

# Ambassadors are capital assets



Conventions are big business, but it's not all about money, writes Elaine Miller

**T**his evening, representatives from a 500-plus network of Edinburgh's business, scientific and academic leaders will gather to celebrate 20 years of the Edinburgh Ambassador Programme. Thanks to their hard work, enthusiasm and dedication, these local experts have made a significant contribution to our city, not only in raising the profile of Edinburgh as a global centre of excellence, but also in making a staggering financial contribution to its local economy.

Over the last two decades, Convention Edinburgh, their members and their local Ambassadors have worked tirelessly together to bring 528,605 delegates to 1,348 events in the city, generating a massive £900 million in economic impact.

The Ambassador Programme connects the expert support, practical guidance and industry connections of Convention Edinburgh with local leading industry specialists. Together, they build and present a case to persuade events to choose Edinburgh as the host city for their next meeting – with impressive results.

Our Ambassadors are some of the world's most innovative minds in science, medicine and technology. We're privileged to have the likes of hepatobiliary and pancreatic disease specialist Professor James Garden; Dean of Research & Innovation at Edinburgh Napier University Jessie Kennedy; and Prof Martin Tangney, the innovator responsible for creating bio-fuel from whisky waste.

Marking our 20th year, the inaugural Ambassadors Awards, at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC), will recognise the out-

standing contribution of just a few of those Ambassadors, responsible for securing conferences and promoting Edinburgh as a business tourism destination on the global stage.

The nominees for the Ambassador Rising Star – sponsored by In Conference Ltd – are a perfect example of the calibre of expertise within the programme; ranging from Peter Wilkie, Tropical Forest Botanist to Imran Liaquat, Consultant Neurosurgeon and Spinal Surgeon and Dr Asier Unciti-Broceta, a reader in Pharmaceutical Chemistry at Edinburgh Cancer Research Centre.

There is a growing ambition with meeting organisers to leave a lasting legacy within a host city. As the conduit between local businesses, charities, academia and government, Convention Edinburgh is ideally placed to work with its Ambassadors to help the client succeed in these ambitions.

Last year's 50th annual meeting of the British Neuroscience Association (BNA) is a case in point. While Edinburgh's reputation in medical and life science research is among the very best in the world, public awareness of the innovation taking place on their doorstep remained relatively low.

Working with Convention Edinburgh and host-venue EICC, Ambassadors Dr Jane Haley and Dr Peter Brophy, from Edinburgh Neuroscience, were able to help the BNA transform the conference into a Festival of Neuroscience. By building links with the Edinburgh International Science Festival, the BNA held a comprehensive series of fun public events to help demystify the brain.

The Rehabilitation International Congress (RI Congress), which takes



place next month, is already playing a significant legacy role in improving Edinburgh's reputation as an accessible destination. This four-day world congress, expected to attract 1,000 delegates, has been a catalyst for Edinburgh to strengthen its accessibility credentials. A collaborative strategy has seen Convention Edinburgh, VisitScotland and Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) work with the local event organisers, The Shaw Trust, to proactively engage with the public and local businesses.

ETAG's briefing workshops not only reinforced the value of accessible tourism (worth £11 billion to the

Scottish economy) to the hospitality sector, it provided practical advice to help upgrade the visitor experience of disabled guests. Influential disabled access review website Euan's Guide has also undertaken the city's first comprehensive accommodation review ahead of the RI Congress, generating an informative resource the will benefit visitors for years to come.

While the £900m economic impact is impressive, I believe it's the subtler legacies of our Ambassadors' hard work that can reach the furthest.

Conferences play a crucial role in helping shape our city and community, in a way that reaches far beyond

spend on hotel nights and evening meals. They change attitudes, raise awareness and champion innovation. Business tourism brings infrastructure improvements and transport links, while promoting the city as a hub of learning, research, creativity and culture.

So, to all our Ambassadors who have shared a passion for Scotland's capital, today and past, thank you. We could not have achieved the success of the last 20 years without you.

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↑ Convention Edinburgh's team of Ambassadors bring untold benefits to the capital in terms of economic impact and legacy



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