



The official membership  
magazine for the Institute  
of Directors in Scotland

IOD

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# Direction

SPRING 2025

**IoD State of the Nation  
survey reveals positive  
outlook amid concerns  
over tax and skills**

**Prepare the workforce  
for the next generation**

**Aspiring directors**

## The power of resilience

**Marlene Lowe on fighting back, the  
importance of learning, and how  
childhood dreams can come true**



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# World of business needs to catch up with the coming generation's values

**To preserve the integrity of what it means to be a director we need to re-imagine what the role will entail in the years to come, says IoD Scotland Chair Julie Ashworth**



**THE theme of this issue, aspiring directors, offers an opportunity to not only reflect on where we've come from, but to imagine where we might go next – especially as we welcome the next generation of leaders into our world of governance, strategy, and leadership.**

At IoD Scotland, we're not just supporting those who sit in boardrooms, we're nurturing those who aspire to get there.

There's no denying that the title of 'director' comes with weight. It holds history, legal responsibility, and a commitment to accountability and integrity. But for many of the Gen Z and Gen Alpha demographics – typically born between the mid-1990s to early 2010s, and from 2010s onwards – the title can feel outdated. It's often seen as rooted in traditional structures that don't always align with the fluid, value-driven ways in which the next generation of leaders want to work.

During a recent conversation with Young Scot and Youthlink, a clear theme emerged. Young people are not

drawn to today's traditional leadership roles. In the latest 'Truth About Youth' survey, only 31% felt positive about their employment situation, with many expressing anxiety about housing, economic instability, and whether those in power understand their concerns.

What these future leaders are hungry for is not hierarchy, but purpose. They're looking forward to *'figuring out who and what [they] want to be,'* not climbing a corporate ladder without purpose. As we consider the future of governance and leadership, we must ask: what does it mean to be a director in a world where young people are redefining success? Do you need to be called a director to lead like one? What difference does the job title really make?

I believe it's the practice, not the title, that matters most. Director-level thinking is about vision, integrity in decision-making, and accountability to shareholders, employees, community, or the environment. While those values remain unchanged, how we apply them must evolve.

We work hard to preserve the

heritage and gold standard of governance, while also recognising that future-proofing organisations requires fresh thinking and language that welcomes emerging leaders.

It was heartening to see in our latest State of the Nation (SoTN) survey that 88% of members are actively engaging in CPD training, demonstrating a genuine drive to grow not just as business leaders, but as individuals. The number of members achieving their Certificate in Company Direction has increased 59% since last year – well done to all 78 of you. This tells us that, regardless of age or industry, leaders want to understand the fundamentals of how to lead with impact in our changing world.

Our upcoming policy papers, shaped by your SoTN views, will help us continue to advocate with decision-makers and other stakeholders on your behalf.

The challenge and opportunity before us now, is to preserve the integrity of what it means to be a director, while reimagining how the role is carried out in the years ahead.

Whether you are a 23-year-old founder scaling your first business, or a seasoned executive with years of boardroom experience, the principles of good governance apply to all of us.

Here's to building a future where leadership is purposeful and inclusive without losing sight of the values that brought us here.

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# Investment in Scotland's young workforce has to be priority No. 1

**The next generation of directors are waiting to seize opportunities, but more investment is needed in order to let them do so, says IoD Scotland Nations Director Catherine McWilliam**

**W**ELCOME to the Spring issue of Direction! In this edition we are looking at the next generation of leaders, and how current directors can inspire and encourage them on their journeys.

No two paths to leadership are the same; everyone's journey is shaped by unique opportunities and challenges faced along the way. Some leaders may have stepped into their roles very naturally, while for others, it may have taken more time and perseverance. This is something that should be celebrated within our organisations

because having a leadership team that is authentic and reflects both personal and professional growth, can inspire the next generation of directors.

In this issue, we hear from Marlene Lowe, who hosts our Leaders in Business podcast and regularly dives into the journeys of many familiar faces at the IoD. Ewan Rattray, our Aberdeen vice chair, looks at what he's learned throughout his career at sea and with an SME. And our Chair Julie Ashworth also talks about how priorities for future directors are changing and how we can begin to incorporate those values now.

When it comes to aspiring directors, we need to look even further, not just to the directors of the next five years but to young people just entering the world of work.

Confidence in employment is increasing among our membership, with 71% of you responding to our State of the Nation survey saying that you have the right number of skilled employees for current jobs and future staffing requirements.

## Investing in our youth

While it's encouraging to see that businesses are positive about the long-term skills pipeline, it's important that we continue to invest in development initiatives. Working alongside universities and colleges to offer placement schemes will help make our organisations accessible to young people looking for opportunities.

There is huge appetite among Scotland's young people for routes into the workforce. The Young Scot Truth About Youth survey, which asks young people how they feel about key issues, revealed 86% are worried about future prospects. By engaging with apprenticeship and workplace training

“

When it comes to aspiring directors, we need to look even further, not just to the directors of the next five years but to young people entering the world of work.

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schemes, we can show young people that there are avenues open to them. Making our organisations accessible will also mean our talent pools and staff are more diverse, opening us up to new ways of learning from each other.

The next generation are passionate about their future careers, but in order to encourage that enthusiasm, ministers must do more to understand the issues impacting the young workforce today.

The UK Government's restrictive migration policy, particularly the £36,000 salary threshold for skilled worker visas, as well as connectivity and housing issues in Scotland, present major challenges to attracting and keeping talent in Scotland.

Last month, we publicly called for a Youth Mobility Scheme with the EU which would allow 18-30 year olds to work and travel freely between each jurisdiction for up to two years. Investment like this is needed so we can alleviate mobility and skills challenges for UK businesses and continue to build employment confidence.

### State of the Nation survey

On the topic of State of the Nation, I'd like to thank everyone who took the time to complete the survey. It's interesting to see the significant uptake in AI usage – a topic we will continue to discuss on a regular basis to keep up with its rapid development. It was a particular highlight for me to see so many of you engaging with CPD training, with an incredible 78 directors achieving their Certificate in Company Direction this year! As we look at the theme of 'Aspiring Directors' for this issue of Direction, it's encouraging to see you prioritising your own learning and development.

Following the great coverage of this year's State of the Nation survey in the media, please consider participating in our Policy Voice survey that is sent to you each month. We want to hear from you so that we can ensure we are accurately representing your voices in front of decision makers.

I hope you all enjoy this issue of Direction, and as we look to the Summer issue, we'll be focussing on skills. If you have anything you'd like to share on this topic, please feel free to get in touch. You can reach me at [catherine.mcwilliam@iod.com](mailto:catherine.mcwilliam@iod.com)

# IoD hears concerns on tax but GDP growth is an encouraging sign

**Marc Strathie,**  
IoD Senior Policy  
Advisor for  
Devolved  
Nations



IT has been a busy few months since my last update, and particularly on the policy front, the world has been evolving almost daily since the announcement of 10% tariffs from President Trump on UK goods. Although at the time of writing, this threat seems to have cooled somewhat for the time being...

March saw IoD Scotland release its State of the Nation survey 2025, and the results presented a mixed picture for the year ahead.

While we saw a positive increase in employment confidence, taxation is still a serious concern for many of you. The survey found that 63% of respondents believe Scotland's business tax rates are too high, while 75% feel the same about income tax rates.

Nearly half of you who responded to the survey expressed serious unease over Scotland's tax divergence from the rest of the UK (49%). Among that, 40% believe tax differences will impact on hiring decisions, and 34% fear it could deter investment.

At the launch of our State of the Nation survey, we were joined by Deputy FM Kate Forbes, Professor Sir John Curtice and IoD Chief Economist, Anna Leach. One of the key messages to emerge from the panel discussion was the importance of creating a stable business ecosystem.

Continuing to voice your taxation concerns among policymakers will help shape that landscape for businesses and ensure Scotland remains an attractive place to work, invest and live.

The business confidence and

economic landscape across Scotland has picked up markedly if we look at some of the recent data published. The Scottish economy recorded significant growth in January, in contrast to contraction in the UK as a whole. Scottish onshore gross domestic product rose by 0.3% month on month in January, whereas statistics from the Office for National Statistics showed that UK GDP fell by 0.1% month on month in January. Although the data is moving in the right direction, growth is still fragile at this moment in time and



**While we saw a positive increase in employment confidence, taxation is still a serious concern for many of you... 63% of respondents said business tax rates are too high...**



external global events could still eradicate any further progress.

Scottish Government has officially launched the Community Wealth Building Bill, which will require councils, National Health Service boards and other public bodies to take forward measures which boost their local economies. Successful pilots are in progress in North Ayrshire in Scotland and further afield, in Preston and Barcelona.

On March 27, I was invited to give evidence at the Scottish Parliament's Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee on the topic of the UK Internal Market. Covering all three Devolved Nations, I know how important frictionless and easy trade is to our members across the UK.

**You can view the report of the full parliamentary discussion [HERE](#).**

# Scotland's business leaders report rise in employment confidence as AI thrives, but concerns over tax remain

**F**OLLOWING a fantastic response from our membership, this year's State of the Nation Directors survey gave us insight into the key opportunities and concerns for businesses in 2025.

The annual survey asked cross-sector leaders from businesses of all sizes for their opinions and views on a range of issues, including cybersecurity and tax divergence. It highlighted employment as a top concern for Scottish firms, with approximately half (56%) of businesses reporting they do not employ apprentices or support workplace training schemes.

Similarly, business engagement with universities and colleges has fallen, with 46% not engaging with any type of further education establishment, compared to 35% last year.

Despite this, 71% of those of you who responded to the survey felt they have the right number of skilled employees for current jobs and future staffing requirements - an increase of 10% from 2024 and 17% from 2023.

Catherine McWilliam, Nations Director - Scotland at IoD, said: "The skills gap has been at the top of our agendas for several years. While it is encouraging to see increased confidence in recruitment and retention, I'd urge all of you to consider this route as a way to help secure Scotland's future workforce."

Results also showed a significant rise

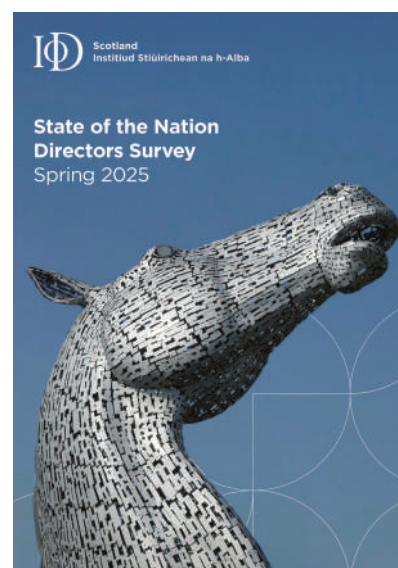
in the use of AI across Scottish businesses, with 84% of you already utilising it within your organisations. Used across a range of functions including administrative tasks, research, marketing, and data analytics, the increased use of AI raises questions about the future impact on hiring and workforce dynamics.

Beyond employment, many of you revealed increasing worries about cybersecurity. Emerging as the third most pressing business issue over the next five years among those surveyed, companies are working to protect themselves from increasing digital threats.

Similarly, taxation remains a concern, moving up to fifth place on the list of top concerns for Scottish businesses. The survey found that 63% of you believe Scotland's business tax rates are too high, while 75% feel the same about income tax rates.

Catherine McWilliam continued: "Tax policies play a crucial role in shaping Scotland's business landscape. Our survey results show that a number of you remain wary of increasing tax burdens, particularly when we look at Scotland's ability to attract and retain top talent."

"Our State of the Nation has arrived at a particularly important juncture as we are just over a year away from the Scottish Holyrood Elections in 2026.

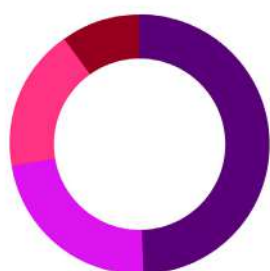


"Over the course of the year, we will be working closely with our members to develop our asks from government in 2026 and we see State of the Nation 2025 as having a key role to play to develop these asks."

"Although our members continue to face acute challenges at the present and for the year ahead, I am optimistic that the resilience and agility you demonstrate on a daily basis, will stand you all in good stead for future challenges."

■ Downloaded the full report [HERE](#).

