choice of university. Across the sector as a whole, pupils achieve a 93 per cent pass rate, with 58 per cent awarded an A, providing another major incentive to think Scottish.

Scottish boarding schools educate the whole child, offering an enviable range of outdoors pursuits.

Scottish Boarding Schools



Kilgraston School near Perth is the only school in Scotland to have an on-site equestrian centre.





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Although 95 per cent of students go on to study at their first-choice university, Merchiston Castle School is not an academic hothouse and aims to encourage pupils to grow into well-rounded young men.

Pictures: MCS



# 'We want our boys to be the best versions of themselves'

**WHILE Merchiston Castle School can trace its history back to the 1830s, it has always been focused on looking ahead as it prepares its pupils for the future, giving them a global outlook which opens up even more opportunities and encourages them to pursue their ambitions.**

The school was an early adopter of iPad technology, for example, something which proved vital when

lockdown was imposed as it gave the school the flexibility to continue offering lessons.

Yet there is one tradition which the school remains proud of – being the only boys' boarding and day independent school in Scotland.

Headmaster Jonathan Anderson believes there are tremendous virtues in Merchiston's unique position.

"We really get to know the boys and adapt our way of teaching to their way of learning and we find it is a much more open community as a result," he said.

"The key driver for us is the boys and what is best for them, and for some boys this is absolutely the right learning environment.

"People might worry an all-male environment might be a very macho one. The direct opposite is true. There's real gentleness, and we talk about that in both ways: they are gentlemen, but they are gentle men, and we see evidence of that all the time."

What also helps in getting to know the pupils is Merchiston's relatively modest school roll of just under 400 pupils, almost 300 of them boarders, with a higher than typical proportion of them from the UK.

Mr Anderson added: "We are comfortable with the size of school we are. That's one of the things that really allows us to get to know the boys well. And that's particularly important for boarders, it makes the school more homely."

Pupils can begin what the school terms "the Merchiston journey" at the age of seven, and stay to the end of sixth year, 11 years later, and the older boys play their part in making the younger ones, boarders especially, feel at home through mentoring and support.

"There is a real sense that when you get to the top of your journey that you are giving back to the junior years as well," Mr Anderson added.

"Mentoring is very important to us and there are many posts of leadership in the school. At our evening homework sessions, we have a lot of boys helping each other, sometimes older and sometimes from the same year. There is a real sense of collaboration."

Merchiston has an enviable academic record, with 95 per cent of its students going on to study at their first-choice university, an achievement Mr Anderson credits to encouraging the pupils to aim high, but also to knowing them well and being able to guide boys to the courses that are right for them.

However, he points out that Merchiston is no academic hothouse, purely focused on achieving high grades. Instead, its key aim is to create a nurturing environment to encourage the boys to grow into well-rounded young men, an ambition aided by the school's location close to the heart of Edinburgh and all its cultural and sporting attractions, but in grounds spacious enough to feel part of the countryside.

"We want the boys to be the very best that they can be academically, but we also want them to be the best possible version of themselves," Mr Anderson explained.

"It is important for us and for them that they personally excel. How they do that will be different for each boy. For some it might be straight As, for others it might be achieving a C in a subject in which they struggle.

"Academic skills are important, but so are the other skills that sit around that. Life in a boarding school



really teaches them these skills. They learn to get on with people, they learn compromise, they learn the art of negotiation, they learn the art of listening and responding and respecting one another and get the best out of each other. That is definitely something you gain from an education here.

"Then there is the opportunity to try so many different things, whether it's sport, drama or music. I'm a great believer in getting the boys to try something new and take advantage of all the opportunities that are available."

In response to the coronavirus crisis and the financial pressures it is imposing on parents, Merchiston has launched a new sixth form entry financial award. This will allow boys from households which meet the school's means-testing criteria and are successful in the selection process to financial assistance of up to 75 per cent of annual day or boarding fees.

For more information, contact the school.

**Merchiston Castle School**  
294 Colinton Road, Edinburgh,  
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The key driver for us is the boys and what is best for them, and for some boys this is absolutely the right learning environment.

Headmaster Jonathan Anderson



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# Giving children the best of both worlds

BRINGING together some of the best known names in Scottish independent education, Edinburgh's Erskine Stewart's Melville Schools (ESMS) is a family of schools, set in beautiful grounds in the heart of Edinburgh. This family ethos is also reflected in the ESMS approach to nurturing its pupils.

Principal Linda Moule explained: "Pastoral care is an important part of school life. Our teachers love what they do and go the extra mile to build close relationships with all of the children in their care. Teachers are also responsible for running extra-curricular activities across the schools, from sport, to outdoor learning trips, to drone club, creating a strong family atmosphere."

ESMS is the only diamond model school in Scotland. It comprises a co-educational Nursery and Junior School and single sex but closely twinned education for the early teenage years, when girls move to The Mary Erskine School and boys to Stewart's Melville College. Children continue to take part in co-educational extra-curricular activities to maintain the close relationships between boys and girls and at sixth form they come back together again to help prepare them for life after school. The boarding house also sees girls and boys living together.

"A diamond model provides children with the best of both worlds, giving children the important social skills offered by co-education, while avoiding gender stereotyping of particular subjects and activities during key stages of their development," Mrs Moule continued.

"For example, STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering,

There is a really strong aspirational culture and a strong work ethic

Linda Moule

and mathematics) are particularly popular at The Mary Erskine School. Girls are more likely to take up these options because at MES every subject is a girls' subject.

"The diamond model also has the advantage of enabling the school to offer a wider range of subjects, allowing every child the opportunity to excel."

All the schools share the same ethos which instils core values, such as kindness, integrity and responsibility.

"Academically we are very successful," Mrs Moule said. "There is a really strong aspirational culture and a strong work ethic. The children want to succeed and we encourage this but not just on the academic front. We focus on their all-round development, encouraging them to have a go at every new opportunity, pick themselves up when they fail, find their confidence and their voice so that they become not just accomplished but resilient and ready to face life's challenges."

This commitment to all-round development is reflected by a belief that learning is not just confined to the classroom. In addition to the extensive sporting facilities made possible by the school's combined resources, the school also introduces outdoor learning



ESMS caters for a wide range of ages from nursery to sixth form.



ESMS students enjoy the annual Carbisdale project.

from nursery. As they get older forest school activities develop into hillwalking and mountain biking at weekends, taking advantage of easy access to Scotland's countryside or camping out in hammocks overnight, supervised by the school's own qualified instructors. This commitment to using the outdoors as a learning tool is exemplified by its annual Carbisdale project. Named after the Sutherland castle and former youth hostel where it was formerly based, the 10-day adventure still takes ESMS's S3 pupils to the Highlands where they can sleep in a bothy and test their

outdoor skills and stamina.

The outdoor learning element is also reflected in the large take-up for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme every year, which also provides pupils with opportunities to volunteer and give back to their community.

"ESMS pupils understand the importance of having a good heart and that was very evident during lockdown when they got involved in so many activities to raise funds for those most in need, in the community," Mrs Moule said.

"This is an important part of what it means to be an ESMS pupil because we want every child to be good citizens and contribute their skill set and their talent to a better world for everybody. That is what makes ESMS so special. We believe in the whole individual."

Contact ESMS admissions at any time for more information.



Stewart's Melville College boys on the rugby pitch.



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The Mary Erskine School, Ravelston, Edinburgh EH4 3NT

Stewart's Melville College, Queensferry Road, Edinburgh EH4 3EZ

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Senior pupils at Albyn School.

# School's out for Christmas...

## What will the new year bring for education?

There is no disputing that 2020 has been an unprecedented time for everyone, none more so than our children and young people. From school closures to online learning and classwork, this pandemic has put an enormous strain on pupils and completely changed the 'normal' school experience. **David Starbuck**, acting head of Albyn School talks to Executive about how the school has adapted to the impact of Covid-19, what challenges they have faced and how the school community has been shaped in recent months.



### Tell us about Albyn School

Albyn is a happy, safe and vibrant community where pupils have come to learn for more than 150 years. In that time, we have helped many young people to achieve things others might tell them were beyond their reach – becoming the first female graduates of Aberdeen University; completing Antarctic expeditions; leading breakthroughs in cancer research; and becoming Olympic athletes.

### When lockdown took place, what did you do?

When the pandemic hit, we adapted extremely quickly, continued with our timetable and delivered lessons live online through Teams and Zoom. We still had form classes and pastoral care.

### What worked well?

I felt very strongly that live teaching would not only allow us to continue educating pupils, but it would help pupils remain connected to each other, to their teachers, and to their school in general.

