



RISING STARS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Empowering Edinburgh's Next Generation of Business Leaders



Welcome

When you're early in your career, it can be hard to find development opportunities that actually speak to where you are - and where you want to go. That's why I'm genuinely excited about the Rising Stars Development Programme.

It's backed by two incredible organisations: the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, which has been supporting professionals for over 20 years through practical, high-impact training across business, finance, marketing, and more - and the University of Edinburgh a leader in innovation and interdisciplinary thinking.

Together, we've developed a programme that's practical, forward-thinking, and tailored to the real challenges emerging leaders face today. This programme is designed for people that are ambitious, curious, and ready to lead. You'll gain real-world skills, hear from inspiring leaders, and explore new ideas that help you grow both professionally and personally.

If you're looking to build confidence, expand your network, and prepare for the future of business - this is your programme. I hope to see you there.



Rachael Findlay,

Events and Professional Development Manager,
Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce



About Rising Stars

Since 1786, the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce has been at the heart of the city's business community. Today, we're building on that legacy to support the next generation of leaders - those who are shaping the future, not just responding to it.

Following the success of our Rising Stars Networking Evenings - which have brought together over 500 professionals from 200 companies across 23 sectors - we're proud to launch the Rising Stars Development Programme, in collaboration with The University of Edinburgh.

This six-part interactive series is designed for:

- Early-career professionals looking to fast-track growth
- Aspiring leaders ready to build influence and impact
- Curious minds eager to explore new ideas and connect with peers.

Each session blends practical learning, real-world insights, and peer collaboration - with hands-on exercises, case studies, and guest speakers who've walked the leadership path.

You'll leave each workshop with fresh tools, sharper thinking, and the confidence to apply it all in your own career.

Whether you're navigating your first leadership role, building your network, or simply hungry to grow - this programme is your launchpad.

Programme Overview

Registration Deadline

08/01/2026

Programme Dates

- 22/01/2026
- 05/02/2026
- 19/02/2026
- 05/03/2026
- 19/03/2026
- 02/04/2026

All sessions run from
09:00 - 12:15

Location

Edinburgh Futures Institute
1 Lauriston Place
Edinburgh
EH3 9EF

Programme Fees

- Member: £1,500+VAT
- Non-Member: £1,700+VAT

Cancellation Policy

Participants are expected to attend all scheduled sessions. Partial refunds or refunds for missed sessions are not available.

Full refund: Available if cancellation is made 28 days or more before the programme start date.

Late cancellations: Cancellations received less than 28 days before the programme start date incur a 100% fee (no refund).

Substitutions: Allowed at no additional cost if arranged 14 days or more before the programme begins.

Why Join the Rising Stars Professional Development Programme?

Develop strategic thinking skills: Learn how to analyse trends, challenge assumptions, and generate innovative options using AI and other strategic tools.

Strengthen emotional intelligence and resilience: Build the self-awareness, empathy, and self-management skills that underpin effective leadership.

Lead and inspire high-performing teams: Gain practical tools for motivating teams, navigating challenges, and making decisions under pressure.

Enhance communication and presentation impact: Master the art of confident, clear, and engaging communication in any business context.

Build a compelling personal leadership brand: Position yourself for career progression by developing influence, credibility, and visibility.

Drive innovation and creative problem-solving: Learn to spot opportunities, embrace change, and deliver solutions in fast-moving markets.

Expand your professional network: Connect with peers, industry leaders, and senior executives across multiple sectors through both structured learning and networking events.



Session One: Beyond Gut Feel - AI-Enhanced Strategic Thinking

Date: Thursday 22nd January

Time: 09:00 - 12:15

Led by: Dr Winston Kwon, Senior Lecturer in Strategy, University of Edinburgh Business School

Business Speaker: To be announced

AI tools are becoming deeply woven into the way businesses operate, offering SMEs levels of insight once reserved for major corporations. For young professionals, understanding how to use these tools effectively is no longer a “nice to have” – it’s becoming a core career skill. With AI shaping strategic decisions across industries, those who can harness it confidently will be ahead of the curve.