**Do you feel you have enough support from government to lead your organisation towards achieving the Scottish Government's Net Zero target? (70% reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2045)?**

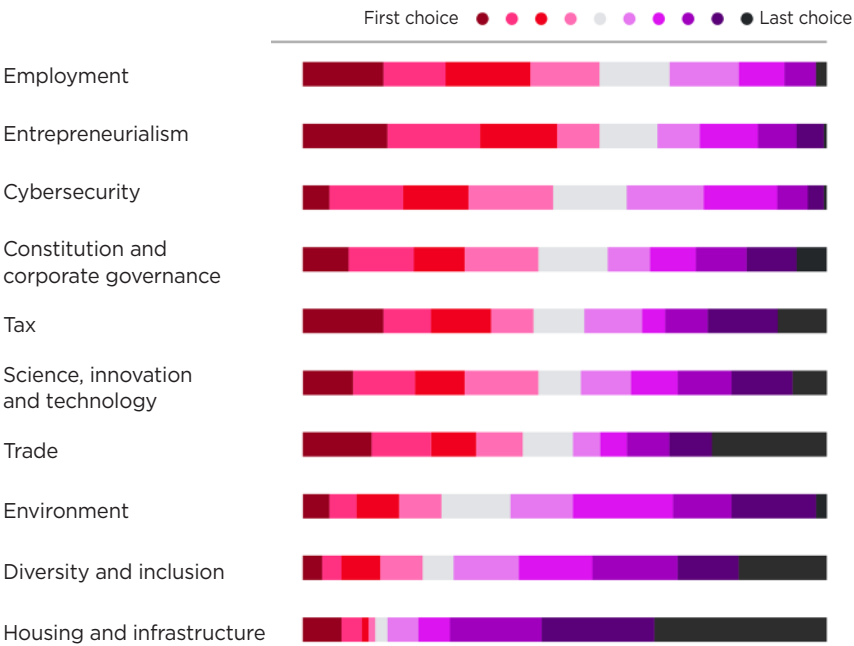


Response	%
Yes, we are on our way	18
No, more support and resources required	50
We are still working on our plan	10
Don't know	23

## Attitudes towards the Scottish Government policy is mixed.

Looking at Scottish Government's Net Zero target, 50% of respondents felt more support and resources were required, the exact same figure as 2024 results and 23% did not know. 27% of respondents were either on our way or still working on a plan, a drop from 2024 figures of 39%.

# Looking to the future

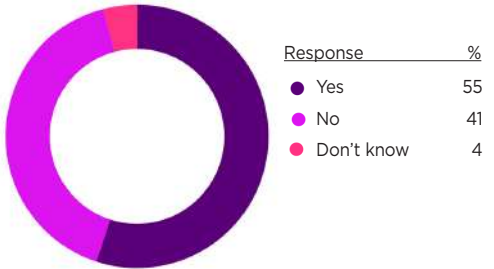


Responses to the survey have indicated that our membership is ambitious in its pursuit of growth and is looking for new tools and approaches with which to deliver it. When asked to describe their views on taxation in Scotland, 63% of respondents felt business taxes were too high, a slight drop from 2024, when this figure was 71%. 75% of respondents felt personal taxes were too high, a percentage increase from 2024 figure of 74%.

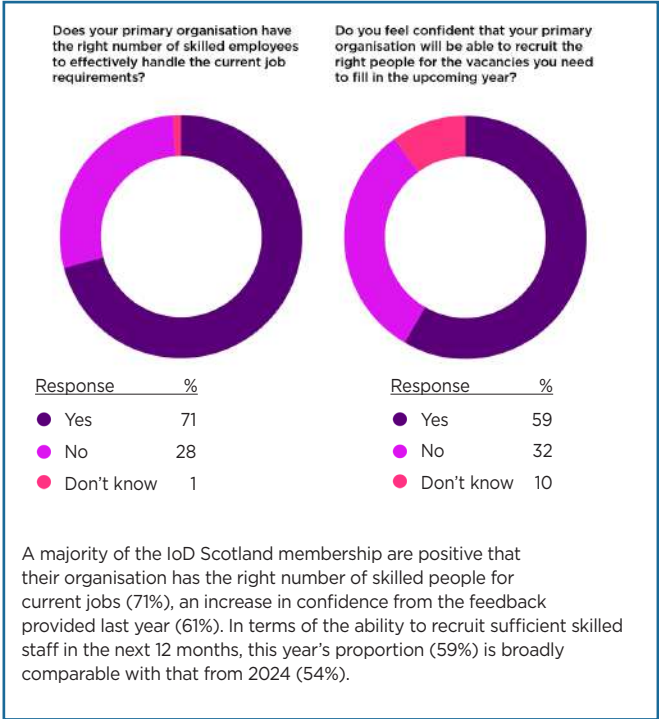
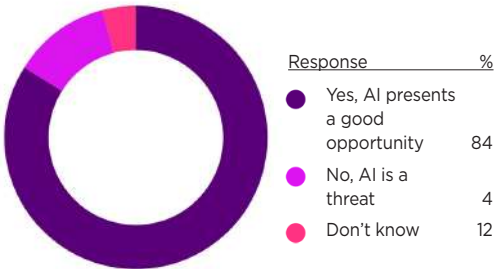
# The use of AI

When asked about the future utility of AI-based tools, 55% of respondents were using AI tools already, 41% said no and the remaining 4% did not know. However, an overwhelming majority (84%) agreed that AI would be a good opportunity in the years ahead for them. Just 4% see AI as a threat.

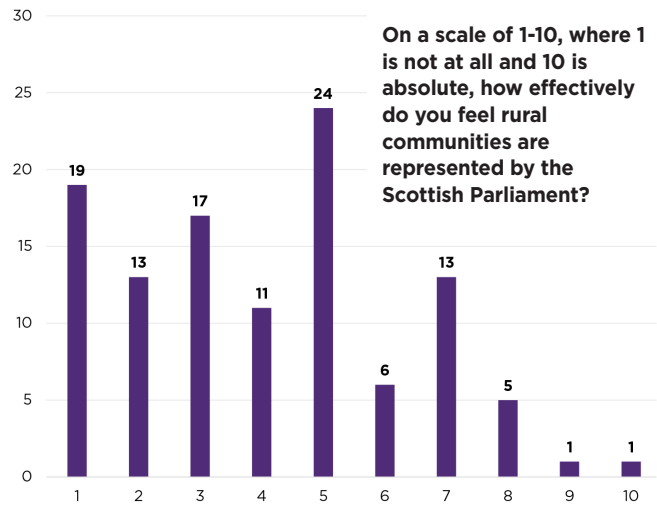
## Is your primary organisation using AI in any of its processes?



## Do you see AI becoming more important to the operation of your organisation in the future?



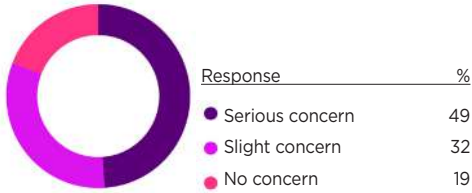
# Rural affairs



A question to rank how effectively rural communities were being represented by the Scottish Parliament, the average rating was just four out of 10

# Tax issues

How much of a concern is income tax divergence in Scotland for either you or your primary organisation?



## If concern is serious, would this have an impact on any of these areas (select all appropriate)?

81% expressed some form of concern with the way in which income tax policy diverged in Scotland from rest of UK.



## IoD ABERDEEN

# AI: competitive advantage or corporate risk?

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) might be dominating the headlines — but for Scotland's business leaders, the real conversation is only just beginning.**

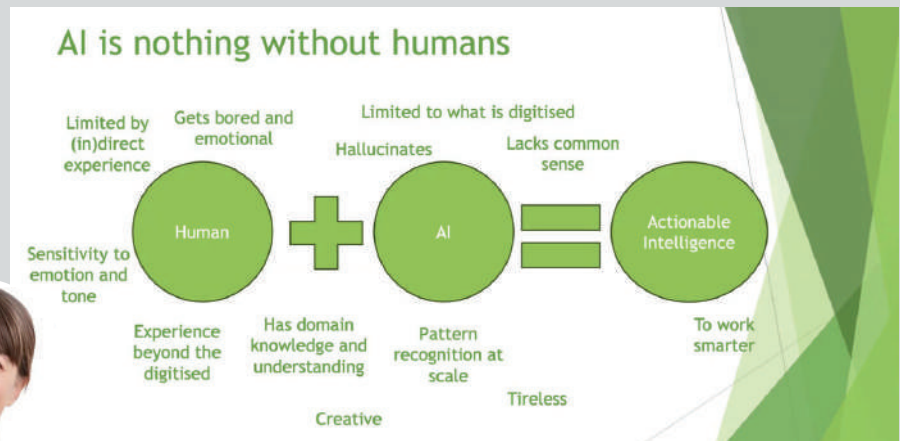
That was the key message from a recent IoD Aberdeen & Grampian online event, where **Dr Zoe Webster** delivered an insightful and thought-provoking session on the foundations of AI and the increasing importance of robust governance.

As Zoe (pictured right) explained, AI is far broader than the current narrative suggests. The competitive advantage doesn't lie in technology alone, but in the quality of data, the skills of people, and the strength of the governance that underpins it.

The foundations for successful AI adoption are: data, governance, skills and knowledge; operations and maintenance; tooling and platform; and change and culture.

But as AI moves rapidly up the boardroom agenda, regulators around the world are starting to ask tougher questions about accountability, privacy, and bias.

Dr Webster posed a powerful question for every director: in your organisation, who is accountable for AI – when it goes right, and when it goes wrong?



Navigating this evolving landscape demands policies that balance innovation with responsibility. Transparency — particularly around the data being used — will be essential to building trust, avoiding bias, and ensuring diverse perspectives shape the future of AI.

Sustainability also emerged as a growing consideration. Few businesses

have yet to feel the energy impact of AI, but with every AI-generated image consuming the same energy as charging a smartphone, leaders should be mindful of how AI aligns with their environmental and sustainability goals.

“Ultimately, AI is nothing without humans,” Zoe said. “The organisations that will thrive are not those who fear AI but those who harness the best of both humans and machines, thoughtfully, responsibly, and transparently to bring actionable intelligence and productivity gains.”

She concluded: “AI is powerful — but it's the people, the policies, and the purpose behind it that matter most.

“And if need be... we can always unplug it!”

**“In your organisation, who is accountable for AI – when it goes right, and when it goes wrong?”**

## Welcome back Sarah, and thanks, Mark



IT'S a warm welcome back to Sarah Downs as she returns from maternity leave to retake her role as Chair of the IoD Aberdeen & Grampian branch.

At the same time we also want to take a moment to say thank you and bid a fond farewell to Mark Wilson, who now steps down from the committee after several years of dedicated service.

Mark has been an integral part of the branch leadership team, serving as Vice Chair for three years and more recently stepping up as Interim Chair during Sarah's maternity leave.

His expertise combined with a wealth of

leadership experience from both the British Army and the energy sector, has left a real mark (no pun intended!) on our branch and its members.

On behalf of the whole committee and the IoD, we want to thank Mark for his contribution and commitment he has given so generously to support the IoD and its members locally. We wish him all the very best for what comes next.

And of course, we're thrilled to have Sarah back at the helm. We look forward to the next chapter as the branch continues to grow, connect and support directors and business leaders across Aberdeen & Grampian.

## IoD CENTRAL SCOTLAND

# Branch events gearing up to boost member connections

**YOUR Central Scotland branch is gearing up for a fantastic array of member events organised for the next few months.**

Before we go into those, we want to highlight our new member drop-in event we held back in February. Our local chair plus a fellow committee member met with a handful of new members over a coffee.

It was great to welcome them and chat about why they joined the IoD so we could signpost them the right way. Our current members enjoyed connecting with the new faces, highlighting one of the main reasons they joined themselves.

On to our upcoming events. Our members tell us they love to meet other members and prefer to do that through an array of different activities, some informal and some with inspiring speakers to stimulate learning and debate. We have a collection of events to achieve just that.

We have just held a member connection event over wine tasting in Stirling on Thursday, 24 April.

Following that we will be hosting our flagship

event, our annual dinner. This year it will be hosted at The Gallery restaurant at Forth Valley College in Stirling on Thursday, 15 May. As all of you who attended will know, this event last year received top-class feedback, so we have a high bar to maintain. We are looking forward to another fantastic event with an inspiring panel of speakers around the theme of "Leadership: navigating through challenging times".