The connections we formed made everyone appreciate each other all the more. Parents could see their children's teachers working their magic first-hand and we became a part of families' lockdown experiences, supporting parents to cope as we continued to educate their children.

There was a lot of personal

sacrifice from all the staff to make that happen for our pupils. And there was a lot of gratitude in return. This has created a renewed sense of pride in our community, and has significantly bolstered our reputation as one of the few schools in Scotland to deliver meaningful educational experiences. Parents, pupils and staff have returned to the buildings, proud and excited to be part of the Albyn community.

### Have you developed any practices that you will take forward?

Yes – our pupils each have tablets or Chromebooks and these are now used far more than they were before lockdown. Also, pupils can still

access their lessons through Teams while self-isolating/quarantining.

Blended learning has also opened up new opportunities for those pupils who are joining us from other schools and other countries where we can provide online learning for them during their transit/transition.

### What, if any, will be the longer-term impact on children's learning?

It will make pupils more independent and resilient. While we don't predict any long-term impact on pupils' academic achievements, the effects of the lockdown and the continuing restrictions on are bound to have a major impact on children's wellbeing if not now, in time to come.

### What has been parents' biggest concerns and how have you overcome these?

We surveyed parents, pupils and staff to see what we should prioritise in the coming 12-24 months.

Universally their response was: kindness, happiness, respect, confidence and resilience. Parents want their children to feel safe and happy at school, which thankfully has always been a key feature of being an Albyn pupil. Pupils are remarkably kind, respectful and accepting of each other.



Chromebooks are used more now.



Lessons can be accessed online while self-isolating.

On our return to school, parents were anxious about their children getting Covid – but our very thorough protocols have instilled confidence in our approach. We have struck a cautious and careful approach to being safe, whilst maintaining a friendly and 'normal' environment for everyone.

### What have the highlights been?

We gained the local reputation of having provided the best lockdown experience of all the schools in NE Scotland. As such, parents who wanted to choose private education chose Albyn. We estimate that around 20 per cent of our new pupils came to the school because of what we achieved during challenging times.

### What will 2021 look like in education?

Across the world, it is going to be messy. With exams either taking place, or not taking place, there will be a lot of uncertainty as we progress through 2021. This is all uncharted territory, but our job at Albyn is to bring about as much stability as we can, and be ready to respond to any last-minute changes in direction. We think creatively and we are ready to deal with anything that comes our way.

■ Albyn School's next Virtual Open Day will take place on Friday, December 4. See the school website for details.



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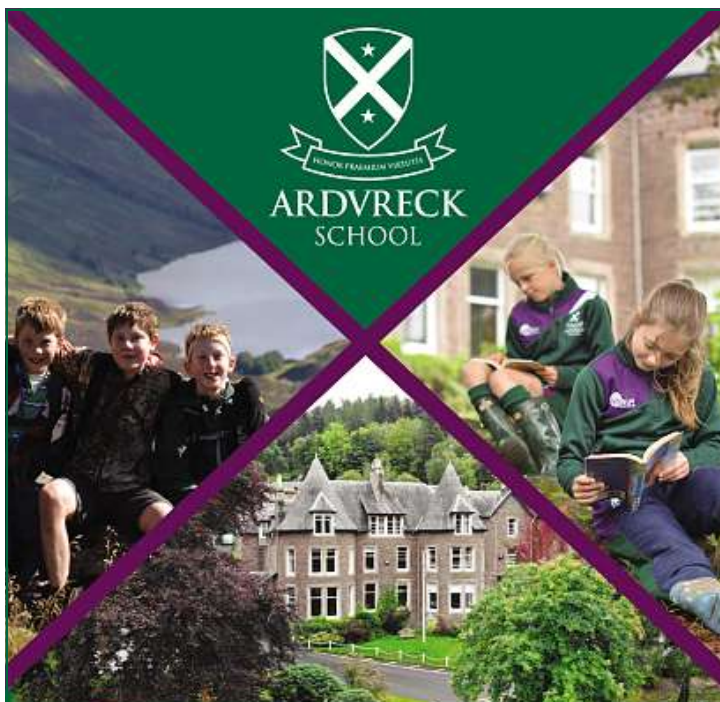
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Ardvreck School firmly believe classrooms do not need walls. As well as outdoor lessons, the entire school regularly adventures into the exciting, natural playground on their doorstep.

This is most definitely the school every grown-up wishes they had attended as a child. It's an environment where working hard and playing hard are of equal importance and

where good humour and fun permeate every undertaking.

And what of their leavers? They are happy, well-rounded and fulfilled children who are full of hope and ambition. Last year's cohort received an impressive 19 scholarships to top UK schools, including Eton and St Mary's, Ascot.

At the end of it all, any school can provide excellent academic rigour, a strong pastoral ethos and a broad co-curricular programme, all of which Ardvreck School do outstandingly well. However, they truly believe that the real value of a prep school education lies in the things that are remembered long after what was taught has been forgotten, the things that contribute to defining not what we know, but who we are.

## Clout.

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Independent schools offer an exciting array of clubs and experiences to help pupils grow physically, socially and in confidence

Alison Herbert

Independent schools often have the resources to offer pupils more choice of both extra-curricular activities (above) and academic subjects (right).



Independent schools cater for a broad range of ages.

# PARENTS ARE MAKING THE INDEPENDENT CHOICE

Calum Macleod



Independent schools look beyond just academic achievement.

**PARENTS will naturally have a lot of questions when it comes to choosing the ideal school for their child. The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) can help them find the answers.**

SCIS represents 72 of the 102 independent schools currently in operation in Scotland, with a combined roll of some 30,000 pupils.

These include co-ed and single-sex, day school and boarding schools, but all with a common ethos of providing their pupils with a safe and nurturing environment, in which to achieve their full potential.

It is the independent sector's reputation for academic excellence which remains the key draw for parents.

Smaller class sizes allow teachers to develop a much deeper understanding of the child's strengths and needs, with strategies to help every child excel, whether through extra stimulation for someone showing clear ability, or a different approach to give additional support when the topic is tricky.

Examination choice is often greater too, with subjects like Mandarin, philosophy, environmental science and drama on offer at Higher and A level, while significant investment in modern, stimulating teaching facilities attracts a high calibre of teaching staff.

Like all sectors of society, independent schools have also been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, but Alison Herbert of SCIS says the schools have adapted to this new challenge.

"They have succeeded in keeping their pupils on track by fostering a sense of community while apart and ensuring they keep a bit of fun every day to keep the spirits of staff, pupils and parents high," she said.

Independent schools also work hard to develop a strong working partnership with parents in recognition of the big investment they are making in their child's future.

Parents are given clear indicators of the child's progress through frequent parental consultations, good communication and obvious homework signposting.

However, independent schools also recognise the importance of what goes on beyond the classroom and recognise that academic achievement alone is not enough to produce a fully rounded individual.

"Independent schools offer an exciting array of on-site clubs and experiences your child can wrap around their academic day to help them grow physically, socially and in confidence," Alison added.

"Your child will have the opportunity to try all sorts of endeavours from coding to musical theatre without you having to worry about how they're going to get there or who is going to pick them up."

Independent schools are also more diverse than often imagined.

Almost a third of boarders come from overseas, and in 2019-2020 over a quarter of pupils received some sort of financial assistance.

"This healthy mix of backgrounds, abilities and nationalities makes for a vibrant, modern student body that mirrors the real world and will serve your child well for the future," Alison added.

"Schools are sensitive to the sacrifices many parents make in order to afford school fees and all schools offer some level of fee assistance which is usually awarded on the basis of financial need.

"In 2019-20, over 3000 children received means-tested fee assistance with 18 per cent of those benefiting from a free place."

Parents and children are encouraged to see what independent schools can offer for themselves. All schools welcome visits from prospective families throughout the year to provide a feel for life at the school and answer any questions.

Details of open days can usually be found on the school's website, although this year things might look a bit different with schools working hard to create virtual open days.

For more information, advice and guidance on choosing an independent school in Scotland visit the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) website at [www.scis.org.uk](http://www.scis.org.uk).





Glenalmond College is set in 300-acres of grounds in Perthshire. Pictures: Graeme Hart/Copyright Perthshire Picture Agency



The school is currently conducting Covid-safe drive-through tours on its grounds for prospective parents and pupils.

# Clear values at heart of college

**FOUNDED in 1847, Glenalmond College is set in its own 300-acre grounds within the beautiful Perthshire countryside.**

Home during term time to around 360 pupils aged 12 to 18, mostly full boarders, with equal numbers of boys and girls, the lively, happy campus bustles with activity seven days a week.

