

# Plea for training cash as digital technologies face growing IT talent gap

**BRIAN DONNELLY**

URGENT investment in tech skills is needed to keep Scotland in the global race for expertise, it is claimed as a survey revealed an ever-increasing IT talent gap. Polly Purvis, chief executive of digital technologies sector body ScotlandIS, said industry and government has been working together for some time to ensure Scotland keeps up with tech

skills developments but greater training investment is needed as she commented on research findings from recruitment specialist Robert Half Technology UK. Robert Half found that nine out of 10 chief information officers (CIOs) want government, businesses and universities to act to fill the tech skills gap. A further 20 per cent believe that more investment in training, closer collaboration with educators and additional government

initiatives are the best ways to tackle the problem. Ms Purvis said the industry and government's ICT and Digital Technologies Skills Investment Plan is ongoing but challenges remain. She said: "We would echo the call for more investment in digital technology skills. As the world changes and digital permeates all aspects of the Scottish economy the demand for specialist digital skills is only growing.

"Adding to the continuing growth of all sectors of the digital technologies industry from IT to telecoms, to software and games development and digital media, are new and developing disciplines such as data science, cyber, artificial intelligence and Internet of Things which are fueling that demand. "We're fortunate to benefit from a strong working partnership between industry and Scottish Government, and its

skills agencies, around the ICT and Digital Technologies Skills Investment Plan to tackle many of the challenges highlighted in the Robert Half report. "But there is more to be done if we are to ensure we have the skills for a truly 21st century digital economy. We need to increase the investment in digital technology skills at all levels and we must do that urgently if we are to remain competitive in a global race for talent."

Matt Weston, UK managing director at Robert Half, said: "This is a worldwide issue that is particularly prominent in IT as digital transformation, automation and industry 4.0 shapes the future of the working world." Businesses face increasing competition for talent in the sector, with 79% of CIOs claiming it is now more challenging to find qualified professionals than five years ago and warning of a possible tech talent exodus.

# Wood wins bumper refinery contracts

**MARK WILLIAMSON**

WOOD has won significant contracts to support the upgrading of a giant refinery in Norway which will help the firm to reduce its reliance on the oil and gas exploration and production business.

Aberdeen-based Wood said it had been awarded "large strategic modifications contracts" covering the Mongstad refinery near Bergen by Equinor, formerly known as Statoil.

The refinery is the largest in Norway and around half its output is exported. The work under the contract will include supporting efforts to reduce sulphur content in gasoline produced at the refinery.

Wood said the contract aligns with the company's focus on expanding in the onshore market in Norway.

Led by chief executive Robin Watson, Wood mounted a push for growth in markets such as refining in response to the challenges it faced in the upstream oil and gas market amid the crude price plunge.

This resulted in oil and gas firms slashing spending on new offshore facilities and on upgrades to existing kit in the North Sea. The fall in the oil price helped refiners increase profits.

Wood completed the £2.2 billion acquisition of Amec Foster Wheeler last year to help gain exposure to a wider range of engineering markets and extend its geographic reach.

Mr Watson noted earlier this month there had been a modest increase in activity in the North Sea from a low base following the partial recovery in the crude price since late 2016.

# Channel the power within and change lives, conference told

**SCOTT WRIGHT**  
DEPUTY BUSINESS EDITOR

COMPANIES and public sector organisations have the potential to make big savings, improve services and change lives by harnessing the ideas of their own employees.

That was a key theme to emerge from Scotland's first ever conference dedicated to the growing phenomenon of intrapreneurship, which took place at 200 SVS in Glasgow yesterday.

The Herald Intrapreneurial Conference 2018 was held in association with CivTech Scotland, the Scottish Government organisation which brings public and private sector bodies together to solve problems, develop new products and deliver more efficient services. It was sponsored by Scottish Health Innovations Limited (SHIL), 200 SVS and The Lens, an intrapreneurship programme which can help leaders develop ideas which originate within their own organisations, and featured a speech from the chief executive of Entrepreneurial Scotland, Sandy Kennedy.