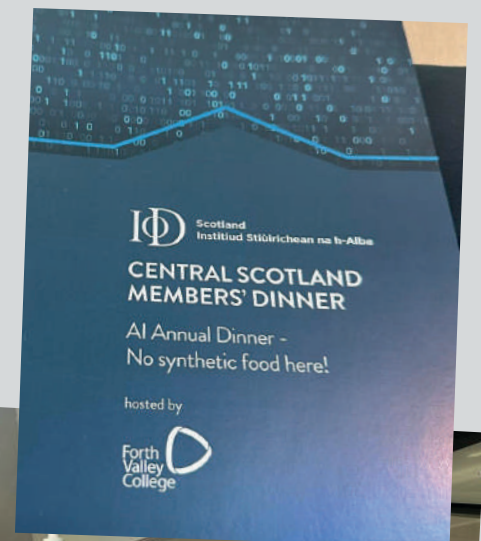
We then have our two annual golf days. Our charity Texas Scramble is earmarked for late May, and the pairs competition will be held in August. Watch out for confirmed details on the IoD website.

Finally, we are also planning a padel event over the summer, and an artisan baking event in September. We look forward to welcoming you at one or more of the events over the next few months.



Scenes from last year's event. Top, the 2024 golf competition. From left to right, Wendy Rayner, Neil Bradbrook, Aidan O'Carroll, Brian Williamson, Lawrence Connolly, Ben Walker, Andrew Pollard.

Right, the annual dinner, held at the venue for this year's event, Forth Valley College in Stirling.





## Council leader reveals key pressure points

**THE IoD Edinburgh and Lothians branch recently welcomed Paul Lawrence, the relatively newly appointed Chief Executive of City of Edinburgh Council, for a breakfast roundtable event at the historic City Chambers.**

The session brought together local business leaders and public sector stakeholders for an open, insightful discussion on the city's most pressing challenges and opportunities.

In a candid and engaging exchange, Mr. Lawrence outlined the complex landscape facing local government, touching on key themes such as the

proposed visitor levy — a potential new income stream to support city services amid rising tourism. Housing and social care also featured prominently, as Lawrence acknowledged the growing demand for affordable homes and the increasing pressures on health and social care systems.

Efficiency in the delivery of public services was another focal point, with the Chief Executive emphasising the need for innovation and smarter working practices. Artificial intelligence was raised as both a tool and a challenge for the public sector, with

discussions on how AI might reshape service delivery while raising ethical and accessibility questions.

Cultural investment was celebrated as a cornerstone of Edinburgh's identity and economy, with Lawrence reaffirming the council's support for the arts. Education, potholes, environmental concerns, and city infrastructure were amongst many other topics, highlighting the breadth of issues on the council's agenda.

The event reflected the IoD's ongoing commitment to connecting leaders across sectors to drive positive change in the capital.

## Labour leader opens up at IoD Pompadour event

SCOTTISH Labour leader and MSP Anas Sarwar offered his own insights into the current political debate at an IoD Edinburgh & Lothians event hosted by The Pompadour.

The event, chaired by Edinburgh IoD Chair Nathalie Agnew, brought together local business leaders for a lively and wide-ranging discussion on Scotland's economic and social challenges.

Hosted by The Pompadour's acclaimed chef Dean Banks, the setting was as impressive as the conversation. Guests enjoyed a specially curated menu that celebrated Scotland's finest seafood and local ingredients, with Dean adding personal touches that highlighted the very best of Scottish hospitality.

In a candid Q&A session, Sarwar addressed key concerns facing the business community, including the impact of employer National Insurance increases and the broader taxation landscape.

There was robust discussion around creating more attractive conditions for business investment, with questions on reductions in VAT in the hospitality sector, pressure on the social care system, the urgent need to address Scotland's housing gap, and the importance of long-term planning for inclusive economic growth.

The event offered a valuable platform for dialogue between political leadership and the private sector. Attendees praised Sarwar's openness and the opportunity to share real business concerns in a relaxed setting.



**Dean Banks, Anas Sarwar and Nathalie Agnew at the Pompadour event**

## IoD HIGHLANDS &amp; ISLANDS

# Brave leadership needed to drive change in Highlands and Islands

**THE Highlands and Islands are poised for transformation. With natural assets such as renewable energy and a world-class food and drink sector, the region has a central role in Scotland's economic future... but realising that potential depends on one crucial element: leadership.**

This was the clear takeaway that emerged during the recent roundtable hosted by IoD Highlands & Islands with Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes MSP. The meeting brought together local leaders, entrepreneurs, and policy-makers to examine the region's pressing economic challenges and potential pathways to growth.

The message was clear – economic resilience depends not just on infrastructure and investment, but on people: their skills, their capacity, and, most importantly, their leadership.

Leadership development was highlighted as essential to reversing long-term depopulation trends, strengthening community resilience, and empowering local businesses. As some communities experience leadership fatigue, particularly in the third sector, there's a growing need to invest in the next generation of leaders.

The IoD is advocating for targeted investment in leadership programmes across the region, including the expansion of its own training courses, to meet this need.

Crucially, the IoD's February 2025 Policy Voice survey revealed a strong appetite for support among current and aspiring leaders – especially women and those in rural enterprises – who face persistent barriers to starting and scaling businesses.

The Deputy First Minister was urged to consider not just funding, but more holistic support structures, including childcare, housing, and connectivity, that enable leadership to flourish in all corners of the region.

"There's an extraordinary drive in the Highlands & Islands," said Clare Winskill, Co-Chair of IoD Highlands & Islands (Islands). "But to harness that energy, we need to equip our people – not just



Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes with IoD members

with funding or infrastructure, but with the tools and confidence to lead."

At the same time, the IoD is calling for a renewed effort to bring together experienced, trusted leaders who can support one another and model brave, values-led leadership during time of change.

"We need to back the future by investing in new leaders while also leaning into the strength of those already guiding businesses and communities across the region" added Alison Wilson, Co-Chair of IoD Highlands & Islands (Highlands). "Bringing these voices together across sectors and generations will build the kind of leadership culture we need to deliver the future with confidence"

As the Scottish Government prepares to implement its increased housing

budget and reviews planning processes for renewable projects, the IoD has called for a stronger alignment between national strategies and local delivery. Ensuring that local voices, including those of experienced business leaders, are involved early and meaningfully will be key to delivering outcomes that reflect the true needs of rural communities.

The IoD is calling for a dual approach investment in new leadership development programmes, such as the expansion of its own leadership offering, alongside efforts to convene and connect a strong peer network of established leaders across the region to develop a cross-generational support system that would create a culture of mutual learning, mentorship, and shared purpose.

By building a cross-sector coalition of leaders and regional stakeholders committed to action, the Highlands and Islands can play a powerful role in shaping Scotland's economic renewal.

The IoD Highlands & Islands Branch Committee was delighted to welcome the Deputy First Minister to this event, and would like to extend our thanks again to DFM Kate Forbes MSP for engaging so meaningfully with our members at the event.

“

The Deputy First Minister was urged to consider not just funding, but more holistic support structures, including childcare, housing, and connectivity, that enable leadership to flourish

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## IoD BORDERS

# Nicola's geared up to help Blood Bikes Scotland keep running in memory of Dad

**ALONGSIDE** running her food and drink export advisory business (A La Carte Consulting), IoD Scotland member Nicola Thomas also volunteers with Blood Bikes Scotland (BBS).

In 2021, her father had over 20 blood transfusions and Nicola discovered BBS's work by chance when she got chatting to members of the bike crew who were sometimes on call-outs at the Borders General Hospital when he was having his treatment.

When he died in June 2022, Nicola's family made several donations to BBS in his memory. After a meeting with the charity's head of fundraising she was inspired to get involved more closely, offering her marketing experience to raise the organisation's profile within the local business community.

Blood Bikes Scotland is a charity providing essential medical delivery services for NHS Scotland across Lothian, Fife, Borders, Forth Valley and Tayside. Entirely run by over 200 unpaid volunteers, the service operates free of charge, 365 days a year, delivering blood products, specimens, equipment and medication via a dedicated fleet of liveried motorbikes and cars.

9,113 jobs were completed in 2024,



**The Arnold Clark Group hands over a donation to Blood Bikes Scotland**

translating into savings of over £350k for NHS Scotland.

BBS receives no payment from Government or the NHS and is 100% dependent on fundraising to maintain its operational service and cover capital outlays. Engagement with businesses – both large and small – is crucial to reaching fundraising targets, and BBS has enjoyed support from companies in the region including grocery retailers Aegon, Sadie's Shed, BP, Arnold Clark, Torrie Taverns, Watermans and State Street.

Help ranges from one-off donations,

to funding a vehicle, to allowing employees to volunteer during working hours.

Supporting BBS in any capacity is a great way to raise your company's profile within your local community, and to give back to it, too.

Do reach out to Nicola to find out more - her fellow biker volunteers are always happy to come and share the BBS story!

• Nicola can be contacted via email by clicking [HERE](#)

## IoD GLASGOW

## Debbie at centre of Aspen People growth plans



ASPEN PEOPLE has announced that director Debbie Shields has become a shareholder in the business. Shields, who joined the company seven years ago, has played a critical role in building Aspen People's strong presence in the third sector. Her elevation to shareholder reflects the company's ongoing investment in its leadership and long-term success.

"I'm incredibly proud to be part of Aspen People's growth journey," she said. "The business has come a long way since I joined, and I'm determined to continue driving its success. Our focus on the third sector and public services has been a huge part of that, and I'm excited for what lies ahead as we continue to grow and deliver great outcomes for our clients."

Headquartered in Glasgow, Aspen People was established in 2012 as a purpose-driven executive search business with a focus on delivering leadership roles to organisations that are making a real difference in society.

# Let's make 2025 the year for positive change in your business



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insured employee benefits

# Scotland's largest rural performing arts festival takes centre stage

**PACKED** with engaging and entertaining events from comedy to theatre to song, **The Dumfries and Galloway Arts Festival** is returning for its 46th stint.

Kicking off at Easterbrook Hall on May 15, the festival offers the perfect chance to network with creative practitioners and immerse yourself in Scottish culture with local and national acts taking to the stage.

In theatre, Tom Foreman presents his Edinburgh Fringe sell-out show *Boiler Room Six* which revealing the true story of stoker Frederick Barrett, who survived the tragedy of the Titanic. Glasgow Oran Mor's famous A Play, A Pie and a Pint brings another of its hilarious theatre offers with *Goodbye Dreamland Bowlarama* to Moffat, Dumfries and Stranraer.



Scottish Opera Pop  
Up Opera  
Photo: Sally Jubb

Another Edinburgh Fringe sell-out show, award-winning poets Gerda Stevenson, Chrys Salt and Pauline Prior Pitt bring *Three of a Kind* to life on Friday, May 30 at the Faed Gallery, Gatehouse of Fleet.

In music, Sonic Labs are set to light up Dark Place Planetarium



Held on the High Wire.

Kirkcudbright with an evening of cosmic soundscapes and after four sell-out shows in 2024, Scottish Opera brings its Pop-Up Operas, celebrating two Gilbert and Sullivan comedies in Sanquhar on May 31 and Moniaive on June 1 to close out the festival. **Find out more HERE**

## Dram-packed distillery tour offers drop of island bliss

ARBEG DISTILLERY has opened its doors for a fresh wave of summer tours. Located on the south coast of Isle of Islay, visitors can enjoy a taste of award-winning smoky malts while soaking up breathtaking ocean views.

The distillery has been crafting its distinctive whisky for over 200 years – so why not take a peek behind the curtain? Ardbeg Distillery tours take guests on a journey that explores every nook and cranny from the mash tun to the spirit stills.

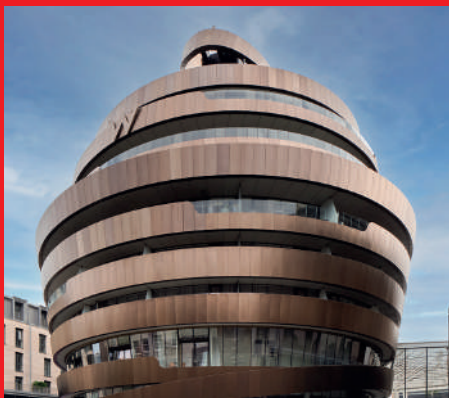
Guests can also enjoy a taste of three limited edition drams, packed with rich, peaty notes and fabulous stories behind each sip.