Head of Glenalmond College, Dr Michael Alderson, introduces us to life at the school.

## How would you sum up Glenalmond's educational philosophy?

Glenalmond's philosophy is simple: a foundation of clear values, confidence drawn from wide-ranging competence, and academic challenge to help our pupils develop into responsible young adults who respond with agility in this ever-changing world. Our setting is unique, but Glenalmond is an exciting and restless place of learning and a place of activity, of warmth, and most importantly, of community. The college is holding on to what is best from the past while equipping the pupils for tomorrow with a vibrant and modern education.

## What benefits will a child gain from studying at Glenalmond?

Every member of our staff is genuinely invested in the welfare and success of pupils and helping them fulfil their potential and their ambitions. We offer a wide variety of subjects, and our pupils regularly leave us with three A levels, a language higher, and an EPQ – a very attractive combination for university entry and future employers.

## How much individual attention are you able to provide to pupils?

At under 400 pupils, every pupil is known: tailored support and encouragement ensures all pupils fulfil their potential. The opportunity for pupils to find themselves in a wide range of activities is another key to this success – whether CCF, pipe band, drama, music or sport.

The fact our teaching staff live on site is incredibly important and makes a huge difference. We have a genuine community of staff and pupils, where everyone really knows everyone else. The school is as much a home for our staff as our pupils and this helps to generate a real buzz and also an immense, lifelong pride in the school.

## You are based in rural Perthshire. What advantages does that location bring?

We really have an ideal central location, at the gateway to the Highlands, but just an hour away from Edinburgh and Glasgow, meaning cultural, sporting and other trips usually only involve a short bus journey. We benefit from the largest area of grounds of any Scottish school, which provides a stunning location for our school and a safe and healthy learning environment. We are delighted to welcome many pupils from the Highlands and the West Coast of Scotland. Geographically, we are situated right at the heart of Scotland, just 10 minutes from Perth, conveniently close to the A9.

## What extracurricular activities do you offer?

With 300 acres of grounds, including our own outdoor classroom, this is a long list! A snapshot includes: skiing, golf, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, kayaking, and Munro-bagging. We also offer rifle shooting, orienteering, bushcraft, archery, fishing, horseriding, mountain biking, and

lots more. We have a lively combined cadet force – with Army, Navy and RAF sections – and an active eco-group, currently sowing a wildflower meadow. We take part in a range of charity activities, including a 24-hour cycle in our quad this year, which raised £4000 for My Name's 5 Daddie Foundation. Our new indoor golf hub with its simulation screens is a popular indoor alternative to our nine-hole golf course. And, of course, that's not to forget orchestras, choirs, academic societies, debating, drama, art, and so on.

## What sort of person would you expect the ideal pupil to be when they leave Glenalmond?

At Glenalmond, we have two simple ideals in mind for our pupils: we want them to be happy, and we want them to be decent, to have clear values, and have the courage to stand by them. The best academic education prepares them to face the future with the greatest number of choices, while experiencing a rich range of opportunities developing competence which, in turn, will provide confidence. Our pupils leave us aware of their responsibilities, and proud of their school with respect for others and lifelong friends.



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**[www.glenalmondcollege.co.uk](http://www.glenalmondcollege.co.uk)**



Glenalmond marked becoming the first school member of the Supporters Scheme, run by agricultural charity RSABI, with a visit from Donald the Highland bull.



Head of Glenalmond College Dr Michael Alderson,



Pupils enjoy a walk in the grounds of the college.





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One in four of us will experience a mental health issue. Lots of us could benefit from improving our mental health through diet.

Dr Megan Rossi

Granola (above) is a good source of fibre and gets your day off to the right start in keeping your gut in good health.



Author and diet expert Dr Megan Rossi.

# GUT RESPONSE WILL AID YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Liz Connor, PA



The events of 2020 have left many of us facing additional anxiety.

## TAKING a fresh look at your diet could help to lower your risk of low moods during this uncertain period.

After many of us experienced disruption in our lives as a result of the pandemic upending our usual routines such as a move to home working or being in a strange and stressful new working environment, it has become even more important to look after our mental health with a combination of a good diet and regular exercise.

Dr Megan Rossi, aka The Gut Health Doctor, believes an important element of any balanced diet is ensuring your gut is in good health.

"Rather than 'you are what you eat', I like to think of health as being 'you are what you digest'. No matter how healthy your diet is, you won't be able to extract the nutrition from your food and absorb it, if you don't have a healthy gut lining," Rossi said.

Our gut flora can have a major effect on our immunity, too, she pointed out.

"Most people don't realise that 70 per cent of your immune system lies along your nine-metre digestive tract – so if you want less sick days and lower risk of allergies, it's important to keep your gut healthy," she said.

It's only been in the last couple of years that the third element has really taken off in terms of the scientific literature, which Rossi says has turned the concept of "gut health" into a buzzword.

"We contain trillions of bacteria (as well as beneficial viruses, yeast and fungi) in the lower part of that digestive tract. We're just learning that it's this community of microorganisms, working together, that do so much for us in terms of communicating to our brain, heart and kidneys," she said.

That means that if you are feeling blue, it could be down to your gut.

"When I first trained as a dietitian, a decade ago, we were taught that if someone has depression or other health issues, that diet could have a small role to play," Rossi continued.

"However, in the last couple of years – thanks to some amazing research – we

now appreciate that diet can have a significant impact on people's mental health."

A 2017 Australian study took volunteers with severe depression and placed half of them on a randomised gut-boosting diet, with advice from a dietitian. The other half stuck to their usual diet, but were given social support.

The two groups were monitored for 12 weeks and then invited back to have their mental health assessed, using a clinical questionnaire.

"What the researchers found was that 32 per cent of those in the gut-boosting group had a significant improvement in depression scores, which classified them as no longer clinically depressed. In the placebo group, it was just eight per cent," Rossi noted.

"It's such a powerful study that shows looking after our gut microbes through diet can clearly have systemic benefits."

Rossi explained that the gut-boosting Mediterranean diet that the Australian study subjects ate was unique in that it provided 50 grams of fibre per day, which could be food for thought for those who are struggling with depression.

"On average, most adults in the UK consume around 19 grams of fibre per day, but the government has just released new guidelines to recommend we have at least 30 grams," she said.

"The optimal fibrous diet is to make sure you're getting better plant-based diversity.

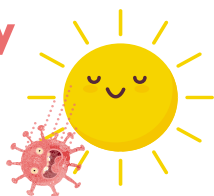
"There are six different plant-based food groups: whole grains, nuts, seeds, fruit, vegetables and legumes. The different microbes in your body like the different types of fibre, so you need to try and aim for diversity across your plate.

"Start with simple things, like adding a teaspoon of mixed seeds to your breakfast, or a can of kidney beans to your steamed vegetables.

"One in four of us will experience a mental health issue each year, so lockdown aside, there's lots of us who could benefit from looking at ways to improve our mental health through diet."



## Vitamin D deficiency can lead to severe coronavirus disease in those infected



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**Over winter**, most people become deficient and need to take more than during summer.

Vitamin D is a steroid pre-hormone essential to immune function. It's present only in small quantities in e.g. meat, fish and eggs, and diet alone doesn't provide enough for most people.

Groups most at risk of vitamin D deficiency are: diabetics, overweight, naturally dark-skinned, elderly, homebound or people otherwise lacking regular access to strong sunlight, vegetarians & vegans.



\* For more information visit  
[bit.ly/vitd3info](http://bit.ly/vitd3info)



## Does COVID end with D?

**A**s the sun has hung lower in the sky COVID-19 has returned. Coincidence? Maybe not.

In the winter months the sun's rays are blocked by the atmosphere, so we cannot make vitamin D in our skin, particularly this far north in the Highlands. Deficiency is widespread and increasing.

Many think vitamin D is just needed for bones but actually animals with no bones need it for immunity. Vitamin D's immune function evolved first, even before bones evolved. For a well-functioning immune system, we need a good supply of it.

Helga Rhein, an Edinburgh GP says: "My patients reported less colds and coughs, less aches and pains and felt happier after taking a decent sized D-supplement"

The Scottish Government advises people to take it, especially those in care homes and with darker skin and those who have been indoors this year but only a very low amount -10mcg (400iu), just about right to prevent bone problems. However, for our immune systems to work best we need more; adults 50-100mcg (2000iu - 4000iu) daily. One expert suggests 69iu per kg body weight.