The event heard from a range of speakers who outlined the steps being taken by their organisations to foster and implement innovative ideas, and highlighted some of the traditional barriers which have to be overcome to encourage more intrapreneurship.

Lisa Dunlop, OD and change manager at Stirling Council, said there is "no doubt local authorities have a number of additional challenges" to address to change culture and encourage innovation.

That is partly down to traditional, hierarchical ways of working, she said, though the level of public scrutiny councils face can also be barrier to change.

But Ms Dunlop said the council, through its work with CivTech and The Lens, is beginning to change. One innovation she highlighted was suggested by an employee in the council's cemetery service, who came up with an idea to eradicate funeral poverty.

It is ultimately hoped the model, which she said has reduced the average funeral cost by more than half, without any extra investment from the council, could be rolled out across Scotland.

"As a business model it makes sense, but it could actually have a massive social impact in the Stirling area," Ms Dunlop said.

She added: "Everybody knows the financial challenges ahead for local authorities, so that is our driver."

"What we need to do is make sure we do not go down the easy route [by] cutting services - that's the easy thing to do."

"We can completely transform the way that we do things by listening to our employees and citizens. We can actually do a better job by doing things more efficiently."

Maria McGill, chief executive of CHAS (Children's Hospice Association) highlighted the impact made by a change suggested by a gardener and a volunteer at the charity's Robin House - a "home from



The morning panel session, hosted by Rachel McTavish, at the event heard from Maria McGill, Lisa Dunlop, Alexander Holt and Angela Harkness.



home" for families in Balloch. Working in partnership with The Lens, the charity has invested in a comfortable Portakabin in the seven-acre grounds where its volunteers can have something to eat and drink - without disturbing life at the house.

Ms McGill said: "It helps our volunteers who have put in a day's hard work feel valued, wanted, loved and part of our organisation."

Further examples of internal innovation were highlighted by Angela Harkness of the Golden Jubilee Hospital in Clydebank through its work with SHIL, of which it is a shareholder.

These include the Caledonian Technique, which has been designed to enhance the recovery of patients who have undergone hip and knee replacement surgery.

Ms Harkness said the technique, inspired by a development in Denmark, led the hospital to have its first "24-hour hip", which saw the patient walking again on the same day the surgery took place.

Before then, patients would typically stay in hospital for seven to nine days.

Those treated using the technique are not put under general anaesthetic for operations, which take place under an epidural.

Ms Harkness said: "We have reduced patient time in hospital [and] created massive cost efficiencies, not only in Scotland but around the world."

The hospital has also set up a "Dragons' Den" system through which members of staff can pitch for funding from the hospital and SHIL for their innovations.

Alexander Holt, who heads the CivTech programme for the Scottish Government, highlighted some of the barriers which can sometimes prevent change from taking place within organisations.

He said: "Where you have vested interests, and people who have paid a lot of money developing something, whatever that may be, that will be defended. It takes a lot of courage to stop something."

Mr Holt added: "In business globally, the challenge that innovators have is getting past the proof of concept stage [and] into widespread adoption."

"And if we don't do it as a country, with the collaboration of public [and] private sector, academia, investors, citizen groups, then somebody else will. If we don't do it talent and the opportunities will go elsewhere."

**“We can transform the way we do things by listening to employees and citizens**

Companies such as IBM and Clydesdale Bank also provided speakers to the event.

Sandy Kennedy at Entrepreneurial Scotland said: "We believe that Scotland can become the most entrepreneurial society in the world, and that means being a leading light in supporting intrapreneurship. We were delighted to share stories from intrapreneurial leaders with others curious about changing their culture and creating more value for their organisations."

Graham Watson, executive chairman of SHIL, said: "SHIL are proud to have supported Scotland's first Intrapreneurial Conference, sharing our experience of supporting innovation and intrapreneurialism across NHS Scotland."