The distillery is also unveiling its new Ardbeg House later this year, following a multi-million-pound makeover. The hotel will feature 12 luxurious bedrooms full of imaginative and playful décor marry up with the unique

designs in the restaurant, bar, and private dining room. The courtyard offers the perfect place to perch and soak up the island sun, surrounded by wild nature with a drink in hand.

• **For bookings, CLICK HERE.**



## Edinburgh's W scoops top hotel award

THE W Hotel in Edinburgh has been named Scottish Hotel of the Year 2025, scooping the top award as well as Lifestyle Luxury Hotel of the Year, Cocktail Bar of the Year, and Spa Treatments Award of the Year.

The five-star hotel, nestled in St James' Quarter, offers meeting rooms and conference spaces with a sleek and modern look. Fancy a change of scenery? There's also a rooftop deck with incredible 360-degree views at the top of the ribbon structure and cosy lounge spaces for a more relaxed working environment, while top eats at Scotland's first Sushisamba restaurant on the 10th floor.

• **Book a spot HERE.**



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# Making the case for truly effective communications

Name: **Hannah Blackford**

Position: **Account Director**

Company: **Muckle Media Ltd**

Number of employees: **35**

Short overview of organisation: **Muckle Media is a multi-award-winning, creative PR agency that delivers strategic communications, from PR and social media to creative campaigns and crisis management, for brands across the UK. As a proud B Corp, its mission for the future is to make the world a better place through communications.**

## What is the greatest recurring challenge you come across in your role, and what's your strategy for dealing with it?

Probably that people don't always understand what we do, or the value of it. Businesses are operating in an increasingly challenging environment, and difficult decisions are having to be made by everyone. Communications is often seen as a luxury or a 'nice to have', and can be the first to go when budgets are being reviewed.

The paradox here is, it is at times like now that a strategic approach is critical, and where well thought-out, well-resourced communications is absolutely vital to meeting business objectives. Particularly when crisis situations arise.

This is a challenge that consistently comes up in discussions with existing or potential clients, but I know it's something felt by the wider industry. For me, it's about better articulating the value we can bring to an organisation as opposed to simply selling our services – being solutions-led as opposed to product-driven and backing this up with case studies and success stories. We need to better advocate for the strategic importance of our involvement to senior leaders and articulate how we can support a business to achieving its overall goals.

Personally, I probably need to practice what I preach in better advocating for myself and articulating the value I bring to a project!

## Who, or what, drives you or inspires you?

My inspiration has always been the wonderful women in my life, particularly my mum and my sister. My

mum for being unfailingly kind and helpful to just about anyone who needs it, and my sister for being the strongest and most resilient person I know. I try to the best of my abilities to emulate that in any way that I can, at work and beyond.

What drives me is simply working with great people on exciting or meaningful projects. One of our values is to leave the world in a better place and this is something that has always resonated with me. The brilliant thing about this is that it helps you to think about the impact you have every day, even if it's something small or as simple as improving someone's day.

Ultimately, I'm driven by the feeling that my work, or my contribution to what we do, matters. I'm constantly being wowed by my colleagues or peers, their ideas and how they've interpreted a challenge or brief.

I also work with a lot of parents, and I am just in awe of how they balance work and home life. They often make it look easy, but I know it must be very challenging at times.

## What is your long-term vision for the organisation that you lead?

As an agency, we want to be the best communications agency group to work with, inspiring change, driving growth and making the world a better place.

For me personally, I'd love to see us grow our team and carve out a bit of a niche for ourselves. We're doing a lot of work around our purpose and what kind of positive impact we want to have on our community so I'm excited to see where that goes and hope one day we can quantify our impact or contribution to solving a particular

problem that we as a group think is important.

## What keeps you awake at night?

Usually, a random dog... we pet sit quite a lot, so we have any manner of breeds and temperaments staying with us at any given time!

In all seriousness though, sleep is incredibly important to me so I make sure I can decompress in time to have a good sleep. I'm a highly organised person so if ever I start to feel out of control of my schedule, this can sometimes keep me awake at night, going over in my head all the things I need to do.

Otherwise, I really try to create separation between work stress and personal life, I'm constantly telling myself it's not that deep!

## What makes a good leader great?

Three key things: personality, transparency, and vision. It's no surprise that communication runs as a consistent thread throughout these traits. I'm a people person so connecting with people is really important to me and I think people are more likely to get behind a leader if they feel like a real person.

## Have you had a mentor, and what did he/she add to your development?

I've had several and I think they can be such a valuable source of insight into your personal development. I usually try to find someone who does something slightly different to me. This helps bring an outsider's view, an alternative perspective that you wouldn't otherwise have. This in turn allows you see opportunities for growth outside your line of vision.

I'm naturally quite creative but one of the best things a mentor taught me was to never stop exercising that muscle and consume as much creativity from others as possible.

**Even leaders aren't the finished article. What's next in your leadership development journey?**

I'm not always a great advocate for myself so that's probably something I need to work on. I'm not very good at trusting the skills I already have, so I find myself seeking development and learning opportunities that help me grow more confident in my abilities.

**What is the 'next big thing' that will transform your sector?**

That's a funny question because it often feels like it's not what is transforming our sector but what is impacting the sectors of our clients that has a bigger impact on our work.

AI feels like the obvious thing to say but it's probably more about data and how that will increasingly drive communications moving forward. I can see a shift away from using gut feel and having more real time data at our fingertips to analyse how communications are landing and using that to shift comms strategies.

I've always said PR is an art not a science, but maybe that's changing...

**What piece of technology do you rely on most?**

Sounds boring and a bit millennial but probably my phone. I'm out and about a lot more than I used to be, seeing clients in person, meeting prospective clients and hosting or attending events, and often in PR every moment counts so being able to respond to things quickly, check my emails on the move and contact colleagues is integral to my productivity day to day.

**What is your favourite social media platform, and what does it bring to your business/organisation?**

LinkedIn. It just feels like a much nicer, more professional place to be. We've also found it to be a really great place to connect with potential clients, both directly and indirectly through showcasing our expertise. I've enjoyed seeing it become more creative and embracing some of the features that work on other apps like Instagram.

I'm also a Co-Chair of Scotland B Local, which is a group of volunteers



from B Corp-certified companies committed to advancing the principles of purpose-driven business at a regional level, and we're building a really lovely community on LinkedIn that gives us a platform to share insights, information, host events, and make new connections.

**What needs fixed?**

Being more realistic about what you can achieve as an individual. Better things happen when we co-create and, in my view, people put far too much pressure on themselves to have all the answers or find all the solutions.

A great deal of hope and optimism

comes from collaboration and admitting where we might have gaps in either our capacity or our capability would help. Let people who have these things step in and maybe together, you can create something even better.

**What leadership advice would you give your younger self?**

To trust the process a bit and in doing so be as curious as possible. Go to as many interesting events as possible, meet as many interesting people as you can and just explore and ask questions. Through all that will come enrichment and a natural path you'll want to follow.

# THE POWER OF RESILIENCE

**Marlene Lowe talks to Rob Beswick about overcoming adversity, the importance of learning and why staying quiet can be a unique superpower in business.**

**I** t doesn't take too long to find the driving force behind Marlene Lowe's success – and her inspiration.

"It's my parents," she says firmly. "I've had challenges in my life, and people have told me how resilient they think I am, having come through them, but those challenges have been nothing compared to the ones my parents overcame."

You can understand why when you learn that Marlene, who grew up in Zambia with ties to Zimbabwe, left her home country when she was nine, her parents leaving a humble but successful life behind to start all over again overseas.

"It was devastating; as a family we left behind everything they had built. But they kept believing in themselves, and perhaps more importantly, believing in their children. They constantly encourage me – they are my daily business advisers.

"I don't feel resilient: they are. They are my biggest heroes."

The owner of The Emerald Agency – a digital design and marketing company – and the Chair of IoD Fife & Tayside, as well as host of IoD Scotland's Leaders in Business podcast, Marlene's journey has seen her come a long way from her original goals.

Though, in a nice twist, she's ended up – sort of – where she always wanted ...

"My dream was nice and simple: 'save the world'," she recalls laughing. "You can never set your sights too high! I kept that dream with me, and took development studies at university, with the intention of going

on to work with an NGO in Africa."

But the first setback to that dream came in the form of a debilitating illness when she was diagnosed with an auto-immune disease.

"It wiped me out. I went from being able to knock off a half marathon without thinking to being tired and sick constantly. I tried to make the best of it, taking roles in banking and insurance. They didn't match my dreams but did give me valuable insights into different business models and cultures. I'd throw myself into my work, do well, but then my body would fail me and I would be left shattered and burnt out.

"It became a constant fight with my health. I spent too long trying to find a good balance, to find my equilibrium, but I just couldn't do it. I lost my fitness, put on weight, I left jobs. I was stuck in a spiral of negativity that I couldn't break out of."

The shining knights who rode to the rescue and dragged Marlene out of her crisis were her parents.

"My father ran a successful IT business, operating in Sweden and Ukraine. In his words, 'look Marlene, you're a people person; Why don't you try your hand at business development for me?'"

"I became his Girl Friday, taking on all the people-centric parts of the job that we had skill gaps in. It started with business development, building a UK base for the business.

"I loved it; the variety of the work kept my focus and appealed to my active mind. There was a lot of problem solving, which suited the way my mind works."

Part of that ever-widening brief

took her into the company's marketing strategy and she became engaged with that like nothing ever before. "I love how marketing involves talking to people when you can't see them face to face, but you are trying to get over your company's ideas. It's story telling, and I was excited by the chance to tell our firm's story."

But what seemed like a solid landing space changed when COVID hit and her father decided to sell the business, "leaving me wanting to rediscover my passions."

"I started again. I took on anything going, from working in a cafe, to hospitality and a little work for a charity". But the interest in helping others tell their stories became entrenched, planting the seed from which emerged The Emerald Agency.

"A business contact asked me to host her podcast," Marlene recalls.

"I loved it. Pretty soon friends were asking for advice on comms, particularly on their websites; which stories to tell, how to position their businesses. I knew I was on to something that could be my true direction.

"I made myself a promise at the end of 2022. I would do what I could to get back to Africa and work on a development project there, but first I would give The Emerald Agency 30 days of completely full-on focus and see if it would take off. If it did, great, but if not, I was off."

Everything clicked into place. "People believed in me and loved the story-telling element of my marketing ideas. I feel very privileged to still be here."

**Continued on page 20**



“

An auto-immune disease wiped me out. I went from being able to knock off a half-marathon without thinking to being tired and sick constantly ... I'd throw myself into my work, do well, but then my body would fail me and I would be left shattered and burnt out.

”

All photos of Marlene Lowe  
courtesy of Newline Photos

**Continued from page 18**

Marlene's USP is demystifying the digital space. "I've been building websites for fun for two decades, just playing with ideas and concepts and putting together clear, simple and focused digital media that works.

"Too much around the digital media industry is opaque; it's a quagmire that can be hard for non-digital players to get their heads around. I wanted to make online marketing simple, affordable and clear-cut. I don't believe that there is a need for the complexity."

She also worked hard to build trust with her clients – and in an unusual manner: by encouraging them to fly the nest, as it were.

"Too often clients can be made to feel like hostages by their suppliers. You can easily feel beholden to them. I wanted to try a different tack, to build an online presence that works, but one where the client feels comfortable running their digital environment themselves.

"Everything around the work we do is owned by the client. It's their story that's important, not mine. I am a business ghost, never seen, remaining totally in the background; the clients's successes are their own. They can walk away with their assets at any time. In fact, I encourage it."

"Marketing is not as hard as people think. Tell your story with clarity, don't use jargon, keep it simple, and stay true to your overarching goals. Pull all that together to build trust."

The business has boomed – including an African-based NGO! "I've finally get to save the world! I'm working with the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, doing my little part to help save orphaned baby elephants and rhinos, and protect Kenya's habitats."

Now The Emerald Agency is established Marlene has had the chance to stop and take stock of how she arrived at her current place. What has she learned on the way? "The importance of staying quiet. To listen. I used to have a tendency to rattle off my own thoughts and have half an answer ready the moment someone starts telling me anything. I've learnt to slow down and listen to people more."

"My clients believe in their power to change lives for the better. My job is to capture their passion and share that story with the world.

"It is an absolute privilege to work with my clients."