Food in the UK does not contain enough D for sufficient levels. Finland, in contrast, has much more food fortified with vitamin D than us. They have twice the average blood Vitamin D levels and a tenth of the deaths per million from COVID-19.

Will taking sufficient vitamin D help in the present pandemic? Why should we believe it?

A large number of studies now show that better vitamin D blood levels reduce severity and infection rate of COVID-19 including one randomised controlled trial which treated patients in hospital with COVID-19 with an active form of vitamin D. It showed a significant benefit; less ICU admissions and death. Most importantly, no studies showed any negative effects from taking more vitamin D.

Most can be found on this website:  
[www.scotsneedvitamind.com](http://www.scotsneedvitamind.com)

We are a group of academics, writers and concerned citizens.

We urge you to take enough vitamin D and give it a chance. It is extremely safe.\* You might just save yourself and your relatives from the worst effects of COVID-19.

\*Anyone currently under hospital care should check with their clinic doctor first.



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Chief executive of Inverness Chamber of Commerce ■

# Stewart **NICOL**

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## Chamber can help the flow of trade after Brexit

**In around 50 days, our nation's transition from the EU will end and all of us in business will find ourselves operating in a very different world. I am absolutely certain that each of our businesses; all of our communities, every family and all of us personally will be impacted by this transition.**

While all of us will be affected, the most immediate impact will be on businesses that trade globally, particularly with the EU.

Customs declarations will become particularly relevant for any business that imports or exports with a new suite of regulations coming in to force on January 1, 2021. To give a sense of scale, it is estimated that

the number of customs declarations, that will be required to be completed accurately and timeously, are expected to increase six-fold to around 300 million annually. Around 180,000 businesses in the UK only trade within the EU and each of them will be required to complete customs paperwork for the first time.

Additionally, the EU27 accounts for just over half of all imports into the UK and being outside of the customs union will subsequently mean that imports into the UK from the EU will be treated the same as those from the rest of the world.

Getting this right isn't just an academic exercise to comply with made up tomes of bureaucracy. Correctly and accurately completing each and every customs declaration is critical to ensure customs officials clear the goods for onward transit and that all appropriate Duty or VAT is paid. Failure of either could result in unnecessary delays or fines being incurred.

Despite many assurances to the contrary, be under no illusion, goods will be subject to increased border checks. And these checks will be carried out by people like you and I who, while striving to do a good job, will always have a bad day in the office or be preoccupied by other stuff going on in their lives.

Given all of the above,



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ChamberCustoms has been launched by the British Chambers of Commerce Network to respond to the demand for the service and cope with the rise in declarations that I have outlined. ChamberCustoms is a customs brokerage service run by Inverness Chamber of Commerce, who are an accredited customs broker. Our dedicated team at the chamber have the training and expertise to provide import and export declaration services for all companies based in the Highlands and Islands to help businesses keep trading smoothly. ChamberCustoms is the only customs broker in the UK to offer a "one stop shop" with direct links to all sea, air and road ports and terminals in the UK and my

team can clear goods from anywhere in the country.

Chambers of commerce have been trusted by UK government and businesses to issue export documentation and paperwork for almost 100 years. During this period we have built a strong reputation as a trusted partner of both business and government. ChamberCustoms has been designed to be an HMRC compliant service which is both straightforward and reliable.

Our customs brokerage services are open to any Highlands and Islands based company whether or not you are a member of any chamber. Contact us on 01463 718131 or [international@inverness-chamber.co.uk](mailto:international@inverness-chamber.co.uk)

Despite many assurances to the contrary, be under no illusion, goods will be subject to increased border checks.

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Taking the time to check your financial information is correct can save business owners from problems further down the line.

# The **seven deadly sins** of management accounts

Sharing financial information about your business that doesn't make sense is a sure way to dent your credibility.

**Donald Forsyth**, partner in Saffery Champness, looks at the seven most common mistakes made by business owners and provides tips on how to avoid them



WE'VE all seen the scenario. The bank asks for the latest management accounts. Supplying the information could be a condition of a term loan, needed for the annual renewal of an overdraft or an application for new funding. Some prints are taken from the computer and emailed to the bank. Instead of getting the green light the bank come back with awkward questions.

This article suggests quick checks you should do before to ensure you don't commit one or more of the seven deadly sins of management accounts!

## **The numbers don't look right**

You know your business. You might not have studied accounting or finance, but experience has given you a good feel as to whether the numbers are right. In the profit and loss account look at the sales, gross profit, costs and net profit. In the balance sheet, what about, stock, money due from customers and to suppliers. Do they make sense? Do they tie in with your expectations? If they don't they may well be wrong. Investigate any odd numbers before sharing the reports.

## **The balance sheet doesn't balance**

Again, you don't need to be a whiz with numbers. The clue is in the title – balance sheet. Do both sides of your balance sheet come to the same number? If they do, it doesn't necessarily mean that the numbers are correct; there are seven deadly sins not just one. If they don't, something is wrong. Don't let the information go any further until it has been fixed.

## **The profit and loss account and balance sheet don't agree**

This is a bit trickier. Let's take it you've already checked the numbers in the profit and loss account and they are reasonable. Most months the movement in the balance sheet total should be the profit for the month minus any dividends paid. For example, opening balance sheet total £100, plus profit for the period £50, less dividends paid in the period £30, so the closing balance sheet total should be £120. Now there are rare instances where this might not work. In which case look at the other numbers in the bottom half of your balance sheet (capital, reserves, etc) and

ensure you understand the reasons for any movements. If you don't, then a phone call to the accountant is in order.

## **Numbers which should be positive are negative (or vice versa)**

This is an easy one to miss. Are there any numbers in the profit and loss account or balance sheet that should be positive but are negative, or vice versa? These can be hard to spot. Some for example, perhaps your bank balance or VAT balance may rightly change from positive to negative. Most of the numbers should only ever be one or the other.

## **The lists of money due from/to customers and suppliers don't agree with the balance sheet**

If your business buys or sells on credit, then your balance sheet should include the total of the amount due to you by customers (trade debtors/accounts receivable) and the total amount you are due to pay your suppliers (trade creditors/accounts payable). If this is the case, your accounting system should produce a listing of sums due to be received from customers and paid to suppliers. The totals of these listings should be the same amounts as appear in your balance sheet. If not, investigate thoroughly.

## **Stock and work in progress are not up-to-date**

Have you updated the figures for stock and work in progress? Depending on your business this could make a big difference to the numbers. It could turn a profit into a loss, or vice versa. Although on-line accountancy packages have lots of clever short-cuts and built in checks to avoid errors,

they can't generally get the stock figure correct without input from the owner. It is always worth checking it is reasonable.

## **The bank doesn't reconcile**

Not reconciling bank accounts is a classic error. If your bank accounts are not reconciled the bank figure in the balance sheet will be out of date as will either one or all the following: income, expenditure and amounts due to or by the business. Reconciling the bank is a key control. If you leave it for weeks or months at a time it can become an unwieldy task and may add to your annual accountancy fees. All businesses should ensure that all their bank accounts are reconciled regularly.

If you work on the basis that the numbers must be right because they came from the computer – you could be in for a surprise! Taking a few minutes to do these seven checks could save time and embarrassment and will show the outside world that you are on top of your game.

■ **If you'd like to have a confidential discussion about your management accounts, or any other business matter, please get in touch with Donald Forsyth at Saffery Champness LLP, Inverness.**

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www.saffery.com



Businesses have turned to accountants for advice in adapting to the 'new normal'.



Almost 45 per cent of businesses said accountants helped prevent permanent closure.

# Accountants are Covid key workers

**SMALL businesses are heralding accountants and financial advisers' increasingly critical role in keeping them running since Covid-19 arrived, considering them to be among the "key workers" of the post-pandemic economic recovery according to new research.**

The study by global small business platform Xero found 43 per cent of small business (SME) owners said that their accountant has been crucial to their pandemic survival, with 37 per cent saying that their accountant helped them retain staff during the height of the lockdown.

However, while one third (32 per cent) of SME bosses turned to their accountant for business advice when Covid-19 struck, 34 per cent turned to government websites and resources and 15 per cent turned to friends or family.

Almost half (45 per cent) of small businesses said their accountant is more important to their business than ever before, while 14 per cent said they have turned to an accountant for the first time.

Meanwhile, 38 per cent of SME owners said they have built closer relationships with their accountants

in recent months.

More than half (58 per cent) named their accountant as their most trusted business advisor, assisting in areas such as business advice and planning for the future, with 61 per cent saying their accountant supports them in areas they struggle with or are baffled by.