"The success of products and spin out companies originating from NHS Scotland is testament to the talent and commitment of Scotland's health professionals and endorses the important role of SHIL in bringing their ideas to life."

Steven McCreadie, chief executive of The Lens, said: "Scotland's first ever intrapreneurship conference was a huge success and we, at The Lens, look forward to continuing to building a community of intrapreneurs off the back of it."

A spokesperson for 200 SVS said: "We've thoroughly enjoyed hosting and sponsoring the first ever Intrapreneurial Conference in Scotland."

# Union warning over delays to support payments

**FARMING**  
**GORDON DAVIDSON**

FARMERS and crofters have struggled through 18 months of the most challenging conditions in memory - and some have done so while still awaiting support payments delayed since 2017.

Ongoing problems with ScotGov's rural payments IT system have afflicted a variety of Scottish Rural Development Programme (Pillar 2) schemes, snarling up outstanding monies under the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme, the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, the Forestry Grant Scheme, Rural Priorities and Land Managers' Options.

The National Farmers Union Scotland this week noted that, for farmers and crofters whose margins are extremely tight, especially through additional costs driven by the extended adverse weather, they can be vital for keeping businesses afloat.

NFUS president Andrew McCornick said: "We must

## MARKET ROUND-UP by Rog Wood

WALLETS Marts held their annual show and sale of Scotch Mule ewe lambs in Castle Douglas on Monday when smaller, "gimmering" types proved more difficult to cash on the year as a result of a shortage of grass and lack of confidence in the sheep trade.

The champion pen was shown by J&A Brown, Macqueston and went on to sell for £154 per head, while the reserve ticket went to Mains of Larg Farmers and fetched £118. The sale topped at £162 for a pen from RJ Shennan & Sons, Farden followed at £160 for the top pen from W Lockhart & Co, Culdoach.



pull out all the stops to ensure payments are made in full as soon as possible. "A farmer or crofter who may not have received

The overall average levelled at £92.91 for 7,266 sold compared to £100.83 for 8,474 last year.

The firm went on to sell 1,197 prime lambs at the same venue yesterday to a top of £100 per head and 225p per kg to average £78.03 and 185.9p (+3.6p on the week).

Cast sheep were a sound trade and sharper on the week with 295 heavy ewes selling to £132 for Bleu de Maine and averaging £63.42, while 54 light/export-type ewes peaked at £59 for Blackfaced and levelled at £42.51.

Messrs Craig Wilson

Ltd sold 14 prime heifers at Ayr yesterday to a top of £1,333.40 per head and 238p per kg to average £1,218.72 and 219.2p, while a prime bullock fetched £1,221 or 220p.

In the rough ring 106 beef cows sold to 178.7p and averaged 128.7p, while 118 dairy cows peaked at 129.1p and levelled at 108.6p. Eight bulls sold to 172.9p and averaged 129.1p, while 18 clean OTM cattle peaked at 182.5p and levelled at 138.8p.

A small offering of eight dairy cattle sold to £1,700 for a Holstein Friesian heifer and averaged £1,201.

disadvantaged areas - who face spiralling costs and flat-lining returns at best.

"Outstanding payments at this time of year can seriously hinder how they are able to plan for the coming winter and spring - undermining efforts to

become more resilient," he warned.

"It is important these payments are made sooner rather than later, not just for the farmers and crofters but also for Scotland's wider rural communities.

"When farmers are properly supported, the positive impact is felt throughout surrounding areas with businesses such as fencers and mechanics all reaping the benefits."

Meanwhile, NFU Scotland's Next Generation Group has written to Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy Fergus Ewing expressing its "extreme disappointment" at the abrupt closure of the New Entrant Capital Grant Scheme.

It has called for urgent clarification of the situation of eligible claimants already in the process of submitting an application, but awaiting paperwork.

For in-depth news and views on Scottish agriculture, see this Friday's issue of The Scottish Farmer or visit [www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk](http://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk)

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