“

**I've learnt the importance of staying quiet and active listening. I've a tendency to rattle off my own thoughts and have an answer ready the moment a client starts talking. I've learnt to slow down and listen to people more...**

”

One of her long-standing projects sees her host **IoD Scotland's Leaders in Business** podcast. Now over 70 interviews in, with leaders drawn from all corners of the Scottish business scene, what stands out?

"The thing I have found most inspiring is how motivating they all are. Without exception they are committed to making a difference. But while that goal is universal, the path to it is so varied. These are business leaders who all have different approaches to leadership; finding out what has driven them on has been fascinating."

**(You can listen back to the podcasts via the IoD website.**

**[CLICK HERE for more details](#)**

One really stands out. "I loved

chatting to Sophie Dow, the founder of Salvesen Mindroom Centre. She is a journalist and writer whose life was changed significantly when her daughter Annie was diagnosed with an incredibly rare condition, indeed, it is so rare she is believed to be the only person in the world with it, so it has been named 'Annie's Syndrome'.

"She has a unique chromosome deletion on Chromosome 1, which means she is missing 25 vital genes out of the approximately 22,000 we should all have, which affects her development.

"Since starting to look into ways to help Annie, Sophie has broadened her interest out into all issues surrounding neurodiversity, winning plaudits from



the medical community for her work.

"She was truly inspiring, and I would urge everyone to listen to her podcast (***you can listen to it HERE***)"

The podcasts have reinforced another important view: "We're always learning," says Marlene. "Or rather, we should be, because the day we stop learning, that's the day we might as well give up. Never be satisfied with the status quo, always look to learn."

A recent edition of the podcast highlighted this: "We've just released a podcast with recruiter Ivan McGeorge and he stressed the quiet art of active listening, and the enduring power of authenticity in business."

"It was a brilliant conversation about life, about showing up as who you are,

and about building meaningful relationships in a world that too often values transaction over truth.

"A really fascinating chat from which I learned a great deal."

As part of her own learning journey Marlene is reaching back into her African roots, by learning Swahili and the linguistics in African languages, while her own periods of ill health have led to her prioritising hobbies as ways to destress.

So what's the next stop for The Emerald Agency? "Well, the work I'm doing with the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust is in many ways my dream job, so I'm eager for more clients like that. I love telling their story; it is a successful orphan elephant rescue and

## Leaders in Business

To listen to the IoD Scotland podcast series, **Leaders in Business**, click **HERE**.

The series includes Marlene's conversations with Sophie Dow and the most recent episode, with Ivan McGeorge (right)



“

We're always learning. Or rather, we should be... the day we stop learning, that's the day we might as well give up. Never be satisfied with the status quo

”

rehabilitation programme, and an inspiring example of an NGO that's getting to grips with a challenge in Africa and providing real solutions.

"I want to help more people feel comfortable telling their own stories. Everyone is interesting, everyone has a story to tell. I think this is particularly true of small businesses. Many small business owners assume no one is interested in their story but I find that actually, they are the ones whose stories are most interesting and most deserving of an audience."

Marlene will be standing down from her role with the IoD as Chair of Fife & Tayside later this year, and it's a move she makes with great reluctance. "It's time to pass the mantle on but I do so reluctantly. I've learnt so much from the rest of the committee, and Catherine and her team at the IoD Scotland office have been a tower of strength and support."

"Being involved with the branch has helped me re-evaluate my goals, and I'm so grateful to the IoD team for that."

"I sometimes think the drive to make The Emerald Agency work is my desire to repay the faith that so many people have shown in me."

"It's important to know that people have got your back."

# From aspiring to inspired: Enabling more diverse directors

Everyone has bought in to the concept of a more diverse range of directors – but why, with such support, are our boardrooms still overwhelmingly old, white and middle-class? Ezra Wilson, Managing Director at V360 Systems, looks at the issue and ways to solve the conundrum.



**SOME 94% of new members are aged 50 or over, resulting in an average age of 61.1 years old. 87.5% are white, and 57% are male.**

These figures, when you review them, might bring to mind an exclusive, outdated gentlemen's club. Yet, these are the numbers that define boardrooms across the UK today.

In 2024, the Spencer Stuart report revealed that only 6% of new directors in FTSE150 companies were under the age of 50. Equally concerning is the lack of ethnic diversity – with just 12.5% of directors from minority ethnic backgrounds – and gender balance, as women account for only 43% of board members.

## The business case for diversity

A diverse board is more than a nice

to have, it is a strategic necessity. Research consistently demonstrates that businesses with diverse directors benefit from more rounded decision-making, enhanced innovation, and often superior commercial performance.

In practice, when directors mirror the society they are a part of, they challenge old ways of doing things and uncover new opportunities. A business that champions diversity is not just progressive, but also demonstrates focus on long-term business success.

## Doing better on professional development

Reflecting on my own early career, the route into directorship was anything but clear-cut. I was fortunate to secure a directorship – and later, the role of MD – by the age of 31.

Yet, as I advanced early in my career, I constantly found myself as the sole young voice in rooms filled with leaders nearly twice my age. I seldom saw anyone who looked or shared my background at the board level, making it hard to imagine a future where I truly belonged.

My development was also driven more by circumstance than by a robust professional development programme. I often found myself navigating uncharted territory, knowing that 'what got me here, won't get me there', but having no context on what would get me there. I learnt very much in the job, from a series of chaotic organisations and projects rather than benefiting from a structured mentoring process or solid development goals.

These 'trial by fire' experiences may work for a lucky few, but they are not a scalable or, frankly, desirable way to continue nurturing emerging talent. Especially today, where the Mental Health First Aid report in 2024 found that 79% of employees experience moderate-to-high stress levels (with younger employees and women particularly affected), it is imperative that we as business leaders invest in professional development in a structured and safe way rather than leave it to chance or chaos to determine who emerges into leadership.

But here is where we have a further challenge, with the recent IoD Scotland State of the Nation survey revealing that 56% of businesses do not engage in any workplace training scheme, and



As I advanced early in my career, I constantly found myself as the sole young voice in rooms filled with leaders nearly twice my age. I seldom saw anyone who shared my background at the board level...





46% have no engagement at all universities or colleges. Structured development is crucial not only to enhance career growth but also to serve as a guard against the overt stress and mental health risks that unstructured and unplanned career 'development' bring.

#### Barriers and solutions

But these challenges don't solely come from a lack of training. Institutional bias and common perceptions of what a board should look like all contribute to an environment where many capable aspiring leaders can feel excluded from directorship.

One of the most frustrating challenges I encountered early in my career was the persistent feeling of not quite belonging. The traditional image of a director – predominantly older, well off and male – can make it hard for those who deviate from that mould to even envision themselves in senior roles.

So, how do we reimagine boardrooms to reflect the rich diversity of our society, particularly in Scotland where innovation thrives amid unique local challenges? The answer lies in purposeful action.

First, we as directors must meaningfully invest in and commit to structured professional development. Whether it be through mentorship, training, shadowing, or anything else, we have to enable our aspiring directors to become actual directors.

Second, succession planning is critical. With a third of the UK's workforce over 50, businesses need to be thinking now about who their next generation of leaders are and how to get them to that point, and not leave it to chance.

With more IoD networking events specifically aimed at aspiring directors and championing diverse role models, we not only can enable aspiring directors but encourage more people to aspire to be directors in the first place.

“

**Just 12.5% of directors come from minority ethnic backgrounds – and a true gender balance is also lacking, as women account for only 43% of board members**

”

# IS MY SHIP SEAWORTHY?

**It's a question every mariner asks constantly, says Ewan Rattray, Harbour Master & Director of Port Operations, Peterhead Port Authority... should an SME director ask the same?**



**I AM 18 months into my journey as a director in a medium-sized enterprise. My career started at sea, more specifically in the Merchant Navy. Prior to stepping ashore over seven years ago now, I would navigate vessels around the world, transporting cargo or conducting services at sea.**

Ships are themselves similar to SMEs. Although they usually operate under the umbrella of a larger

company, the ships' crew, or more specifically the master, has overall responsibility for the safe and successful operation of the ship and its cargo.

The overarching legal responsibility put on a vessel's master is to ensure the ship is seaworthy. In legal terms, a 'seaworthy' vessel is one that is fit for its intended purpose, properly equipped, and sufficiently maintained to withstand the ordinary

perils of the sea.

Sounds simple, and you might be asking yourself what this has to do with being an aspiring director.

Well, a ship being seaworthy covers everything from the way the ship's steel is constructed to employment contracts for the crew, and everything in-between.

Just like a ship's master, a director of a business needs to know their ship is secure and ready for sea. Just like the master though, this involves having oversight of every area of the ship.

Now that is easier said than done, especially for a new director.

'Is my ship seaworthy' is a question I ask myself every day. That one simple question allows me to think about the organisation from a wider perspective both operationally and

Photographs courtesy of  
Peterhead Ports Authority



in the boardroom.

For example, from an operational perspective, it can lead a director into having a deeper dive into the company's processes. Take any activity in your business and ask 'is my ship seaworthy'? Or in other words, is it in the best possible condition it can be to complete its primary design purpose while weathering any storms?

If it's not, the great thing is, you can put an improvement plan in place and evidence that you, as a director, are discharging a key responsibility. All while improving the business.

The other interesting thing about asking yourself, 'is my ship seaworthy?', is at the end of the day, organisations need to navigate into potentially dangerous waters; we need to take risks. It is imperative that as directors, prior to taking these risks, we ensure the business has a solid governance structure in place and the risk is consistent with the strategy and risk appetite.

The final benefit of asking 'is my ship seaworthy' is that it can lead to asking the right questions in the boardroom. We keep reading in the news about catastrophic governance failings. Hindsight is a great tool, but it is hard to imagine how some of these decisions managed to get through robust and diverse governance structures. We often look at these cases and think, what if



**The final benefit of asking 'is my ship seaworthy', is that it can lead to asking the right questions in the boardroom... what if someone had taken a step back and asked, do these questions truly align with our principles?**



someone had taken a step back and asked, do these decisions truly align with our principles? Are these decisions being made with the best interests of our stakeholders?

New and aspiring directors likely will bring a different perspective to the table, and these perspectives are so important for good governance. This is why it is crucial for them to stand up and ask the right questions.

With that in mind, just like the master of a ship, ask yourself, is my ship fit for its intended purpose, properly equipped, and sufficiently maintained to withstand the ordinary perils of the sea?

Hopefully, by asking yourself this simple question, it will help to lead you down a path of good governance.

## IoD appoints top trio to positions on its Council

The Institute of Directors has appointed Allie Renison, Philippe Vogeeler, and Menai Owen-Jones to its Council following a comprehensive search process.

Together, they join the IoD Council to help oversee and advise the IoD Board, ensuring that it meets the Institute's Charter goals and maintains its gold standard reputation for corporate governance.

Ms Renison is currently Director of Advocacy Practice at SEC Newgate, and was previously Head of EU and Trade Policy at the IoD. She has 15 years of experience working with stakeholders across Westminster and Whitehall, having previously served as Head of Strategy, Trade Advocacy in the Department for International Trade and Policy Advisor to the Secretary of State in the Department for Business and Trade.

Mr Vogeeler is a Chartered Director with over 25 years of experience in the ICT sector. Originally a tech lawyer, he has held senior positions in legal and regulatory, strategy, and in business development for Orange Group, Ooredoo Group, and Vodafone Group globally.

He now supports a wide range of fintech, tech, and investment companies globally.

Ms Owen-Jones is a Chartered Director with a portfolio career as an award-winning chief executive, NXD and independent adviser. She previously served as Chief Executive of The Pituitary Foundation and is now Chief Executive of LATCH Welsh Children's Cancer Charity.

She is a Fellow of the IoD, the Royal Society of Arts, and the Institute of Welsh Affairs.

Ms Renison and Mr Vogeeler joined the IoD Council on 22 April. Ms Owen-Jones will assume the role on 1 June.

# Mistakes are still the best learning opportunity you'll ever have

Helping to equip early-career professionals with the skills they will need to be future business leaders is a challenge that Emma Alkirwi says is easier if you look on mistakes as opportunities for learning and growth

**A**s the founder and director of a CV writing company, I have extensive experience interviewing directors – and future directors – as part of the process of preparing their application documents.

Talking to people across different industries and practices has taught me a huge amount about how people work. As a result, I think a lot about the next generation.

How can we equip early-career professionals with the skills and experience needed to step into director roles?