VAT (37 per cent) and payroll (30 per cent) were two areas in which SMEs felt particularly supported by their accountants, with 70 per cent saying they felt most supported in the area of tax returns.

Darryl Swift, CEO of small business

Impact Research, said: "Our accountant has been crucial to us, helping us make quick decisions on what to do next as a business.

"Thanks to them, we have been able to plan for various scenarios.

"The pandemic has meant that we now have a closer relationship than ever, and they're really embedded in our business."

Pamela Phillips, co-founder and managing director at accounting firm de Jong Phillips, said: "Accountants aren't just number-crunchers – they're essential business partners.

"We've been helping clients

interpret the ever-changing rules around furlough and the government support initiatives. Digitising and automating operations has helped save time spent on accounts as well, allowing us to spend more time on providing business advice."

Gary Turner, managing director of Xero, said: "Behind every resilient small business there's a hard-working accountant.

"They have played such a huge role in saving, and often transforming, small firms adapting to the pandemic.

"Accountants and bookkeepers are the unsung heroes of our recovery and their importance has never been greater to individual businesses and the British economy."

The study of 500 business decision makers placed accountants third in a list of workers who were key to firms' survival during lockdown, behind delivery drivers/postal workers and technology firms.

Politicians and political leaders were in fourth place.



Firms say they have built a stronger relationship with their accountants since the start of lockdown.

Accountants and bookkeepers are the unsung heroes of our recovery.

Gary Turner



# A pandemic financial plan for all the family

Ensure a safe financial future for yourself, your parents and your children during the coronavirus pandemic



Members of the sandwich generation, those individuals in their 40s, 50s and 60s who are bringing up their own children while also providing care for their parents, face increased financial strain in the best of times. Pulled in different directions, they are also trying to save for their own retirement during a critical period in their working life.

In the current coronavirus crisis, the sandwich generation is facing additional challenges, with the pandemic impacting jobs, businesses, schools and home life.

It's the perfect storm of financial, emotional and time pressure. You might be in a senior role at work and have to juggle management responsibilities with the challenge of working from home. Or you might have been furloughed from your current role and face the prospect of a cut in income. Added to this, there are concerns about the performance of your pension and other investments given recent stock market falls.

So, amid this perfect storm, what can members of the sandwich generation do? A financial adviser can help to work out your priorities and put a plan in place to build wealth for the future. In the meantime, here are some tips on how to support your parents and your children – while also taking care of yourself.

## How to help your parents

Whether your ageing parents live with you, by themselves or in a care home, this is an anxious time. And while money is never an easy topic to talk about, having a conversation will allow you to plan for this period of uncertainty more effectively.

Do you have a clear understanding of your parents' assets, income sources, living expenses and debts? Do they have life insurance or long-term care insurance? Are they claiming all the benefits they are entitled to?

Involving a financial adviser at this point can remove emotion from the equation and restrict the discussion to the facts and figures – for example, if you need to adjust your financial plan due to a change in circumstances caused by the coronavirus crisis.

Talk to your parents about financial scams in order to help prevent them from falling victim to online or telephone fraud. Keep in regular contact (via phone or digitally) and make sure they're aware that you're happy to discuss any money concerns that they may have.

And though it is a difficult subject, it's important to check that your parents' affairs are in order. Will creation and legacy planning will be front of mind for many people during this time of uncertainty, and it's worth taking a look to make sure everything is up to date. Also note whether they've specified who can legally take control of their finances should they become unable to make decisions on their own.

## How to help your children

Whether your children are younger and home from school, or older and back living at home after their university has closed, or they have been laid off from their job, they will likely need increased emotional – and possibly financial – support.

Thinking about money as a family, rather than each generation trying to manage alone,

is a great place to start, and has the added benefit of introducing younger generations to financial planning.

Ask yourself: what are you currently paying for childcare or schooling? Are you saving for a child's education, or to help with a first-home purchase? Are loans and gifts to your children being structured in the most flexible or tax-efficient way?

The impact of the coronavirus may change the answers to these questions, and a financial adviser can help you identify what to prioritise and how to adapt to current circumstances if needed – while still saving for the future.

Pensions and Junior ISAs are great opportunities to give children a financial head start, and it's worth contributing even in times of volatility. In the Budget in March, the annual allowance for a Junior ISA was more than doubled to £9,000. A parent or guardian must set up the Junior ISA, but anyone can pay into it, and there is no tax to pay on any income or gains. And even small contributions into a child or young person's pension can make a big difference over the long term.

## How to help yourself

Remember, to continue caring for your children and your parents, you need to take care of yourself.

It can be tempting to try to predict the future, or react to events as they happen. Talking to a financial adviser can help you make a financial plan in a calm, rational way, rather than reacting to news stories or your own emotions. Putting the right plan in place will allow greater opportunities to build wealth over time – fulfilling your retirement plans while still supporting other generations.

If you can, continue contributing to your own pension and savings. Sacrificing saving today could result in financial strain tomorrow. In addition, life insurance and financial

protection are relevant now more than ever – we may not like to think about death, serious illness and long-term sickness, but they're especially important if others rely on you financially.

Use your time in lockdown to give your budget a spring clean. Are there monthly costs that you could eliminate or reduce? Are you using available tax breaks? You may even find there is an opportunity to make the most of a fall in share prices and invest for the future.

When markets have dropped, it can be a good time to save and invest. It may seem counterintuitive, but you are buying cheap stocks.

Look after you and yours. If you have any questions or concerns about intergenerational financial planning, just ask a financial adviser. They're there to help.

To receive a complimentary guide covering wealth management, retirement planning or Inheritance Tax planning, contact Mary MacFarlane Financial Planning on 01463 793542 or email [mary.macfarlane@sjpg.co.uk](mailto:mary.macfarlane@sjpg.co.uk)







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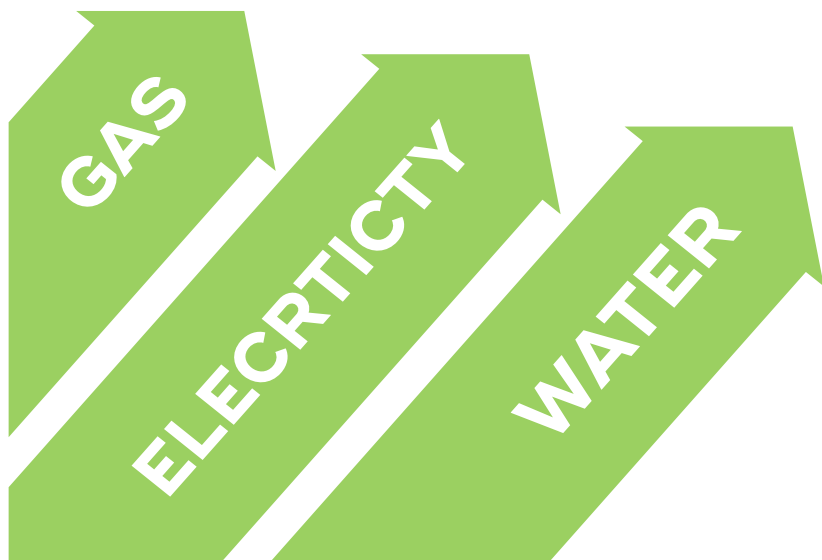
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## Take up HBW's silver challenge

**D**uring these strange days, we're surrounded by advice on keeping physically and mentally healthy.

We know how important it is to keep in touch with others and to have some fun. Lots of organisations have set up befriending services to reach isolated people in our communities, such as Age Scotland's free Friendship line (available on 0800 12 44 222).

For 25 years, Highland Business Women has also been extending the hand of friendship to women across the region.

Whether you run your own business, are an employee, volunteer or a retiree, Highland Business Women is for you.

We get together – online for now as we adapt to the circumstances forced on us by the coronavirus pandemic – at least once a month for a bit of socialising and fun.

We offer opportunities for women in business to showcase what they do as well as providing opportunities to meet other women and make professional and personal friendships.

In normal times, we'd be getting together monthly, usually for a two-course meal followed by a speaker or activity.

These days, we are now getting together online for activities from cocktails and nibbles at Christmas to home décor tips for all seasons and virtual coffee breaks.

So if Covid-isolation is getting you down, reach out to us and enjoy the warmth of friendship with other members.

In this, our 25th year, we're celebrating our silver anniversary by raising funds for our 2020 chosen charity of the year, Fèis Rois.

With a diverse programme of activities in Ross & Cromarty, across Scotland and beyond, Fèis Rois is widely recognised as a national leader in the arts, particularly in music education and supports people of all ages to reach their potential through engaging in traditional music and Gaelic language activities.