In this hands-on session, you’ll explore how generative AI can enhance, rather than replace, human judgment. You’ll learn how to scan strategically for hidden trends, use AI to challenge assumptions and biases, and generate non-obvious strategic options that set you apart. We’ll also examine AI’s cognitive risks and share practical frameworks to help you make sound, SME-friendly decisions with AI as a trusted partner.

Meet the Experts



Dr Winston Kwon is a Senior Lecturer in Strategy at the University of Edinburgh Business School. He holds a PhD in Marketing from Lancaster University and a BCom in Finance from the University of British Columbia. Before academia, Winston worked in corporate finance and business analysis roles within the technology and consumer sectors for Fortune 500 companies and start-ups. Winston is also a Research Fellow of the Advanced Institute of Management and his research explores how language shapes and resists strategic change, and the role of social enterprises in tackling sustainability and inequality.

Session Two: Emotional Intelligence and Self-Management

Date: Thursday 5th February

Time: 09:00 - 12:15

Led by: Kirsty McWilliam, ACCA Master Accredited Executive Coach, Think EQ

Business Speaker: Lindsay Fyffe-Jardine, Chief Executive, Apex Scotland

In this interactive Emotional Intelligence session, we will explore what Emotional Intelligence (EI) really is, why it matters more than IQ, and how it impacts our personal and professional success. We'll start by understanding the core components of EI and its benefits - improving decision-making, resilience, and leadership effectiveness.

You'll learn the language of EI to recognise and express emotions more effectively and engage in a self-management rating exercise to assess where you currently stand. Through interactive discussions and activities, we'll explore how to apply EI in real-world situations and establish accountability partnerships to support your growth beyond the session. Expect practical insights, self-reflection, and strategies to make Emotional Intelligence a powerful tool in your everyday life.

Meet the Experts



Kirsty McWilliam is a Master Accredited Executive Coach and founder of Think EQ, Scotland's longest-established centre for executive coaching and team development. With a background as a Chartered Accountant in Corporate Recovery at KPMG and PwC, she combines analytical expertise with deep insight into leadership and team dynamics. Kirsty works with organisations to strengthen leadership capability, build emotional intelligence, and enhance performance. She addresses the pressures of modern workplaces, helping leaders and teams move beyond survival mode to create thriving, high-performing cultures where people are engaged, supported, and able to deliver sustained success.



Lindsay Fyffe-Jardine is the CEO for the justice charity Apex Scotland. Lindsay has worked across the humanitarian, aviation and animal welfare sectors in senior roles leading operations and disaster response programmes. As IOD Director of the Year Third Sector for 2023 Lindsay has dedicated her leadership career to promoting social justice through relationship building and partnership working, and is a champion of causes including poverty, fair pay and equality. Combined with her role as CEO Lindsay sits on the board at the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and is a trustee for ACOSVO, where she was previously Chair for the Women Leaders Network. She is a founding member of the Edinburgh City Council Fair Work Committee.

Session Three: Leadership and Team Dynamics

Date: Thursday 19th February

Time: 09:00 - 12:15

Led by: Professor Kristina Potočnik/Personal Chair of Organisational Behaviour

Business Speaker: Gordon Robertson, Chief Communications and Sustainability Officer, Edinburgh Airport

Organisations depend on teams to deliver results, but even the best teams face challenges that can derail performance. For young professionals and future leaders, understanding how to lead effectively - especially when conditions are uncertain - is a skill that will define your career trajectory.

In this session, we'll explore what makes high-performing teams tick, and where common challenges arise. You'll take part in a fast-paced, interactive case exercise designed to test leadership and decision-making under pressure. Together, the cohort will unpack the lessons from this exercise and other short activities, focusing on practical approaches to building resilient, high-performing teams.

Meet the Experts



Professor Kristina Potočnik is Personal Chair of Organisational Behaviour at the University of Edinburgh Business School, where she has designed and delivered postgraduate courses for over 12 years. She holds an MA in Psychology from the University of Ljubljana and a PhD in Occupational and Organisational Psychology from the University of Valencia. Her research explores resilience, innovation under pressure, and effective team dynamics, with publications in leading management and psychology journals. In her teaching, Kristina draws on extensive research and practical case studies to equip students with insights into high-performing teams and organisational effectiveness.