In my opinion, future directors need a combination of insight and responsibility to prepare them for their career progression. The insight part comes from supportive mentoring.

This needs to go beyond training. Structured progression conversations and targeted development plans are key to preparing emerging professionals for their future careers. Create an environment where they feel comfortable asking questions, raising concerns, and sharing their future ambitions.

Leading by example is an essential part of this mentoring journey. We can see countless examples of how

Gen Z is starting to reject 'hustle culture' in search of a better work/life balance. Existing directors have to demonstrate the positives of their role, how this can be achieved and lead by example.

Then, the responsibility part comes from learning opportunities. Everyone needs first-hand experience as they go along to gain a real-world understanding of what being a director entails.

When I founded The CV Guru in 2016, I became the director of a company overnight, so I know personally that the learning curve can be steep!

Allowing high potential professionals to lead on projects or take ownership of certain tasks helps to build their experience and confidence.

By the time they apply for director roles, they will have a range of invaluable experience to include on their CV – and, most importantly, feel like they are ready to take on the commitment full-time.

Finally, a key part of preparing talent for director roles is providing a safe space to make mistakes.

As a director, I hold monthly 1-2-1 meetings with every member of my team. During these meetings, I always ask three core questions:

■ What has been your proudest achievement this month?

■ What do you think hasn't gone so well – and what have you learned from it?

■ What support do you need moving forward?

Mistakes are never penalised in these meetings. Instead, we chat them through in a supportive environment and set up an action plan to try and ensure they don't happen again.

In these meetings, I always provide feedback on what I believe each person is doing well, alongside offering advice and new opportunities to build on their strengths, address areas for growth, and develop their skills.

Mistakes need to be treated as growth opportunities.

As long as people learn from them, they are a valuable experience that are essential to both personal and professional development.

■ **Emma Alkirwi is the founder and director of The CV Guru Limited, an award-winning CV writing company that creates attention-grabbing CVs, cover letters, and LinkedIn profiles for clients in the UK and Australia.**



“

Future directors need a combination of insight and responsibility to prepare them for their career progression. The insight part comes from supportive mentoring.

”



Alasdair McGill (Managing Director), Jared Cordner (Operational Director) and Andy McGill (Co-Founder)

# Embracing new experiences is essential for aspiring leaders

**You should never underestimate the value in asking questions, says Andy McGill**



**W**HEN I first started Ashton McGill, I had no experience with governance or board roles. As the business began to grow, I quickly realised that to thrive, I needed to keep learning and embrace new skills and experiences.

Every new step – whether joining a committee or participating in industry forums – introduced me to fresh perspectives and innovative ways of thinking. These experiences didn't just enrich me personally, they directly contributed to the growth and resilience of our business. I found that being curious and asking questions, no matter how basic, was incredibly valuable. It allowed me to develop deeper insights and make better-informed decisions.

Formal training and mentorship from experienced directors helped me navigate the complexities of leadership, corporate governance,

and risk management. By proactively seeking out this knowledge, we've been able to build Ashton McGill on solid governance principles – something that's just as important in a small business as it is in a global one. That early investment in learning helped create a sustainable foundation for future growth.

My role on external boards also taught me important lessons. For example, serving on the board of a Community Interest Company (CIC) during a period of significant financial challenge was particularly tough. However, through strong governance, open communication, and prompt decision-making, we were able to navigate those challenges. This experience reaffirmed my belief in the

importance of timely action and applying sound governance.

Reflecting on my journey, I've realised that continuous learning and embracing new experiences are not just optional – they're essential for anyone aspiring to leadership or directorship roles.

If you're thinking about taking that next step towards directorship, I encourage you to stay curious, keep asking questions, and seek experiences outside your comfort zone.

The personal and professional rewards are genuinely transformative.

**■ Andy McGill is the Co-Founder of Ashton McGill, an accounting business known for its people-first approach**

“

Every new step introduced me to fresh perspectives and innovative ways of thinking. These experiences didn't just enrich me personally, they directly contributed to the growth and resilience of our business.

”

# The Information Age... and why it can empower directors

The Information Age can empower the budding director says industry commentator Bill Magee. Especially if they take full advantage of the rapid pace of digital change by adopting a pragmatic digital mindset to lead an organisation towards commercial success.



**B**ACK in the heady 90s, as the story goes, the busy executive would switch off from a week of high-powered decision making.

A PC languishing on their desk corner would catch their eye. They would blow off the dust, switching it on to indulge in a well-earned hour or two of gaming.

That was as far as they would go when it came to embracing what was then a budding tech revolution.

Nowadays, what with Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z, and now Gen Alpha, one would think everybody is digitally literate.

This is not necessarily the case. It's one thing effortlessly handling one's mobile and laptop on a virtual 24/7 basis as second nature to keep in touch with social media platforms and the like.

It is quite a different situation developing a thorough understanding over what can amount to complex commercial needs emanating from ever-rising demands of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).

## Bottom line?

An annual government technology tracker reveals concerns over the rise in AI has intensified. Yet MIT Technology proclaims that AI can 'supercharge creativity'.

A downside is revealed by a Vodafone Business survey revealing small to medium-sized businesses are now losing £3.4 billion from cyber security attacks. Blackfrog research shows ransomware activity continues on the rise.

Tech Nation's 2025 Report shows the UK AI sector is worth £180 billion (\$230bn), making it the largest AI market in Europe with three-quarters of IT leaders stating it is driving their business growth.

So, of course, digital led by GenAI can offer up exciting commercial times for the ambitious organisation and aspiring director making their executive move towards the C-Suite.

As long as AI is handled with commercial 'tlc'. Just remember that power shower...(see below)

## Why burnout is still the director's curse

Worried you may be at risk of burnout? Try Alasdair Hendry's four-pointer of ways to avoid the curse; they have carried him through to become managing director following the successful MBO of Exception:

**Have a shower:** Before a big call, let it simmer overnight and hit the shower. Give yourself that 24-hour buffer to wrestle with it. I've found the fog clears by morning and time isn't always as critical with some things.

**Find your sanity valve:** This gig's a pressure cooker! Endless fires, and

the weight of everyone's jobs. Carve out something to give you some time – anything. A drop of whisky, a run, a bad guitar habit, sailing, cycling, it all keeps you from cracking.

Everyone tells you this but it's true: burnout's the real enemy.

**Embrace the chaos:** You're not just steering the ship; you own the mess. Get comfortable with sleepless nights.

**Build a diverse network:** Engage with professionals across industries to gain insights, and broaden perspectives.





*Scott McGlinchey (left)  
with Exception's new  
MD, Alasdair Hendry*

## Meeting a challenging digital era

DIGITAL entrepreneur Alasdair Hendry, the buyer of Exception, one of Scotland's leading and long-standing technology companies, is in prime position to spell out how to prepare oneself for the demanding and responsible role of director.

Hendry, its head of transformation, is now managing director following a management buyout which saw IoD Fellow and ex-CEO Scott McGlinchey hand over the reins of one of Scotland's premier IT businesses.

Exception's client base over two decades-plus lists a veritable who's who of financial giants, including state-owned £2 billion Scottish National Investment Bank and American Express, along with, in the public sector, the UK's second largest force, Police Scotland, City of London Police and Scottish Prisons.

The move by the 46-year-old Alasdair – a 'Gen X' (just) and a product of Harvard Business School Online – stands out as a refreshing example of ultra-modern entrepreneurship in an increasingly challenging digital world.

It is now a case of taking



Alasdair and his team's vision aligns perfectly with the innovative spirit we've always championed.



Exception Mark II to the next level in the burgeoning but commercially uncertain era of generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI).

Exception's new managing director explains how they are tapping into what leading analyst Gartner predicts as a rise in GenAI spending soaring to £500 billion (\$644bn) globally this year.

It represents an overwhelming 76.4 per cent leap from 2024. "Our pragmatic approach avoids the situation where many businesses stumble at the GenAI proof-of-concept (poc) stage."

By designing a client's business change plans and aligning strategy-and-outcomes upfront, pitfalls of failed pocs are sidestepped to

unlock "real value" in an organisation.

Exception's dedicated and hand-picked leadership team now has a renewed focus – one that's centred on helping businesses harness AI to operate more efficiently through cutting-edge solutions that simultaneously drive productivity and cost savings.

"We are thrilled to take this bold step forward," Hendry says. "This buyout is a testament to the strength of everyone in the company, trust in our stakeholders and our belief in the exceptional value we deliver."

He adds they are poised to accelerate growth, invest in their people and sharpen the drive to support organisations to make the most of AI through a seamless streamlining of operations all round.

IoD Fellow Scott McGlinchey, who held several executive roles in Exception, latterly chief executive officer, and who has now retired, sums up: "Alasdair and his team's vision aligns perfectly with the innovative spirit we've always championed."

# IoD membership and benefits

We're delighted that you have chosen the IoD to support you in your development as a director, and we hope you get real value from your membership.

The IoD Scotland team is always looking to enhance your membership with exclusive discounts on products and

services, helping make your role that little bit easier, kinder on the budget and – most importantly – more convenient. We have outlined some of the key benefits here.

For a full summary and discount codes, contact [patricia.huth@iod.com](mailto:patricia.huth@iod.com)

## Introducing.... IoD Mentor Connect

### Introducing a brand new IoD member benefit...

The IoD Mentor Connect platform is designed to connect members looking for support and guidance on their leadership journey with those that want to share the benefit of their experience.

Whether you are an aspiring or experienced director, or anything in between, our platform makes it easy to find and build your support network, share your experiences and learn from others.

Access to the platform is free to all members.

Find out more by accessing the IoD Mentor Connect platform [HERE](#)



## Dundee opens doors on latest IoD member meeting space

IoD Scotland is pleased to be partnering with **DunEden Business Centre** (formerly Affinity Business Centre) in Dundee to introduce an exciting new member hub.

Located just off the A90, DunEden Business Centre offers users free parking, gym access and tea and coffee as well as a variety of hot desking and meeting space.

Full details of the exclusive IoD member offer are highlighted below:

- Free 2 x hot desks in a designated hot desk office space
- Free 2 x hot desking areas in large canteen room
- Free utilities – gas, electricity, wi-fi
- Free use of gym and showers
- Free teas and coffees
- Free car parking



- EV charge points – charged at Dundee City Council rates which are less than all the other private EV rates at present. (pin provided by our receptionist – user would

probably have to make payment in cash or card at end of day)

- Board room hire £20ph + vat or £140 per day + vat (8hr day).
- Training room hire at special rates.

# Hotels, dining and accommodation

## Unique offers and discounts for IoD members

### EDINBURGH

#### The George

The George, a Grade-II listed hotel, is complemented by elegant interiors, from the bedrooms to the grand King's Hall.

All with the very best of Edinburgh's shopping, restaurants and nightlife on your doorstep.

To enjoy up to 15% off on rates covering free cancellation up to one day before your stay, use your IoD corporate special rate code when booking online. **Click here.**

#### Kimpton Charlotte Square Hotel

Overlooking one of Edinburgh's prettiest private garden squares, this hotel consists of seven inter-connected Georgian townhouses.

With a magnetic inner courtyard and an acclaimed Middle Eastern restaurant, it's no wonder the hotel has become a natural meeting point and a sociable heart of modern life.

Enjoy up to 15% off on accommodation when booking online by using your IoD corporate special rate code. **Click here.**

#### Eden Locke

Eden Locke offers the fusion of the privacy and personality of a designer apartment with the facilities of a boutique hotel. Use your online code



to enjoy up to 10% off best available rates. **Click here.**

#### Other offers:

**Cheval Collection** - 20% discount on accommodation rates.

**Angel Share** - Get 15% off the base room rate.

**Malmaison** - Enjoy a 10% discount on accommodation and dining at sites in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

### GLASGOW

#### Native ApartHotel

Packed with history. Updated with style. Minutes from everything.

Enjoy an opulent, art deco setting situated within the heart of Glasgow, with a 24-hour reception, two on-site restaurants and a range of original features kept intact in this beautiful Edwardian building.

Enjoy up to 15% off the best

### Unlock offers

Interested in accessing these discounts, or in finding out about them and other venues across Scotland where IoD membership can unlock benefits?

Contact [iod.scotland@iod.com](mailto:iod.scotland@iod.com) for details

available rates when using our IoD special code online. **Click here.**

#### Citizen M

Located just around the corner from Glasgow Central station, enjoy the highlights of the city centre on your doorstep.

