

On Point: CMS Scotland's Annual Business Conference 2025

Scottish business and the new world order
02 October 2025

Edinburgh International Conference Centre
The Exchange Morrison St, Edinburgh

Programme

8.30am	Registration and breakfast
9.05am	Welcome Allan Wernham, Managing Director, CMS Scotland
9.10am	Introduction Kirsty Wark, Broadcaster and Journalist
9.15am	Global economic overview Sebastian Burnside, Chief Economist, NatWest Group
9.40am	The customer of the future: what your business needs to know Will Ullstein, CEO of YouGov (audience questions)
10.10am	Outlook for AI: Promises, perils and pathways Dr Stephanie Hare, Broadcaster and Author on AI and technology, and co-presenter of BBC's AI Decoded (audience questions)
10.40am	Brunch break
11.15am	How can Scottish business thrive in this new world order? Panel discussion facilitated by Kirsty Wark <ul style="list-style-type: none">— Julie Hesketh-Laird, Consultant and Chief Executive FIVS, Co-opted ARC member, Revenue Scotland— Rachel Jones, Head of Smart Works Scotland, entrepreneur, and Non-Executive Director— Stephen McGee, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Friendly— Martin Pibworth, Chief Executive, SSE plc
12.00pm	Frankly Speaking: a life in politics Nicola Sturgeon MSP, former First Minister of Scotland Presentation, followed by Q&A with Kirsty Wark
12.55pm	Summary Allan Wernham, Managing Director, CMS Scotland
1.00 pm	Close

Meet our speakers

(In order of appearance)



Allan Wernham
Managing Director, CMS Scotland

Allan Wernham is Managing Director Scotland and a partner in the Real Estate group based in Glasgow.

With over 25 years' experience, Allan specialises in major development and regeneration projects with a particular focus on prime retail and city centre assets, and in advising large energy and utility companies on their property needs. Allan's experience covers the whole range of development work, from initial acquisitions and development agreements through to letting, financing and disposals. He advises major players in the UK real estate market, including Landsec, Hammerson and Nuveen.

As Managing Director Scotland, Allan is responsible for leading the firm's ambitious growth strategy in Scotland, building on over 260 years of heritage and a market-leading reputation in the key sectors of the 21st century economy.

Allan, alongside the other real estate partners based in Scotland, works closely with the wider UK real estate team to provide a seamless service north and south of the border. Allan is dual qualified to practice as a solicitor in Scotland and England & Wales.



Kirsty Wark
Broadcaster and Journalist

Kirsty Wark stands as a pioneering figure in UK journalism, with a distinguished 30-year tenure on BBC's "Newsnight". Following the 2024 General Election, she stepped down, leaving behind a legacy of holding politicians and public figures to account with her sharp interviewing skills. Kirsty's journey began at BBC Scotland, where she made her mark reporting on significant events, such as the Lockerbie bombing. Her talents soon saw her move to BBC 2's "The Late Show" as a presenter, and in 1993, she joined "Newsnight", becoming a familiar face in both arts and current affairs.

Beyond "Newsnight", Kirsty has hosted "The Review Show" for over a decade and has presented a wide range of BBC arts series and documentaries. Her interviews have spanned a remarkable spectrum, from Margaret Thatcher to Madonna, Harold Pinter to Pete Doherty, and Damian Hirst to George Clooney, to name just a few. She continues to make her mark on Radio 4 with "The Reunion" and regularly presents "Start the Week", alongside her ongoing contributions to arts programmes and cultural history series, including "The Women Who Changed Modern Scotland" and "Panorama" specials. Kirsty's exceptional career has been recognised with several prestigious awards, including BAFTAs for Outstanding Contribution to Broadcasting, Journalist of the Year, and Best Television Presenter. In 2024, her remarkable achievements were celebrated with a lifetime achievement award at the RTS Journalism Awards.



Sebastian Burnside

Chief Economist, NatWest Group

Sebastian Burnside joined the bank in 2009, has been Chief Economist since 2018 and is a trustee of the group's pension scheme. His areas of interest include the economics of net zero, adapting to an ageing society and the microanalysis of customer behaviour. Before joining the bank, Seb worked in economic consulting and for the telecoms regulator Ofcom.



William Ullstein

CEO of YouGov

William was appointed as UK CEO of YouGov in September 2024, a newly created role reflecting the company's strategic focus. Over his nine-year tenure at YouGov, William has demonstrated exceptional leadership across multiple high-performing teams, driving both commercial growth and innovation initiatives.

Prior to joining YouGov, William held senior research and commercial positions at several leading Market Research agencies and start-ups.

William is a sought-after industry speaker, regularly presenting at prestigious events including DMEXCO, IAB, Festival of Marketing, Marketing Week Live, Online Marketing Rockstars, and Cannes Lions.

William holds a BA in Economics from the University of Sussex. Beyond his professional achievements, he is a keen sportsman and proud father of two, bringing the same dedication to his personal life as he does to driving YouGov's continued success.



Dr Stephanie Hare

Broadcaster and Author on AI and technology, and co-presenter of BBC's AI Decoded

Dr Stephanie Hare is a researcher, broadcaster and author focused on technology.