Gordon Robertson is Chief Communications and Sustainability Officer at Edinburgh Airport, which he joined in 2010 during the volcanic ash crisis. He leads communications, marketing, stakeholder engagement, lobbying, airspace change, and the airport's Greater Good sustainability strategy. His role spans external and internal communications, political engagement, crisis response, and promoting aviation's benefits to Scotland—economic growth, jobs, and responsible environmental action. Gordon also ensures external voices shape key business decisions. Outside of work, he chairs the Board of Trustees of Scouts Scotland and serves on the Board of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce.

Session Four: Effective Communication & Presentation Skills

Date: Thursday 5th March

Time: 09:00 - 12:15

Led by: Amanda Singleton, Deputy Director of MBA Programmes

Business Speaker: Ian Stirling, Co-CEO and Founder, Muckle Brig

Effective communication is a key interpersonal skill influencing all aspects of our personal and professional lives. It also lies at the heart of successful leadership. In this session, we will explore the essential components of effective communication and the skills required to communicate and present with confidence and impact.

We will explore the interplay between verbal and non-verbal cues, and understand how both significantly influence your message. We will also discuss the art of listening - not just as a passive activity, but as a dynamic tool that enhances understanding and empathy and helps to build stronger connections.

The session will also cover practical strategies for delivering presentations that will not only help you to convey your ideas clearly but also help you to build connection and rapport with your audience. From structuring your presentation to mastering body language, you will gain insights that will boost your confidence and competence.

Meet the Experts



Amanda Singleton is Deputy Director of MBA Programmes at the University of Edinburgh Business School, overseeing the full-time and Online MBA portfolio and leading the design and delivery of the MBA Professional Development course. She focuses on enhancing the student experience and supporting skills development for post-experience students. Previously, Amanda spent 14 years in executive search with Hudson, recruiting senior leaders across diverse sectors, and began her career in commercial management and graduate recruitment at Marks & Spencer. She holds a degree in International Marketing with Modern Languages and is an accredited executive coach and facilitator.



Ian Stirling, Founder and co-CEO of Muckle Brig Ltd spent a decade in the wine trade in London before returning home to Edinburgh in 2016 to establish a whisky distillery in Scotland's capital city, with his business partner and lifelong friend Paddy Fletcher. As two founders with no experience of either running a distillery, or indeed building one, they have been on a unique journey to raise millions of pounds from hundreds of investors around the world, create a global gin brand, research uncharted territories in whisky production, and construct the world's tallest distillery on a small patch of land in Leith. The Port of Leith Distillery finally opened to visitors in October 2023.

Session Five: Developing your Leadership/Personal Branding Roadmap

Date: Thursday 19th March

Time: 09:00 - 12:15

Led by: Julian Rawel, Director of MBA Programmes

Business Speaker: Gilly Bain, Founder and CEO, YOURGB

For ambitious young professionals and future leaders, personal branding is a powerful driver of career growth. This interactive session blends strategy, marketing, and soft skills to help you position yourself for success. You'll begin by building a personal SWOT analysis, giving you a clear picture of where you are now and where you want to go.

Then, you'll apply the STP marketing framework - Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning - to market yourself effectively to the audiences that matter most. Alongside this, you'll explore how to develop the soft skills that make you influential, credible, and trusted. The session wraps up with Julian Rawel's five proven tips for building a personal brand that inspires and attracts opportunities.

Meet the Experts



Julian Rawel is Director of MBA Programmes at the University of Edinburgh Business School, with extensive experience as an entrepreneur, board member, and educator in marketing and strategy. He spent 16 years as Group Sales and Marketing Director at Eurocamp, leading a £32m management buyout and £60m stock market flotation, and was responsible for marketing the £42.5m Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds. Julian has held senior academic and leadership roles across several business schools and runs his consultancy, Market Echoes. A Fellow and Chartered Marketer of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, he combines practical business expertise with teaching to help future leaders,



Gilly Bain is the Founder & CEO of YOURGB, a multi award-winning collective of event designers and experience creators. With roots in performance art, she founded YOURGB in 2011 and has grown it into a global agency delivering audience-centric experiences for brands including Sony Music, lululemon, Johnson & Johnson, TSB and Helly Hansen. She leads with empathy and purpose, championing inclusivity, gender equality and sustainability. Under her leadership, YOURGB donates to charity after every event and pioneers industry-leading sustainability initiatives. At the heart of her mission is creating exceptional experiences that matter, while keeping people and the planet front of mind.