This boutique hotel combines cosy bedrooms with communal living and kitchen areas for a lively feel.

Book online to enjoy up to 10% off the best available rates using our code. **Click here.**

#### Apex City of Glasgow Hotel

Everything from this hotel's modern, eye-catching exterior to its tasteful interior is designed for comfort and a unique experience.

Get up to 12% off the best available rates when using our promo code online. **Click here.**

## Say hello to YOTEL

**IoD Scotland members are now eligible for the YOTEL Work Perk programme.**

This special offer gives you access to a host of great benefits, including complimentary breakfast, early check-in/late check-out and a 5% discount on the room rate.

To book at a YOTEL, the easiest method is by clicking on the below link and entering your dates/hotel of choice:

**CLICK HERE**

Or you can enter your corporate ID straight into the Corporate/Promo code section of the website, at [www.yotel.com](http://www.yotel.com)



Top, YOTEL Glasgow. Inset, VEGA, on the top floor of YOTEL Glasgow.

# Diploma in Company Direction

The next stage in your development as a chartered director



**Diploma in Company Direction: Back in Scotland for the first time since 2019!**

**Date: June 23-25**

**Venue: Apex Waterloo Place Hotel, Edinburgh**

The Diploma in Company Direction is a Masters level (SCQF) qualification and the second stage in our Chartered Director Programme, with a focus on developing your board performance. Three days of practical, simulated boardroom challenges in a safe environment will set you up for the diploma examination and have an immediate impact on your performance as a director.

**Cost: Members £4,550 + VAT; Non-members, £5,350 + VAT**



**Find out more:  
Click the button  
for more details**

## Key objectives

- Build on the knowledge gained from the Certificate in Company Direction and boost your expertise and confidence as a director.
- Gain an understanding of your board's role, its dynamic, power, influence and conflicts
- Insights into risk and crisis management, decision-making, and mergers and acquisitions
- Access to techniques and tools to improve your own competencies and evaluate board performance
- Using the latest real-world scenarios and insights, the course encourages peer learning, challenge and reflective practice.

## Leadership for Directors

**Date: November 26-27**

**Venue: Apex Waterloo Place Hotel, Edinburgh**

**Cost: Members, £3,250 + VAT; Non-Members, £3,750 + VAT**

This course introduces a personalised approach to leadership, helping you to understand and develop self-awareness and emotional intelligence.

You will learn different leadership and decision making techniques, determine how to build and sustain high-performing teams, and evaluate how these tools can be applied to your own organisation to contribute to increased success.

*"This course provided a great opportunity for discussion and sharing experience among delegates with a wide range of roles in various sections."*

**Amanda Stewart,  
Policing Board**

• Click [HERE](#) for more details

## Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction

**Date: September 28 – October 3**

**Venue: Norton House Hotel, Edinburgh**

**Cost: Members, £10,695 + VAT; Non-members £13,895 + VAT**

The IoD Scotland Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction five-day intensive residential course is set at Norton House Hotel in Edinburgh. This intensive residential course for experienced directors is designed to fit around your schedule, enabling you to be more effective in your director role in just five and a half days.

### Why attend?

Achieve the IoD Certificate in Company Direction in a flexible way and without taking focus away from your professional life.

### Who will benefit?

Any busy director who simply cannot take too much time away from the demands of their business and who is looking for a fast-track method of achieving the certificate in company direction.

Using a practical approach, each of the four Certificate in Company Direction modules will equip you with the knowledge and skills needed for effective performance, covering the key areas of governance, leadership, finance and strategy. You will explore different business aspects first-hand by meeting course leaders and delegates from a mix of sectors and hear different perspectives, helping to broaden your understanding of your role.

Practical learning enhanced by real-life scenarios and peer collaboration will provide you with the essential knowledge and skills for immediate application and maximum impact. As this course is condensed into five days, all parts of the course are mandatory.

• Click [HERE](#) for more details

## Role of the Director and the Board

**Date: 28-29 July**

**Venue: Online**

**Cost: Members, £3,250 + VAT**

**Non-Members, £3,750 + VAT**

This course provides an introduction to a director's duties and legal responsibilities and the board's role in corporate governance and risk management. You'll leave with confidence to tackle boardroom challenges, equipped to take your career to the next level.

• Click [HERE](#) for more details

### What delegates said:

*"This module really articulated the responsibilities of directors, especially from a legal point of view. I doubt most directors are actually aware of what they are liable for, and I believe there should be some sort of mandatory training for directors such as this when they join a board."*

**Paul Bolton, CDir, ONECPD**

## Finance for Non-Finance Directors

**Date: June 10-12**

**Venue: Apex Waterloo Place Hotel, Edinburgh**

**Cost: Members, £3,550 + VAT**

**Non-Members, £4,150 + VAT**

This course has been designed to demystify the world of finance for non-finance directors and senior managers. It will give you an understanding of key financial concepts and terminology. You will leave with the skills and knowledge needed to evaluate business plans, question financial information and contribute more effectively to boardroom decision-making.

• Click [HERE](#) for more details

### What delegates said:

*"This is an excellent course for someone venturing into finance for the first time. It was extremely useful and well presented throughout."*

**Ian McNaught, Trinity House**



"My experience of the Accelerated Certificate programme was probably the best learning week of my career so far, so clearly it comes very highly recommended."

**Bernard Grenville-Jones CDir, MD, Activate Learning**

## Strategy for Directors

**Date: September 9-11**

**Venue: Apex Waterloo Place Hotel, Edinburgh**

This course will enable you to develop robust strategic planning processes for your organisation. By providing frameworks, tools and the opportunity to apply them, our course leaders will work with you to develop both understanding and skills helping you to gain the confidence to grow yourself and future-proof your business.

**Cost: Members, £3,550 + VAT; Non-Members, £4,150 + VAT**

• Click [HERE](#) for more details

*"Exceptional teacher – extremely knowledgeable and able to dig deeper on the subject with considerable experience and well-read theory and practice together."*

**Paul Burke, MoD**

# IoD Scotland events diary

## Members Connect for new and aspiring directors

**Date:** May 7  
**Time:** 10am — 11am  
**Venue:** Online  
**Cost:** Free of charge

IoD Glasgow and West of Scotland is delighted to host this Members Connect for new and aspiring directors, giving them a great opportunity to connect with others in a similar position.

If you are starting your journey as

a new leader or director, a strong network can be invaluable. This session will be hosted by Ezra Wilson, a member of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Committee. Ezra became a director in June 2024 and has recently been appointed managing director of V360, part of Prime Secure.

**Contact 0131 557 5488**  
**Patricia.Huth@iod.com**



## Spring Economic Update

**Date:** May 12  
**Time:** 12pm — 1pm  
**Venue:** Online  
**Cost:** Free of charge

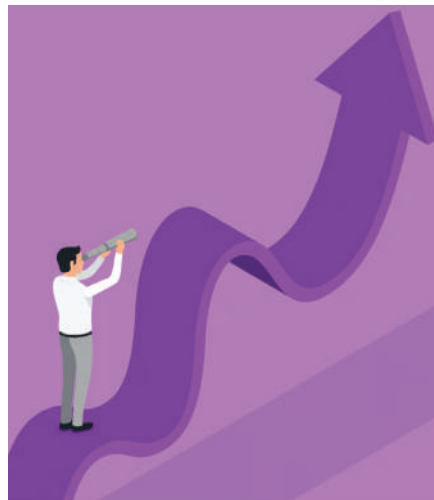
Keep up to date with the trends and analysis by listening to IoD's quarterly economic updates with the Bank of England.

The Bank's next Monetary Policy Committee meeting will take place on May 8. On May 12 we will hear from the Bank's London agent Rob Elder and IoD Chief Economist Anna Leach to discuss the outcomes.

In this members-only event, Rob Elder will present on the progress over the last quarter and the Bank's forecast for the year ahead, followed by Anna Leach who will explore the latest UK economic outlook and what it means for directors and their businesses.

Rob and Anna will cover various points, such as:

- Whether inflationary pressure is rising or falling
- How supply and demand is affecting the economy
- What the latest GDP data is
- How confident IoD members are

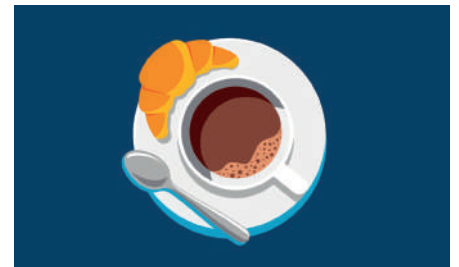


feeling, their biggest concerns and views on main barriers to growth.

This event is an excellent opportunity for leaders to hear more about the UK and global economic outlook for 2025.

Note: this event will be run under Chatham House Rules.

**Organiser:** Events Team  
**Contact:** events@iod.com



## Networking Breakfast

**Date:** May 20  
**Time:** 8:30am — 10:30am  
**Venue:** Royal Northern and University Club

Continuing the theme of a varied branch event programme, IoD Aberdeen & Grampian will hold the next networking breakfast for members at the Royal Northern & University Club, Aberdeen. It is the perfect chance to connect with other IoD members via a networking breakfast. We have an exciting and informative plan for 2025, and a committee made up of subject matter experts across a range of topics.

This event will provide the opportunity to meet other members in an informal environment and to gain an update on committee activity.

**Organiser:** Patricia Huth  
**Contact:** 0131 557 5488  
**Patricia.Huth@iod.com**

# IoD Central Scotland Annual Dinner

## Leadership: Navigating through difficult times

**Date:** May 15

**Time:** 5:45pm – 9:45pm

**Venue:** The Gallery Restaurant, Forth Valley College, Stirling FK8 1SE

**Cost:** Members, free of charge

**Non-members, £120**

**Sponsored by Forth Valley College**

The IoD Central Scotland Annual Dinner is back for 2025. Hosted again at the fantastic Gallery restaurant, courtesy of our sponsors, Forth Valley College, the event blends connections with fellow members – both new connections and reconnections – with a sumptuous three-course meal in a stunning setting.



We are delighted to welcome a panel of expert speakers, who have lived through challenges themselves and are willing to share their leadership journeys to stimulate debate. Their stories will include

how to navigate through difficult times, helping us to consider our own effective approaches as we guide our organisations through the current challenging market conditions.

With the kind generosity of the College, we are delighted to be able to offer such a valuable event for members **free of charge**.

An event not to be missed – this is rightly one of the flagship events in our annual calendar.

**Organiser:** Patricia Huth

**Contact:** 0131 557 5488

**Patricia.Huth@iod.com**

## Generative AI Governance: A guide for UK SMEs

**Date:** May 20

**Time:** 2pm – 3pm

**Venue:** Online

**Cost:** Member, Free

**Non-member, £10**

**Sponsored by Diligent**



Learn about the latest whitepaper on AI from Diligent, the leading GRC SaaS company, on the opportunities and challenges posed by generative AI.

Diligent has published its latest whitepaper on generative AI in collaboration with the IoD, to help directors understand exactly what generative AI is and the possibilities it creates.

As generative AI reshapes industries, UK SMEs must navigate both its opportunities and challenges. How can your business harness AI-driven innovations – like personalised customer experiences and intelligent automation – while ensuring transparency, security, and effective governance?

Join our expert-led webinar to explore key insights. We'll cover:

- The differences between open and closed AI systems
- Data security considerations and risk mitigation
- The role of upskilling in AI

■ Addressing AI risks, including bad actors and ethical concerns

■ Practical strategies for integrating generative AI into business operations.

This session is designed specifically for SME directors looking to implement AI responsibly and strategically. Gain expert perspectives, ask your pressing concerns, and leave with actionable steps to future-proof your business.

It will be led by Dr Erin Young, who is head of Innovation and Technology Policy at the IoD where she leads the IoD's policy, strategy and thought leadership work on technology, science and innovation.

Erin will be joined by Samantha Kappagoda, independent director, Credit Suisse Funds where she contributes insights in the boardroom by leveraging her operating experience harnessing data and analytics to drive ROI and mitigate risk.

**Organiser:** Events Team

**Contact:** events@iod.com

## Future-proofing your workforce: Leveraging SCQF to help close skills gaps

**Date:** May 21

**Time:** 1:30pm – 2:30pm

**Venue:** Online

**Cost:** Free of charge

While most employers say they need skills, they often rely on traditional qualification requirements when advertising job roles.

This webinar seeks to address this disconnect and explore practical solutions.