She co-presents "**Artificial Intelligence: Decoded**" on BBC television and contributes to the BBC World Service.

Her first book, **Technology Is Not Neutral: A Short Guide to Technology Ethics**, was named a *Financial Times* Best Technology Book of summer 2022, and her writing has featured in the *Financial Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Guardian/Observer*, the *Harvard Business Review*, *WIRED* and *Computer Weekly*.

She has worked at Accenture, Palantir, and Oxford Analytica; held the Alistair Horne Visiting Fellowship at St Antony's College, Oxford; and earned a PhD and MSc from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and a BA from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, including a year at the Université de la Sorbonne (Paris IV).



Julie Hesketh-Laird

Consultant and Chief Executive FIVS, Co-opted ARC member, Revenue Scotland

Julie Hesketh-Laird is a consultant working with private clients in the food and drink sector. She is Chief Executive of FIVS, the global federation for the wine and vine industry, where she leads international efforts on sustainability, trade, and responsible consumption. Julie has held senior roles at the Scotch Whisky Association and Salmon Scotland, representing some of Scotland's most prominent global brands. She also served as Deputy Chief Executive of Food Standards Scotland, helping shape national food policy and regulation. Julie is currently a non-executive member of Revenue Scotland's Audit & Risk Committee contributing strategic oversight and governance expertise to Scotland's tax authority.



Rachel Jones

Head of Smart Works Scotland, entrepreneur, and Non-Executive Director

Rachel Jones is a seasoned business leader, entrepreneur, and Non-Executive Director with 30+ years' experience across innovation, brand protection, and strategic leadership. She currently leads Smart Works Scotland, a UK charity helping unemployed women back into work, and is the founder, and former CEO, of SnapDragon, an award-winning brand protection agency born from her own experience of counterfeiting. Now focused on a portfolio of board roles, Rachel is known for her empowering leadership style, sharp strategic insight, and deep commitment to purpose-driven impact. Whether scaling ventures or supporting women into employment, she brings clarity, empathy, and a results-driven approach to everything she does.



Martin Pibworth

Chief Executive, SSE plc

Martin has been with SSE since 1998, joining the company as an energy trader and progressing through a range of commercial roles before becoming a Managing Director in 2012. During this time, he built a deep understanding of commodity and energy markets and developed the strategic focus and commercial proficiency that has been a hallmark of his career.

In 2014, Martin was promoted to SSE's senior management team as a member of the Group Executive Committee and three years later he took a seat on the SSE plc Board as Group Energy Director. He has filled a number of senior executive positions, including that of Chief Commercial Officer, which he held from March 2022 until his appointment as Chief Executive in July 2025. With a clear focus on SSE's purpose and culture Martin has been central to the growth of the Group, contributing to the organisational, operational and financial decisions at the heart of a strategy that is creating value for shareholders and society. Within this, he has applied his experience in large capital projects – including funding, joint venture engagement and governance – to the safe operation and development of SSE's diverse and flexible portfolio of clean energy assets.

Outside of SSE, Martin is a trusted voice on the clean energy transition, market dynamics and wider business issues, engaging with government, regulators, media and other stakeholders in his capacity not only as Chief Executive of the company, but as a member of the UK Government's Net Zero Council and Chair of Scottish CBI Council.



Stephen McGee

Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Friendly

Stephen McGee was appointed CEO in April 2022, bringing with him over 30 years' experience in the UK financial services industry. He has held a variety of senior actuarial, finance, and strategic roles at Phoenix, Aegon, and Lloyds Banking Group.

Stephen is a qualified actuary and has a strong track record of leadership across complex financial organisations. He is passionate about developing individuals and teams, and is committed to making a positive impact for customers, colleagues, and the wider community.

Stephen is focused on delivering long-term value and sustainable growth for Scottish Friendly, ensuring the business continues to meet the evolving needs of its members.

Outside of work, Stephen is actively involved in mentoring and community initiatives and is a strong advocate for inclusive leadership and purpose-driven business.



Nicola Sturgeon

MSP, former First Minister of Scotland

Nicola Sturgeon is one of Scotland's most influential political figures, having served as Scotland's first female First Minister and the longest-serving occupant of Bute House. Over a 27-year career in politics, she played a central role in shaping modern Scotland, leading the Scottish National Party (SNP) through multiple electoral victories and guiding the country through significant moments, including the 2014 independence referendum and the COVID-19 pandemic.

First elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999, Sturgeon rose through the ranks, serving as Deputy First Minister and Health Secretary before succeeding Alex Salmond as SNP leader in 2014. Under her leadership, the SNP delivered a landslide victory in the 2015 general election, continued to dominate Scottish politics, and introduced key social policies such as expanded free childcare, the Scottish Child Payment, and a distinct social security system.

Throughout her tenure, Sturgeon was a vocal advocate for Scottish independence, repeatedly pushing for a second referendum following the 2016 Brexit vote. However, despite several attempts, she was unable to secure the agreement of the UK government, leaving her defining political ambition unresolved.

Her leadership also saw controversy and challenges, including divisive debates over gender reform legislation, scrutiny over SNP finances, and internal party struggles. She announced her resignation as First Minister in February 2023, later confirming she would step down as an MSP in 2026, closing a defining chapter in Scottish politics.

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