

Bank takes innovative approach to helping Scotland's start-ups

Anna Dove reports on how the Royal Bank of Scotland is preparing to welcome fledgling businesses and entrepreneurs to its Gogarburn headquarters

WORK to transform Royal Bank of Scotland's (RBS) Edinburgh headquarters into a hub of Scottish entrepreneurship is well underway and business support organisations are already looking forward to watching start-ups take their first steps at the Gogarburn facility.

With free wi-fi, individually designed office space and the services of RBS's technical solutions centre available to all fledgling businesses, the new workspace is set to become not just the heart of Scottish enterprise, but also a hub of technological innovation when it opens its doors early next year.

The centre will house staff from business organisations including Entrepreneurial Spark, Business Gateway, Scottish EDGE and the Prince's Trust Scotland.

It will also be home to an Entrepreneurial Spark Business Accelerator Hub which will include a hatchery for early stage start-ups and a nest for high growth, high impact businesses.

"I have been very keen to bring together the different parts of our organisation and external influences," says Simon McNamara, chief administrative officer at RBS.

"Not only are we setting up this hub at Gogarburn but we are bringing in our technology teams into the building as well.

"We are hoping to have these people there to help some of the entrepreneurs.

"That's very much behind how we will set up this whole wing which is the nerve centre of the bank.

"Ultimately these guys are our customers or our potential customers and it's important for us to support them in their success.

"Having customers in there, a group of start-up companies that ultimately we are providing some support for, and having some of our own employees, I think is a very healthy thing.

"When you listen to the pitch [by one of the entrepreneurs] and you hear the dynamic there's a directness that I think is very refreshing and there's the energy level that I think organisations often struggle with if they have been around for some time."

McNamara has been championing a more open style of operation with a team in California's Silicon Valley tasked with collaborating with other

companies and bringing ideas back to RBS.

On top of offering up the fabric of the Gogarburn HQ, McNamara hopes entrepreneurs and business organisations will benefit from the wi-fi and from the services and experience of RBS staff.

"It's a brilliant facility and it's one we haven't really used in a substantial way until now," he says.

"There's our own technology solutions centre. We are moving that into the same sort of area so they will be able to see emerging thoughts about how we are running our business, our future solutions. I think that works both ways.

"Beyond that, there's a whole range of other skills that we have within the organisation that we can make available to these small companies whether it be marketing skills or accounting and technology skills. These are capabilities we have available."

Alison Rose, chief executive of RBS commercial and private banking, agrees the opening of the entrepreneurial hub at Gogarburn will not only benefit Scottish entrepreneurs but also RBS staff.

"As a bank we need to innovate and be forward thinking and having entrepreneurs working alongside us will help ensure this happens," says Rose.

"We need to support the business-

'It's really bold of RBS to bring all these people into one space'

es of tomorrow but we also need to learn from them and understand their needs.

"Asking entrepreneurs to work with us and alongside us marks a step change in the way we operate as a bank and how we support the UK's economy."

Keeping on top of the latest developments in technology is key to the success of RBS. Over the past few years the bank has invested £750 million in the resilience of its technology.

"We want to be known for our technology for all the right reasons, the way it actually does make it easier for our customers," says McNamara.

"Our mobile app has emerged as



» Alison Rose believes the entrepreneurs will help RBS to be forward thinking

the number one rated mobile app in the UK and we have a touch ID facility that our customers seem to like in terms of identifying themselves.

"This is an opportunity for entrepreneurial companies to see how some of the things that we have and that we are aware of will tie into their own companies. I think that development and support is very important.

"It's a great opportunity for our people to spend some time around these entrepreneurial companies, providing them with support and also getting some back."

There is no doubt that the hub will provide a two-way learning system for RBS staff and the entrepreneurs.

In order for fledgling businesses to gain the initial backing of a business support organisation such as Entrepreneurial Spark or Business Gateway, they must first pitch a winning idea packed with the potential to grow into a successful product or service.

Scottish EDGE and Entrepreneurial Spark are just two of the business organisations looking forward to making the move to the Gogarburn hub.

"I think the new hub at Gogarburn is really interesting," says Jim Duffy, chief executive of Entrepreneurial Spark, the world's largest free business accelerator for early stage and growing ventures.

"First of all, it's really bold of RBS to bring all these people into one space. I think the biggest support from RBS is that they are giving us their HQ.

"There are 4,000 or 5,000 people who work in that building so we can use them for support and to test prod-

ucts. The space allows for creativity. I wish ten years ago when I started business that I had something like that."

Scottish EDGE is a funding competition aimed at identifying Scotland's top young, early stage and high growth potential entrepreneurs.