Featuring speakers Greg Bremner, formerly with Rocket Environmental Services, Michelle Reid from Institute of Occupational Medicine and Craig McFadzean at ScotRail, who will share insights about skills-based recruitment.

**Organiser:** Patricia Huth

**Contact:** 0131 557 5488

**Patricia.Huth@iod.com**



# IoD advice for fledgling directors

**Date:** May 21

**Venue:** Online

**Time:** 12pm - 1pm

**Cost:** Members, Free

**Non-members, £10**

Join us for a taster session with two of our Information and Advisory Service advisors on how you can start your new business, and learn how this core IoD membership benefit could help you.

Starting a business can be exciting but also overwhelming, requiring knowledge of market conditions and legal compliance. Our Information and Advisory Service gives IoD full members access to an external

panel of advisors who are equipped to give you the support you need for your business endeavours.

Join this one-hour webinar with Stephen Cooper, legal and business advisor, and Chris Coyle, chartered accountant, as they break down the key steps to launching your venture, from choosing the right business structure to understanding tax obligations.

This session is designed to guide aspiring entrepreneurs through the crucial early stages of business formation.

Our experts will cover:

- The different business structures you can trade under

- Key legal considerations when setting up a business

- How taxes work for different business types

- Essential steps to ensure compliance and protect your business

Whether you're in the early planning stages or ready to take the leap, this session will give you clarity and confidence to move forward. There will also be a Q&A session at the end so come along with any questions you may have.

**Organiser:** Events Team

**Contact:** events@iod.com



## Embrace excellence in networking

**Date:** June 5 & Sept 4

**Time:** 5:30pm — 8pm

**Venue:** Rusacks St. Andrews, Pilmour Links, St Andrews KY16 9JQ

Join us for the next in the series of our informal meet ups for IoD Fife & Tayside members.

We're looking forward to an engaging evening at The Gallery, Rusacks, and we'd love for you to join us. It's a blend of relaxed networking and genuine connections, set against the backdrop of a space where comfort touches on the grand.

For this event, we have teamed up with FSB Scotland to widen our audience and to ensure an even richer and productive networking environment.

Join us any time between 5:30 and 8pm for some stimulating company and great networking.

**Organiser:** Patricia Huth

**Contact:** 0131 557 5488

Patricia.Huth@iod.com

## Fireside Chat Series: What sustainability means to University of Edinburgh

**Date:** June 4

**Time:** 12pm — 2pm

**Venue:** Rathbones Group Plc, 10 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 2PF

**Cost:** Members £10

**Members' guests £15**

**Non-members £20**

Join members of the IoD and their guests for the first in a new series of fireside chats and networking lunch, where we explore how and why different organisations are developing their sustainability initiatives, what impacts they hope to achieve.

In the first we will explore why the University of Edinburgh takes sustainability so seriously with Scott Davidson, head of sustainability at the university. We'll explore aspects of how initiatives are prioritised and embedded into the organisation.

The university is ranked second in

the UK and seventh in the world for sustainability. It is a large and complex organisation with a £1.3bn turnover, and a major landowner with a gross internal area roughly the size of the city of Inverness across its five campuses and 980 hectares in Edinburgh.

This presents unique challenges and opportunities for achieving the University's ambitious sustainability goals; net zero by 2040 and 50% carbon reductions per £ million revenue by the end of this year.

Scott has a very wide remit across the organisation with a particular interest in getting changes to stick by embedding them into the culture.

This is a relaxed but in-depth Chatham House conversation.

**Organiser:** Patricia Huth

**Contact:** 0131 557 5488

Patricia.Huth@iod.com

## IoD Glasgow Summer Drinks

**Date:** June 9; **Time:** 5-11pm; **Cost** Members £30; non-members £35

**Venue:** Radisson Red Sky Bar, Glasgow

IoD Glasgow and West is delighted to be hosting a summer drinks event for the second year, following the success of last year's event. We will be at the wonderful Sky Bar at the Radisson Red. A superb location with wonderful views, where better to spend a summer's evening. Price includes buffet style food and a welcome drink on arrival.

**Organiser:** Patricia Huth **Contact:** 0131 557 5488 Patricia.Huth@iod.com

## Navigating the north-east to a just transition

**Date:** June 12

**Time:** 12pm – 2pm

**Venue:** Robert Gordon University (RGU), Garthdee House, Garthdee Rd Aberdeen AB10 7AQ

**Cost:** Free, members only

How does the north-east of Scotland navigate a just transition?

A just energy transition will present opportunities for businesses and organisations across all sectors. But how do directors and senior executives make the most of these opportunities and contribute to a truly just transition?

This event will include expert input and the opportunity to gain valuable insights via a workshop format.

This event will examine what a just transition really means for the north-east region. It will explore opportunities within, but also beyond the energy industry,

considering particularly the impact on skills development, small businesses and the third sector.

Through expert presentation and discussion, participants will explore how to adapt, thrive and contribute to making a just energy transition a reality for the region. The event aims to foster collaboration, share knowledge and identify actionable steps towards a just transition, emphasising local solutions, inclusion and accountability. It will be a vital discussion for directors and senior executives from all sectors in the region.

Refreshments will be served and parking spaces are available by booking with the event organiser.

**Organiser:** Patricia Huth  
**Contact:** 0131 557 5488  
**Patricia.Huth@iod.com**

## Improving your board through review

**Date:** July 1

**Time:** 9am-10.30am

**Venue:** Online

**Cost:** Free

Join us at this webinar on Board Evaluations to gain insights from our own IoD reviewers on the process, recommendations and outcomes of a board evaluation.

Board evaluations can effectively improve and benefit your board

through review. Our speakers will delve into our board evaluation process, discuss why certain important questions aren't considered by boards and share some of our typical recommendations and outcomes which we've seen through our reviews.

**Organiser:** Events Team  
**Contact:** events@iod.com

## The IoD's Director's Quarterly Update

**Date:** July 8

**Time:** 12pm – 1pm

**Venue:** Online

**Cost:** Free of charge

Get valuable insights on the state of the UK economy and how it could impact your business at the Director's Update virtual event on July 8.

The IoD's Director Quarterly Update examines the state of the UK economy together with regulation, legislation and government policy relevant to directors, and is exclusive to IoD members.

It can be hard to make the right decisions for your organisation when the economic and regulatory outlook is so unpredictable. This is where the IoD Director's Quarterly Update comes into play.

Join us on July 8 to ask the experts and get the inside track on the economy and key developments in regulation and the business environment.

The session will be led by Dr Roger Barker, IoD Director of Policy and Corporate Governance; Alex Hall-Chen, Senior Policy Advisor at the IoD, and Emma Rowland, IoD policy advisor specialising in international trade and EU affairs.

**Organiser:** Events Team  
**Contact:** events@iod.com

## A night to remember with the Edinburgh Tattoo

**Date:** August 19

**Time:** 7pm – 10:40pm

**Venue:** The Balmoral Hotel

**Cost:** Members £130 Non-members £140

Come along to see the world-famous Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo with your fellow IoD members from the Edinburgh & Lothians branch. We will meet in the Annan Suite at the legendary five-star Balmoral Hotel, where we will enjoy a four-course dinner including coffee and wine. After dinner we will head to Edinburgh Castle for the 9.30pm performance of the Tattoo. Places are limited, so please book now. Members and non-members are welcome.

**Organiser:** Patricia Huth  
**Contact:** 0131 557 5488 / Patricia.Huth@iod.com



# Bringing order to your organisation's staff records

## WhosOff has a new Staff Hub to organise records and document storage

Whatever type of business or organisation you're in or run, when you start talking about managing your staff leave or employee sick leave, you will struggle not to say "WhosOff?"

But WhosOff is actually the answer to your problems. It is a proven staff leave application which comes with a 'Staff Hub' area that offers an at-a-glance overview of your organisation's current staffing level.

The application also has a separate 'Document Storage' section, enabling companies to not only manage leave allowances and other staff records but also publish important documents such as the Company Handbook, along with other restricted documents and certificates for individual personnel.

### So who is behind Whosoff?

WhosOff is a global brand managed from Canterbury in Kent and delivered around the world from the UK. WhosOff users in the UK include many high-profile businesses, led by IoD members.

Going live in 2007, WhosOff is a true success story of continued change, growth and innovation that

now sees the application used by more than 2,700 businesses in over 70 countries around the world, who trust it to manage their staff leave, other absence and staff details.

The 'WhosOff' brand is owned and operated by X:drive Computing Limited. Its CEO, Reg Groombridge, believes constant change over the years and continued delivery of customer expectation are the keys to the application maintaining its position as a leader in the staff leave management market.

Reg said: "With the addition of the Staff Hub and Documents Storage areas, we will continue to be a leader in this area of staff management."

### Whosoff - when they're working

Many companies still have staff working from home two or three days a week, and online tools that help companies manage their staff and absence seamlessly, including on their mobile phones, and make important records and documents available, are essential.

Accurate management of all staff leave is critical to having happy employee/employer relations. No one wants to be short-changed on

## Instant leave and overtime management

■ Solving the problem of staff leave, efficiently & in your way

■ Used by over 700,000 users worldwide

■ Manage policies such as staff to staff restrictions

■ Reduce the overhead time and money spent on managing leave

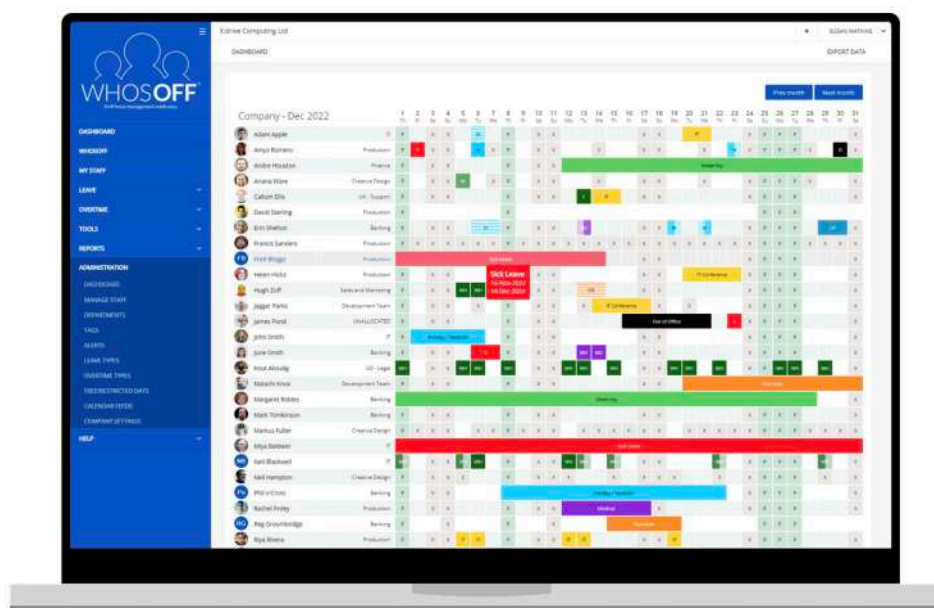
their remaining leave balance and to the same account, an employer does not want to give away extra days in error, due to poor leave management. Employees also don't want to find out, after applying for leave, that too many staff are already off, or key personnel they cannot be off at the same time as, have already booked time off.

With WhosOff everyone can instantly view the holiday plans of others at the time they apply.

WhosOff delivers an accessible, easy-to-use system which also covers the things you need to record about your staff, starting with their leave and absence. The new Staff Hub area can also store and log emergency contacts, right to work details, certificates held, permits, memberships, job title and progression, reminders on expiry dates and renewals, keeping everything tidy for you.

### Take a free trial

IoD Scotland members can try Whosoff for free. Go to [www.whosoff.com](http://www.whosoff.com) to find out more.



# Online staff leave & holiday planner

- ✓ No more wall charts or spreadsheets
- ✓ Prevent staff shortages
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✓ Reporting tools
- ✓ FREE iOS/Android apps
- ✓ Records management
- ✓ Employment & Compensation Tracking
- ✓ Document storage
- ✓ Low cost

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

SCAN ME

**Try the full system, today, for FREE!**

Our work holiday planner allows businesses to manage leave without affecting employee productivity. It's so easy-to-use, you can be up and running in minutes!

WHOSOFF®

# Get the Skills employers are hungry for



Find out more about  
HNCs and HNDs at  
**[hn.sqa.org.uk](http://hn.sqa.org.uk)**