The charity celebrated a significant anniversary of its own this year, marking the 21st anniversary of its Ceilidh Trail with the release of a double album featuring several star of the contemporary traditional music scene who began their performing careers with Fèis Rois.

We are proud to announce our 25 year Dare & Donate fundraiser for this leading arts charity.



Highland Business Women's silver anniversary '25' challenge will support the work of Highland arts and culture charity Fèis Rois.

From November 9 to 14, we are looking for daredevils to take on a sponsored challenge around the theme of "25".

Two of our board members, Hannah Lloyd and Victoria MacDonald, are intending to swim 250m in seven lochs (brrr!) over seven days during that week while the Royal Bank of Scotland's North and Highlands business banking team is planning on covering 250km

over six days by walking, running or cycling.

But you could do whatever suits – walk 25,000 steps over the week, swim 2500m at your local pool, cycle 25 miles – you get the idea.

For more information, see our website or Facebook page.

You don't need to be a member of Highland Business Women to help us raise funds – everyone can join in and it's a great chance to get some much needed exercise during the darker months while doing something amazing for a great cause, in what's been a very challenging year for charities on the fundraising front.

Then join us online for our Silver Zoom party on Saturday November 14 at 6.30pm.

Full details for our Dare and Donate event are on the website: [www.hbw.scot/charity](http://www.hbw.scot/charity)

If you are connected with a charity and would like to apply to be the Highland Business Women's charity of the year for 2021, then we'll be opening for applications between

December 7 and 21 2020.

Application forms and details will appear shortly on our website.

We will draw up a shortlist over the festive season and announce the finalists on January 6.

Shortlisted charities will then be invited to give a presentation – which will probably be online given social distancing restrictions – on January 13 2021, when our membership will vote for their preferred charity.

We hope to raise between £4000 to £5000 for each HBW charity of the year – last year HBW members and supporters did even better by raising £5300 for The Oxygen Works.

However, with a curb on the usual programme of events and activities, including the annual awards ceremony which this year was moved online and is usually one of the biggest fundraisers for HBW's chosen charity, 2020 has proved very challenging.

So, hopefully you can take part in the November Dare and Donate challenge with us this year and help raise funds for another worthy cause.

If Covid-isolation is getting you down, reach out to us and enjoy the warmth of friendship with other HBW members.



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# QUIRKY COUPÉ

## BMW 220d Gran Coupé

**Base price:** £33,340  
**Model as tested:** 220d  
**Price:** £37,825  
**Engine:** 2.0-litre turbocharged diesel  
**Power:** 188bhp  
**Torque:** 400Nm  
**Max speed:** 146mph  
**0-60mph:** 7.3seconds  
**MPG:** 53.4  
**Emissions:** 134g/km CO2

By **Jack Evans**

**IN a motoring world seemingly obsessed with niche-busting models, here's another one. The BMW 2 Series Gran Coupé is essentially a four-door version of the two-door 2 Series and the smallest Gran Coupé model in BMW's line-up.**

The 2 Series GC shares its underpinnings with the standard 1 Series and as a result retains that car's list of engines and front-wheel-drive layout. However, it is slightly longer, which helps add to its sleek, stretched-out design, though at the expense of interior headroom.

Though there's quite the range of engines to choose from, we've got the 220d model, which sees a 2.0-litre turbocharged diesel engine sending 188bhp and 400Nm of torque to the front wheels via an eight-speed automatic gearbox.

BMW claims up to 53.4mpg combined and, during our time with the car, we were going above and beyond this on longer journeys. Emissions figures are also reasonable for a car of this size and type at 134g/km CO2.

You expect a car like the 2 Series Gran Coupé to be comfortable, refined and easy to live with over long journeys and, for the most part, it achieves each of these well. The ride is a touch too firm for me, but it does result in excellent body control when cornering. Road and wind noise are contained well too, and though there's some noise intrusion into the cabin when accelerating hard, during regular drives it remains hushed.

The steering is excellent too, and the engine itself is punchy and muscular in the way it puts the power down. The eight-speed gearbox tying it all together is one of the best in the business, responding well to acceleration inputs and leaving little delay when pulling away from a dead stop.

Against the 1 Series or standard 2 Series, this Gran Coupé looks like a distinctly new proposition and its quirky design took some getting used to.

But there are plenty of nice touches.

**The steering is excellent, and the engine itself is punchy and muscular.**

The bright blue brake callipers on our car helped to brighten up an otherwise quite dark exterior, while the large alloy wheels give it a distinctly premium air.

The interior represents an excellent blend of the old and the new. We like the traditional orange backlights for the buttons, while all of the leather used throughout the cabin has a robust, old-school feel to it. In contrast, the main screen – which uses BMW's latest operating software – is



simple and easy to use, though we're still not huge fans of BMW's digital dashboard design which still seems too cluttered even if it gives the forward area of the cabin a cutting-edge feel.

Headroom in the back of the car isn't the best as a result of the sloping roofline. Though there's plenty of legroom, taller passengers will find their heads competing for space with the roof if they're sitting in the back. The boot is actually larger than the one you'll find in the 1 Series too, though because of the narrower opening it's a good degree harder to access.

Our car was finished in tip-top M Sport specification, which brings a full sport styling package, larger alloy wheels and a full sport suspension setup too.

The Technology Pack (£1500) brought features such as adaptive LED headlights and a head-up display, alongside wireless charging, adding genuinely useful kit for not a whole lot more money.

BMW's 2 Series Gran Coupé might be another exercise in niche-filling, but you can't say it hasn't been a well-executed one. Those drivers who find the 1 Series too, well, ordinary and the standard 2 Series Coupé too cramped could well find themselves swayed by the in-the-middle Gran Coupé.

With its decent on-road manners, excellent economy and good build quality, we couldn't fault them for doing so either. It might be there to fill a gap no one might have seen in the first place, but the 2 Series Gran Coupé is well-rounded enough to appeal as a genuine prospect in BMW's current crop of cars.





MOWI employs around 1500 staff throughout Scotland.



MOWI COO Ben Hadfield apologised for the mistake.

# Fish farm escape leads to new study

## A CRUCIAL study into the effects of interbreeding between wild and farmed salmon has been launched.

The research, funded by farmed salmon company Mowi Scotland, is in response to a recent escape of farm-raised salmon.

It will be managed by the wild fish conservation body Fisheries Management Scotland and supported by government scientists from Marine Scotland Science.

The multi-year study of 115 sites aims to confirm wild salmon's current genetic profile and to track for the potential of genetic changes should interbreeding of farmed and wild salmon occur.

In late August, Mowi Scotland confirmed 48,834 farm-raised salmon had escaped from its aquaculture facility in the Firth of Clyde after becoming detached from its seabed anchors during a combination of strong weather events.

Since the escape, Fisheries Management Scotland has been working with member District Salmon Fishery Boards and Fisheries Trusts, as well as angling associations, to monitor the situation and mitigate where possible.

Escaped farmed salmon have been caught by anglers in multiple rivers across Loch Lomond, Ayrshire, Clyde, Argyll and in rivers in north-west England.

The priority for Fisheries Management Scotland and its members has been to ensure any farmed fish are removed from the rivers, humanely dispatched, and scale samples submitted to enable accurate identification, and Mowi has committed to support these actions.

Alan Wells, chief executive of Fisheries Management Scotland,

said: "We are very disappointed this escape occurred. The Carradale North farm is a new development, and we are all agreed it is not acceptable for such escapes to occur. It is crucial lessons are learned and appropriate steps taken to avoid such escapes in the future."

"We have welcomed Mowi's commitment to work with us and to fund a comprehensive genetics study that will help us better understand the potential impacts."

"We will continue to engage with the industry and regulators, with a

view to improving the situation for wild salmon and sea trout."

Thanking Fisheries Management Scotland for helping remove the escaped salmon, Ben Hadfield, COO of Mowi Scotland, said: "I would like to apologise for any disruption and concern this escape has caused all those with an interest in wild salmon."

"We have learned the root cause of the escape – system anchor lines crossing and resulting in friction failure – and acknowledge our responsibility to quickly learn from this event to prevent it from occurring again."

This new, comprehensive study of genetic introgression aims to add to the understanding of one of the potential pressures on Scotland's wild salmon, which are approaching crisis-point.

The Scottish Government has identified a range of high-level pressures on wild salmon including over-exploitation, predation, invasive species, habitat loss and quality, and inshore commercial fisheries.