Chief executive Evelyn McDonald and her team are preparing to take up residence at the new entrepreneurial centre in February with a view to offering office space to their fledgling businesses on a hot-desking basis.

"I think the key benefit for us will actually be the fact that we are in with other business support organisations and that we are in with other entrepreneurs," says McDonald.

"It's also really interesting that RBS are going to be housing some of their departments within the hub. Their employees will be in that space where people are coming up with new ideas.

"I am looking forward to the buzz of that exchange of ideas and working together and the collaboration."

Since the competition started, Scottish EDGE has supported over 130 businesses. The organisation then collects information from its start-ups in order to measure turnover increase and job creation. Its success so far is evidence enough as to why RBS has chosen to support fledgling businesses.

"If we look at just what happened in rounds one to five - we are now on round six - 311 new Scottish jobs have been created," explains McDonald.

"And £13.9m of additional turnover has been generated. We collect that information on a six-monthly basis and I know that it's going to go up significantly."

The feeling among the hub's future residents is that RBS's plans for the hub reflect a change in the organisation.

"What used to be the executive wing of RBS has now been completely transformed into a hub for Scottish up and coming businesses," says McDonald.

"There's something really nice about that. I think that the fact that RBS have a team focused on entrepreneurship is just fantastic.

"There's no sell at all. There's no expectation that any of the businesses will open bank accounts or take out a loan with RBS. It's about them giving something back. It genuinely is corporate social responsibility."



Neil Hanna



Lisa Ferguson



Case study Evelyn Owenson, Allatus Unity

Marketing help for developers

EDINBURGH-based entrepreneur Evelyn Owenson co-founded Allatus Unity in 2011 after noticing a gap in the market for a software tool to help large organisations manage and store their data.

It wasn't long before the fledgling business secured funding from Scottish Enterprise to help it get off the ground.

"We set up the business to develop a software tool to help organisations that have customers to retain their data," explains Owenson, left.

"We had done this a lot in our work with RBS and other large organisations and we had seen the problem of trying to do this with spreadsheets and people keeping knowledge in their heads.

"We decided we would develop a software tool to help them retain that knowledge."

Since August this year, Allatus Unity has been a "chiclet" at Entrepreneurial Spark, where Owenson and her colleagues are benefiting from advice on their pitching and sales techniques.

"We have lots of sessions in the hatchery," says Owenson. "There are three of us who are co-founders in the company and we are quite technical. We don't have a sales or negotiations

background so we are going to be getting a lot of support on those aspects which will be good for us.

"They are helping us simplify our message and we have been learning to do our 60 second pitch."

Having worked at the RBS Gogarburn headquarters in a previous role, Owenson is looking forward to sharing the office space again when Entrepreneurial Spark moves into the new hub early next year.

'We are going to get a lot of support'

"You are part of a bigger RBS environment and I think that will be really good because for us we are working with RBS towards a sale," she says.

Another benefit of the new entrepreneurial centre will be the opportunity to learn from other start-up businesses.

"One of the girls does coaching on pitches so I have taken advantage of that and some people come and ask me questions as well," says Owenson.

"It's good making contacts with people in different industries."



Case study Sandy Williams, Artificial Lift Performance

Coaching adds value

AFTER 12 years' travelling the world as a consultant and global troubleshooter in the oil and gas industry Sandy Williams returned to Edinburgh in 2010 and set up Artificial Lift Performance (ALP).

Williams, left, has used his expertise to create a manufacturer-independent software package to maximise production, optimise wells and artificial lift equipment. He also ensures companies have well-trained staff making the best possible contribution to businesses.

When Williams heard about Entrepreneurial Spark through sponsor KPMG, he knew it offered the support he needed to develop the business.

In September ALP joined Entrepreneurial Spark's

six-month programme as a "chiclet" and Williams is already seeing the benefits.

"I have had a huge amount of value from it," he says.

"Some of the coaching you get is amazing and

'Software is one of the key areas of my business'

it's good through the programme to meet other people who have start ups.

"The other benefit to being part of Entrepreneurial Spark is I had no idea how many great resources there are in Scotland to help entrepreneurs and small

companies." Working primarily from home, Williams regularly makes use of office space at the Entrepreneurial Spark hatchery, which will move to the RBS headquarters at Gogarburn next year.

He is looking forward to taking up residence alongside RBS' technical team. "For me, software is one of the key areas of my business and access to experts and technology and particularly IP technology is huge," Williams explains.

"Looking at cloud-based software, should it be cloud-based or should it be behind a client's firewall.

"People in the bank have that level of expertise surrounding technology.

"I see a huge amount of benefit of being out at Gogarburn and having these people beside us."