

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Time to look forward to life sciences conference

There are areas Scotland needs to improve on, writes **Patrick Wiggins**



A New Year always represents a point in the calendar when it is good to look back and reflect on what has passed, in order to help define what we need to do in the future.

That is why at Irvine Bay Regeneration Company we are gearing up to again sponsor the annual Scottish Life Sciences Conference, organised by The Scotsman in collaboration with the Scottish Lifesciences Association and supported by the Scottish Government and others.

This year's theme – How can Scotland be a global leader in life sciences?

There are many areas Scotland needs to get right if it is to compete on a global scale in life sciences. Last year's event looked at the need to improve the capability for turning R&D excellence into manufacturing at scale, in order to deliver direct economic benefit.

To assess progress we need to answer a whole range of questions: How are we placed to help small companies with big ideas expand – and how good are we at attracting global investment? Do we have the right testing and scale-up facilities, and have we made strong enough links between the private sector and the NHS to stimulate domestic markets for life sciences products? Can we attract centres of excellence to help commercialise great ideas?

Life sciences has been identified as one of Scotland's key economic sectors, with 600-plus organisations employing 32,000 people and adding more than £3 billion in added value to the economy every year. The Scottish Government's aim is to see the sector double that turnover by 2020. Cabinet Secretary and Deputy First Minister John Swinney is a keynote speaker at the conference, which will be chaired by Scott Johnstone, chief executive, Scottish Lifesciences Association.

The company database of Scottish Development International shows more than 500 businesses in the sector call Scotland home, including:

- 250 medical technology companies (with another 100 involved in their value chain)
- 150 pharma services companies
- Five of the world top ten

CROs (PPD, Bioreliance, Charles River, Quintiles, Catalent)

■ More than 30 companies working on stem cells and regenerative medicine Scotland has 19 universities and higher education institutions, and our life sciences researchers are among the most productive in the world as measured by the number of publications and citations.

Plus we have Health Innovation Partnerships that facilitate collaboration between industry, academia and clinicians to develop products for future healthcare needs.

Everyone also agrees that the environment has rarely been better to achieve the vision of a blossoming life sciences sector. The collaborative nature of the sector in Scotland is well illustrated by the speakers for the conference. As well as John Swinney, they include: Hugh Griffith, NuCana Medical who will talk on Global investment to support life sciences in Scotland; Dave Tudor, GSK on how do we harness R&D and scale up operations? Caroline Strain, Scottish Enterprise on the life and chemical sciences manufacturing strategy; Andrew Fowlie, NHS Scotland on public-private collaboration and test-bed facilities; and Sarah Lynagh, chief executive, Fios Genomics poses the question How do we build up small companies?

At Irvine Bay we are well placed to play a positive role. It is our innovation and industry park at Irvine which includes an Enterprise Area with a focus on life sciences. So we have the skills, particularly in manufacturing. In delivering over the past few years we have assisted the creation of hundreds of jobs, seen more than £100 million of capital investment from the private sector, and created or refurbished more than 200,000 sq ft of business space within 13 Irvine's Life Sciences Enterprise Area.

● Patrick Wiggins, Chief Executive, Irvine Bay Regeneration Company

The conference takes place on Tuesday 1 March, at the Royal Society of Edinburgh, George Street, Edinburgh



Africa's hidden gem is full of surprises



Tourism can have a positive influence on economic and social development in Malawi, writes **Keith Bohannon**

Recent research suggests some 46 per cent of Scots have a friend or family member with a connection to Malawi and increasing numbers of Scots are now choosing to holiday in this small but charming African country. Visit Scotland recently welcomed a tourism delegation from Malawi here to discuss plans to develop their country's tourism sector. Keith Bohannon, from the Scotland Malawi Partnership, reflects on his experience as a tourist in Malawi and the positive influence tourism can have on the economic and social development of the country.

As the crimson African sun sinks below the horizon I find myself perched on a white sandy beach, sipping a world-famous Malawian gin and tonic and asking myself if life can really get much better than this. I spent yesterday hiking across part of the majestic Nyika Plateau and along the way added zebra and elephant to my list of wildlife encounters. Malawi truly lives up to its fast growing reputation as Africa's hidden gem. Indeed it offers everything a visitor to Africa could ask for – accessible, indigenous wildlife, breath-taking scenery, unspoilt beaches and a vibrant and welcoming culture.