The study will look at the impact farmed salmon escapes might have on the wild fish population.

It is crucial lessons are learned and appropriate steps taken to avoid such escapes in future.

Alan Wells



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## The heart behind the face mask

**A**re you here on holiday? I'm being asked that repeatedly by fellow walkers.

Unless it's code for something I don't know about I'm guessing the question is arising because I'm feeling buoyant for the first time in a while.

My husband and I have recently moved into a new house.

It's our second home together and we're now permanently based here in the Highlands.

I'd forgotten how much I missed being here full-time.

The big sky, the scenery, sunrise and sunset, a better pace of life, and, of course local people and their generosity of spirit.

Within a couple of weeks in our new place we'd met a handful of the neighbours (albeit mumbling through face masks and over rickety fences).

We were five years in our previous home in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, and our street seemed to be populated by a removals firm at least monthly; we didn't fully connect with more than a couple of households.

We heard doors slam at 7am when neighbours left their warm beds for the commuter train.

The bigger cities of Leeds and Manchester – and even Halifax town centre – created too much anonymity for me.

The old feelings of "why does everyone know my business?" I used to experience here, were swapped for "why does it feel like nobody cares?"

Since we've been home I've genuinely felt touched by the chit chat in the local shops: So much so that I bought Scott in Vodafone a wee bag of Thorntons the other day.

He saw me as a person, and

helped me navigate the techy stuff with absolute humour and charm.

Before I moved away from here I'd fallen into the trap of finding fault with things because I was no longer making an effort to actively appreciate them.

In my 20s I worked for Moray Firth Radio and although I found the early newsdesk shift with its 6am live news bulletin excruciating, the sunrise over the Kessock Bridge was jaw-dropping and I had a brilliant group of friends. Yet after a while I paid scant attention; it became background.

Living in Beaulieu it took me less than 12 minutes to leave home and arrive at my desk, yet rarely did I savour those 12 minutes of stunning fields and shimmering firth.

They were the norm.

If you're on a short break (or even skiving) at work how comfy is the seat you're sitting on?

Can you take a few seconds to appreciate it?

What about the tea you're drinking?

Is it nice?

Are you taking the time to enjoy the moment? Or overlooking the good because it is normal?

Behind the face masks you can find good compassionate people desperate to connect; the love always shines through if you're willing to see it.

Finding a way to reach out to others, no matter how small, can make a huge difference to happiness levels.

You have no idea how much it helps.

How about you?

What could you appreciate just that little bit more that would add some sparkle to your life?

Whose day could you make a little brighter?







## An opportunity has arisen for the purchase of Caithness Serviced Apartments.



**Due to retirement Donald Campbell has decided to sell his business. The four apartments have been lovingly refurbished to a high standard with a VisitScotland 4 star accreditation.**

The apartments offer a great location for the business and tourist travellers, situated 1 minute from the expanding Wick Harbour.

The purchase of this business will give a great investment.

There is a strong client base from tourists visiting the world-famous North Coast 500 route or business and work-trade visitors working in the region, which has huge development within the energy sector. Caithness Serviced Apartments is a great location for someone to take on this business and thrive.



Interested parties are welcomed to contact Donald Campbell for further information.

**T: 01955 651297**  
**M: 07879 641333**

**E: [info@caithness-apartments.co.uk](mailto:info@caithness-apartments.co.uk)**  
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# BOOK REVIEW

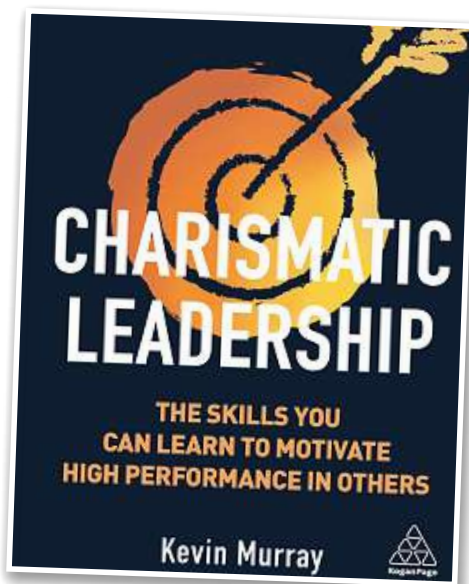
A new guide shares the secrets of how good leadership can inspire staff to take on new challenges and think creatively.

For many, charisma is something you either have or you don't, not something you develop yourself. Kevin Murray, the former director of communications for such major names as British Airways and the UK Atomic Energy Authority, disagrees.

"Everyone is capable of developing charisma because it stems from skills you can practice and apply," he writes in his introduction. "Charisma is something you learn, not something you are born with."

By identifying five key traits of leadership – authenticity, personal power, warmth, drive and persuasiveness – Murray sets out a pathway to using your personality as a positive influence on colleagues, peers, staff and customers, while avoiding the pitfalls of shallow charm or egotism. Written in a punchy and accessible style that is divided into relevant topics and issues – something that makes it easy to dip into for a quick reference or refresher – this is a practical guide that will make you think hard about your own attributes, or those you need to develop.

Murray also makes it clear that leadership is not just about you. To be an effective leader you must also be empathetic, respectful, inclusive and understanding and aware that a leader is also a part of a team, not apart from it.



Questionnaires and exercises help the reader keep track of their own progress as they develop their own leadership skills, but Murray also pays attention to those other skills which are vital to becoming a leader others can put their faith in, such as problem solving, presentation, solid preparation and coaching.

However, as Murray shows from examples drawn from his own 40-year career, the leadership skills you develop have to naturally flow from your personality and cannot be forced.

A blunt speaking northern English engineer can still make a charismatic leader if he shows the honesty and trust that his staff and colleagues expect.

As Murray stresses, you do not need to be a Mandela or an Obama to show charismatic leadership.

Whether you are head of a small team or a major business, the changes you make to your personality can make a big difference to how you and your staff perform.

## bookmarks

One in seven UK workers is already self-employed and research tells us that lockdown has seen even more of us think about starting up on our own. But how do we go about it? **Boss It** (Kogan Paul £11.99) by Carl Reader gives an eight step guide to getting your business off the ground.



If this year has taught us nothing else, 2020 has emphasised the need to be prepared for change. Henley Business School fellow Campbell Macpherson in **The Power to Change** (Kogan Paul £11.99) shows how to embrace and harness change and make it a positive for you and your business.

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) has brought unwelcome complications for businesses of sizes, with massive penalties for any breaches are committed. In **GDPR for Dummies** (John Wiley & Sons £23.99), Suzanne Dibble, provides simple steps to help you easily get to grips with GDPR legislation.

### Charismatic Leadership

by Kevin Murray

**Published by**

Kogan Page £11.99

# Book success shows Caroline is a cut above

**AN Inverness hairdresser has topped Amazon's best sellers list with her guide to helping fellow salon owners make a short cut to success.**

Caroline Sanderson (right), the owner and director of Ego Hair Design and Hair Heroes salons in Inverness, put lockdown to good use by writing **The Salon Jedi: The Big Business Breakthrough For Ambitious Salon Owners**.

Written to help others achieve business success, the book became the fastest ranking on Amazon and the number one bestseller in seven categories in the UK.

It also earned a clean sweep of five star reviews from readers, with one calling the book "a game changer" and commenting: "If you are a business owner in need of some guidance and really want to build your business you won't be disappointed."

The book covers mindset, marketing, management and maintenance for business owners.

Ms Sanderson said: "It's always



been my goal to empower salon owners so that they can grow their business and ultimately get off the tools when the time comes.

"Many salon owners are also their salon's best earners and are stuck behind a chair while the rest of their

team under-performs.

"They can get caught in a cycle where they have no time to allocate to actively improving their business because they're always with clients."

Ms Sanderson shares some of her personal journey to success in the book.

She tells the story of when she nearly went bankrupt while she was eight months pregnant and her salon manager walked out with her client list.

She subsequently turned her business around using a number of techniques and experienced a massive 398 per cent growth during the last recession.

Ms Sanderson said her book was written to help salon owners struggling to find a way to step off the salon floor and put more energy into growing a profitable business by providing them with industry secrets and success strategies to help them achieve their goals.

"My method teaches them how to take control so they have a confident, high earning team who

perform across the board," she continued.

"We cover mindset, marketing, training, HR, retail, targets and everything they need to succeed in a tangible time frame."

Ms Sanderson is an international speaker teaching her Super Salon Success Systems all around the UK and in the US from Florida to California.

In 2019 alone, she hosted 22 boot camps and eight schools in her mission to reach and teach 1500 salons.