Session Six: Innovation and Problem Solving

Date: Thursday 2nd April

Time: 09:00 - 12:15

Led by: Dr Alessandro Rosiello, Personal Chair in Innovation & Entrepreneurship and Professor Steven Drost, Executive Vice Chair and Co-Founder of CodeBase

Business Speaker: Rory Buchanan, Co-Founder, Ask Vinny

For young professionals and aspiring leaders, the ability to innovate and solve problems is vital for staying ahead in a rapidly evolving business landscape. In this session, Alessandro and Steven will explore how innovation fuels both the launch of new startups and the transformation of established businesses. With AI now reshaping every industry, they'll examine the challenges and opportunities emerging from this shift. You'll gain insight into why most new startups are now AI-native, how investment capital is increasingly focused on AI, and what this means for Edinburgh's startup ecosystem. The discussion will also reveal how established companies can adapt, embrace AI, and unlock new sources of value for long-term growth.

Meet the Experts



Alessandro Rosiello, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at University of Edinburgh Business School and Director of Innovation of Edinburgh Futures Institute, combines innovation and institutional economics from an evolutionary approach to study science, technology and innovation dynamics in industrial settings, entrepreneurship and small business finance, and industrial clustering at a regional level. He has a PhD in Economics from the University of Strathclyde and was appointed as a research fellow of the Innogen Institute in the University of Edinburgh to study the policy framework to trigger industrial clustering in Scotland.



Professor Steven Drost is Executive Vice Chair and Co-Founder of CodeBase. He is a three-time start-up founder with one successful exit, one failure and one ongoing venture. Steven is a practitioner and mentor who loves learning and understanding, connecting people and ideas. He has founded start-ups, raised funds, scaled and sold businesses, and worked with large corporations and state institutions. His current focus is economic development for the UK via building start-up ecosystems.



Rory Buchanan is the Co-Founder and CTO of Ask Vinny. Since launching less than a year ago, the company has scaled rapidly to serve over 100,000 homes worldwide, helping landlords and operators manage portfolios more efficiently. Before founding his company, Rory built his career in product management at some of the world's fastest-scaling startups, including Deel, Trustpilot, and Bulb Energy. Across these roles he developed deep experience in building and scaling products that solve real customer problems. Rory is passionate about learning directly from customers, selling boldly and with integrity, and creating technology that people fundamentally want to use.

Benefits

For participants, the benefits are clear: sharper strategic thinking, stronger communication, and a deeper understanding of leadership in practice. But meaningful development programmes go beyond skills – they create space for early-stage professionals to build self-awareness, resilience, and adaptability. These qualities are consistently highlighted by UK employers as critical, yet often underdeveloped. The structured Rising Stars programmes provides a safe, reflective environment where emerging leaders can explore their strengths, learn from peers, and grow with purpose - laying the foundation for long-term success in a rapidly evolving workplace.

For employers, investing in early-stage professionals is more than good practice - it's a strategic imperative. It supports retention, motivation, and succession planning, ensuring future leaders are equipped to drive innovation and growth. In the UK, over 50% of early career hires leave within three years, often due to limited development opportunities and unclear progression paths. With entry-level hires costing an average of £3,200, early attrition can be a costly challenge. Structured development programmes significantly improve retention, engagement, and team performance, helping build a stronger, more future-ready workforce.

Applications for the first cohort are open now, with limited places available. Whether you're an ambitious young professional seeking the next step, or a business leader looking to invest in rising talent, this is an opportunity to shape the future of Edinburgh's business community.

[Find out more and book here](#)





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