So have I missed something? Where are all the other tourists? Well, if the statistics are anything to go by, they're off wine tasting in Cape Town or in a convoy of Toyotas queuing to spot a lion on the Serengeti.

Malawi's tourism industry by comparison is an emerging one, lacking the profile of South Africa and Kenya. But as I sit here enjoying the fact that I have this amazing beach to myself it occurs to me that perhaps this is less

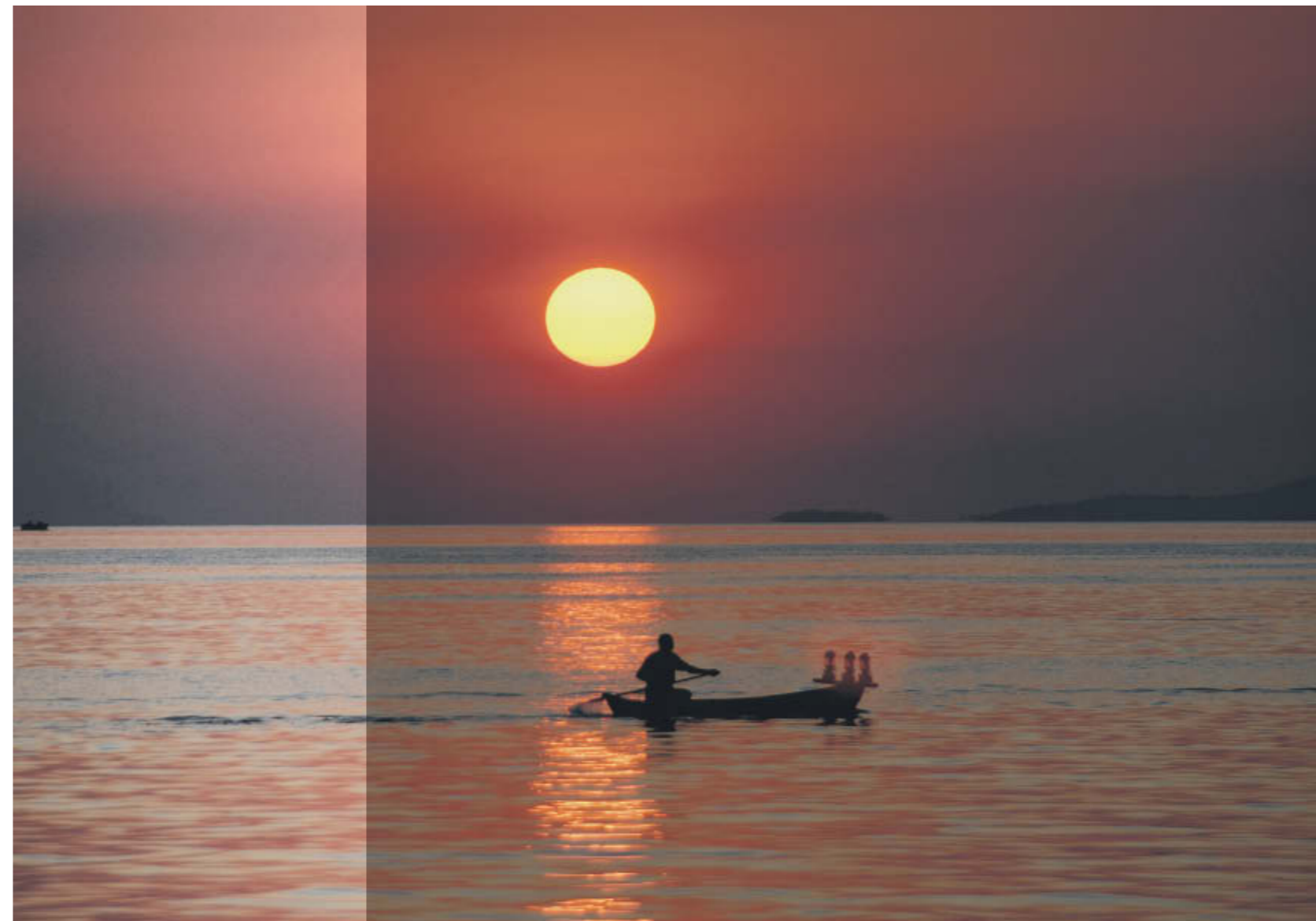
a curse and more a blessing. Alongside its welcoming atmosphere (it's not called the "Warm Heart of Africa" for nothing), the overriding feeling I have is that I am experiencing a more authentic Africa.