She also has a podcast called the M.i.n.d.f.u.l Salon Jedi and her own make up brand.

Her success has been recognised by several industry awards, including Scottish hairdresser of the year at the British Hairdressing Awards, best front of house team at the British Hairdressing Business Awards and has twice been named Britain's best photographic stylist.

The Salon Jedi by Caroline Sanderson can be purchased at [tinyurl.com/salonjedibook](http://tinyurl.com/salonjedibook)



# PAPER TALK

## Council backs bid for Wick airport's future

**HIGHLAND councillors gave their commitment to continue working to secure the sustainability of Wick John O'Groats Airport and to press for Public Service Obligation (PSO) status as a matter of urgency.**

Chairwoman of the Caithness Committee, Wick and East Caithness councillor Nicola Sinclair highlighted the work done to prepare a strong business case and stressed that to be truly focused on socio-economic recovery "it is vital" that the doors of the airport remain open.

She said: "Caithness Chamber of Commerce and other local stakeholders took early action and commissioned a detailed, independent feasibility study in 2019 which was then worked up into a full business case. This asks the Scottish Government to consider a dual-route public service obligation to protect our services to Edinburgh and Aberdeen which we believe is a sustainable model.

"A PSO would require an annual subsidy of £3 million over four years, but it's projected to deliver £5.2 million in economic benefit and up to 46,000 passengers per year by year four. The airport is a catalyst for 400 to 600 local jobs as well as 60 directly employed at the airport. It's therefore critical to the economic prosperity of the region that we secure the investment from the Scottish Government for a PSO."

Transport Scotland has made it clear that any PSO would need to be supported by the council and other stakeholders. For this reason, members of the Caithness Committee called on the council to identify financial support for the airport.

Cllr Sinclair explained: "We are asking the council to continue with its efforts in exploring the resource implications of a successful PSO bid."

Speaking after Thursday's meeting, she added: "Today we asked for that process to begin in earnest and to reflect the urgency of the situation.

"Socio-economic recovery and reversing population decline are key priorities for our county, and that cannot be achieved without a show of confidence in Caithness and positive decisive action."

Thurso and north-west Caithness cllr Struan Mackie added: "It has been refreshing to be part of a cross community campaign, with stakeholders, businesses groups and individuals all seeking a solution in resuming flights from Wick.

"After years of progressive market failure, it is clear that the PSO is the only option left."

 **Caithness Courier**

Wednesday, November 4, 2020

## No ill wind for Port

**THE offshore wind boom helped blow in a healthy profit for the Port of Cromarty Firth, along with a best ever year in cruise boat visits.**

It recorded another excellent year in 2019, according to its annual review – with a turnover of £10.6 million achieved.

The port generated a surplus (profit after tax) figure of £2 million of which 100 per cent, as a trust port, will be reinvested in future development of the port for the benefit of the local area and its stakeholders.

The port said the rapidly-growing source of revenue was renewables, with Port of Cromarty Firth developing a hugely valuable track record in offshore wind.

Further offshore wind work for the port is also on the horizon, with Crown Estate Scotland launching the next leasing round for Scottish offshore wind developments, with up to 10GW of capacity available.

Oil and gas activity continued

throughout the Cromarty Firth last year, with major oil rig inspection, repair and maintenance projects helping to secure and safeguard jobs locally. This industry continues to be a vital employer within the Highland region.

The port also enjoyed its best-ever cruise season since the first luxury vessels sailed into the firth over 40 years ago. It welcomed 104 ships and more than 167,000 passengers in 2019, with some of the world's largest cruise ships taking advantage of the firth's deep water and local attractions the Highlands has to offer.

Port chief executive Bob Buskie said: "I am delighted that our business performed well throughout 2019 and once again surpassed our forecast targets."

*Ross-shire Journal*

Friday, October 30, 2020



The port surpassed its forecast targets in 2019.

## EVENTS DIARY

**11**  
NOVEMBER

**Countdown to change online**  
10am

In the third of four British Chamber webinars, Liam Smyth explains what will change when the EU transition period ends.

**12**  
NOVEMBER

**Moray Growth Deal: What it means for you online**  
10am

Hear from Moray Council what the £100 Million Moray Growth Deal means for business, with a focus on digital health and housing.



Unique live Caithness Chamber event identifying potential ScotWind suppliers and partners.

**12**  
NOVEMBER

**Floating Energy Supply-Chain Engagement Event online**  
9.30am

**18**  
NOVEMBER

**HIE: Exercise in a box online**  
9.30am



Test and practise your response to a cyber attack.

**18**  
NOVEMBER

**Employee ownership explained online**  
10.30am

Webinar hosted by Cooperative Development Scotland outlining the process of moving to an employee-owned structure.

**25**  
NOVEMBER

**Photography for business online**  
10am

Learn how to shoot, edit and upload photos for use online and to showcase your business with Business Gateway.

**01**  
DECEMBER

**Countdown to change online**  
10am

Interactive webinar from the British Chambers of Commerce, counting down to the end of the EU Transition period.

# INTERACTION

Write to us: Executive, Suite 3.04, Moray House, 16-18 Bank Street, Inverness IV1 1QY.

Email: [business@hnmedia.co.uk](mailto:business@hnmedia.co.uk)  
Facebook: [executivebusinessmagazine](https://www.facebook.com/executivebusinessmagazine)  
Twitter: [@ExecutiveHNM](https://twitter.com/ExecutiveHNM)  
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All queries and complaints about your Executive should be made in writing to the Editor, Executive, Suite 3.04, Moray House, 16-18 Bank Street, Inverness, IV1 1QY, in the first instance. If the matter cannot be resolved it will then be referred to the Independent Press Standards Organisation, Gate House, 1 Farringdon Street, London, EC4M 7LG. For information on the Code of Practice or IPSO, visit [www.ipso.co.uk](http://www.ipso.co.uk), email [inquiries@ipso.co.uk](mailto:inquiries@ipso.co.uk) or call 0300 1232220.

## Posts and Tweets

Get in touch via social media or email us at the address above. Let us know your views on the news!

So proud of my Mama (Fiona Russell of Fabrik Magik Interiors Ltd). Recently she had her work filmed by the BBC at the famous Torridon Hotel and now this new article in the Executive Magazine!  
I wish I had her eye for design and colour!

Linzi J Russell, via Facebook

Back before social distancing, a business lunch @SutorCafé with @ExecutiveHNM. Fab lunch talking about community in Cromarty with @cromartycheese and @vandykebros.  
Be sure to visit the new Sutor Creek deli!

Calico UK, @Calico\_UK

Took my first turn as writer in chief for Highland Business Women this month for Executive Magazine, with a bit of a round up of our lockdown activities. Was great looking back and reflecting on how we have all been supporting each other.

Donna Smith, Thistle, via Facebook

Did you see the Highland Business Women article in this month's Executive Magazine?  
Great reflection from vice-president, Donna Smith, on 2020 so far, and how we have embraced virtual and kept the HBW community connected!

Highland Business Women, via Facebook

I find Executive Magazine very interesting and enjoy reading it. Have now encouraged other members of the family to read it too!  
**Alexandra MacRae, Kiltarlity**

Brilliant to be in Executive Magazine, featuring in the Inspirational Women section. Achieve your full potential!  
**Clare Humphreys, Will to Win, via Facebook**



Kerry and Derek Campbell of 8 Doors Distillery.

## THE QUIZ

Our business quiz gives you the chance to win a prize. We have a 50cl bottle of gin from Dingwall's GlenWyvis Distillery to give away each month. Just answer the questions, based on the contents of this month's issue. The winner will be chosen at random from the correct entries. This month's questions are:

1. 8 Doors Distillery takes its name from which legendary Caithness figure?
2. What is the Star Wars-inspired title of Caroline Sanderson's salon owners guide?
3. Orkney's Aurora Jewellery has launched a range based on what fantasy series?
4. Which project was named overall winner at the 2020 IAA Architectural Awards?
5. How many independent schools currently operate in Scotland?

Entrants must be over 18 and entries will be accepted until 5pm on Monday, November 30. Fill in the form below and send your answers, name and address and contact number to: The Quiz, Executive, Suite 3.04, Moray House, 16-18 Bank Street, Inverness, IV1 1QY. Alternatively, email [business@hnmedia.co.uk](mailto:business@hnmedia.co.uk)  
Last month's winner: C. Johnston, Culduthel

### Answers

1.....  
2.....  
3.....  
4.....  
5.....

Name.....  
Address.....  
.....

Postcode.....  
Contact number.....



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