The fact that Malawi is a peaceful, stable, English-speaking country also means you can wander on to the road less travelled safe in the knowledge that when you get lost (and you probably will) there will be a friendly face there to point you back in the right direction.

In a country highly reliant of overseas aid and struggling to grow and diversify a limited, agri-based economy, tourism offers a much-needed source of economic development. Tourism currently accounts for approximately 5 per cent of Malawi's GDP (interestingly, that is the same as in Scotland) but has the potential to grow to 8 per cent in just one year, providing thousands of Malawians with opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, particularly those living in rural areas.

For example, tour operator the Responsible Safari Company has set up an ecotourism initiative on the shores of the lake. The initiative is run by local boat builder Joseph, who was concerned about the development of his village, in particular the lack of opportunities for young people in terms of education and employment. It's still early days but the initiative is already reaping the benefits of having a community of engaged and motivated young people, which is now supported and funded through regular visits from Scottish students.

In addition to economic and social benefits, tourism in Malawi also challenges some of the negative assumptions



and stereotypes too often found in the mainstream media. This is a different vision of Africa; a dignified vision celebrating the vibrant culture, spectacular scenery and incredible natural resources. This vision has made Malawi the proud home of the internationally renowned Lake of Stars festival which offers a truly unique experience of music, art and culture that attracts big names

such as Scotland's Mercury Prize winners Young Fathers.

So, if this dreich weather is getting you down, and you want to escape from the impending permafrost that we've been promised in 2016, my advice is get in touch with your adventurous side and book yourself a trip to Malawi. Have a holiday you'll never forget and support the sustainable development of one of Scotland's

closest and oldest friends at the same time.

● Keith Bohannon is member services manager for the Scotland Malawi Partnership. For more on Malawian tourism please visit: www.malawitourism.com <http://lakeofstars.org/> www.responsible-safari.com www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/areas-of-partnership/tourism/

↑ Malawi has a lot to offer the tourist who fancies a more adventurous break



New powers on abortion mean everybody should be informed

Emotional issue requires sensitivity when discussed, says **Emily Murtagh**

This October saw the announcement that abortion law is to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Because of the responsibility which comes with these new powers, it is for each of us, as individuals, to be adequately informed and to enter discussion at a level that aligns with both our minds and our hearts. In view of how vitriolic debates around abortion can be, it is imperative that we learn to discuss the issue in a way that promotes a due sense of compassion and care as warranted by such a sensitive topic.

It would seem that a good starting point is in the examination of how past abortion legislation and its subsequent amendments have been interpreted and put into practice since its enactment. This includes the grounds on which an abortion

can be obtained, and how many weeks into the pregnancy an abortion is legal – which currently stands at 24 weeks in Wales, England and Scotland. Indeed, with the constant advancements in neonatal care, the stage at which the foetus can independently sustain life is constantly being redrawn and offers no stable solution for those who wish abortion to be considered on these grounds.

As well as examining present legislation, we can also look to some of our closest neighbours and how appropriate their laws have been, when assessing abortion. Some of Scotland's nearest neighbours, in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, practice much more restrictive laws. In the Republic, the embryo is constitutionally protected and abortion is permitted only when there is

an endangerment to the life of the woman. While in Northern Ireland it is only possible where there is a serious and long term risk to the mental or physical health of the woman. Examining how abortion is understood in other European countries is also important. For example, in Germany, abortion is legal at the request of the woman but only until the 12th week of pregnancy and counselling provided for every woman who seeks abortion.

The difference between countries is a demonstration of how concepts, such as that of personhood, are not universally defined principles. Is this a biological, philosophical or theological concept? Does a foetus become a person at conception, at birth or somewhere along the way in its development? This is something

that cannot be scientifically measured. Thus a discussion that listens to voices across disciplines and world views and which takes into account, in a meaningful and serious way, the stories and experiences of individuals seems like an important endeavour. With this approach, a responsible discussion can exist that does not dissolve into a battleground for those who hold different world views, but rather that works towards the best possible outcome for the flourishing life of citizens.

As an increasing number of powers continue to be devolved to Holyrood, it would seem true to say that we are part of the story of a nation that is writing a new chapter. It is hoped that with due care and sensitivity towards issues such as abortion, it is a legacy of compassion and

solidarity that is woven into the narrative at this point. It is hoped that the discussions can be set free from medical and political jargon, and instead be a demonstration of the exchange of stories and ideas across disciplines and backgrounds, making it a respectful discussion for all.

● Emily Murtagh, research associate with the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics



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