

# Working to redress the balance in business

RBS is one of several organisations aiming to help women start their own enterprises, finds **Martin Hannan**

**I**F WOMEN are to prosper in starting up businesses, they will have many hurdles to overcome, but the first and biggest obstacle that many women face might be themselves. The evidence is that for a variety of reasons, some women feel they lack the confidence or skills to start their own business, and that may well be damaging Scotland's economic prospects - if women started up businesses at the same rate as men, billions of pounds would be added to the Scottish economy.

Women make up more than half of the population of this country, but they own, lead or run less than one-fifth of the nation's businesses.

That's a gender imbalance with its roots in history and culture, but it is one that can be rectified, and the likes of the Scottish Government, Women's Enterprise Scotland and the Association of Scottish Businesswomen, plus many more, are determined to see women take their rightful place in this entrepreneurial age.

RBS is playing its part in the major effort that is taking place on several fronts to get women into business and especially to start businesses.

Inspiring Women in Enterprise is the name given to the bank's three-year programme that aims to help 20,000 women to "explore and unlock their enterprise potential". RBS's commitment to women in business

goes much further than one single programme, however.

Margaret Kennedy, RBS regional director for business banking in Scotland, is adamant that the bank can and will do much more for women customers that want to create or develop a business. Her aim is that any female would-be entrepreneur who wants advice or support from another woman should get it.

As a founder member of the Women in Business programme within RBS, which was set up specifically to support women-led and women-owned small businesses, Kennedy has seen the bank in Scotland grow and develop that programme so that there are now 20 Women in Business Ambassadors across the country.

Kennedy says: "Through things such as hosting networking events, the Ambassadors are working with RBS's partners and stakeholders to establish what we call an ecosystem to encourage women to come together in entrepreneurship.

"We now have our own Inspiring Women in Enterprise programme and we work closely with the Everywoman Network and Women's Enterprise Scotland in their activities such as workshops, while this month we are hosting a conference at our Gogarburn headquarters [in Edinburgh] for the Association of

Scottish Businesswomen.

"Another important event we hosted involved women and how they access the procurement chain, and we are doing another one with Women's Enterprise Scotland this year.

"RBS is also involved with the Scottish Government's EDGE fund and I was delighted to be part of the judging panel. It really pleased me that 11 out of the 15 companies who received funding in the last round of awards were female-owned or female-led, and that should mean we will get more applications from women starting up businesses in future.

"We also supported the launch of Investing Women which is an investor panel that includes non-traditional funding such as crowd funding.

"RBS also works closely with Entrepreneurial Spark and the other incubator units that help start-ups."

Kennedy started with RBS as a 16-year-old teller. She went to night school to do her Highers so she could take her banking exams and has since worked her way up through the ranks to her current senior position where she has responsibility for looking after a team of directors who in turn look after teams of managers.

There is no doubting Kennedy's commitment to her goal of encouraging more women to start up new businesses, and consequently she and numerous colleagues act as



business mentors for women – they all have mentoring accreditation and are happy to mentor men as well. .

Within RBS a particular group which Kennedy – diversity lead for Business Banking, Scotland at RBS – supports is the Focused Women’s Network. Kennedy explains: “We focus on providing help and encouraging confidence to build a network for female colleagues at any level within the organisation in any country. We hold regular events such as video-conferencing and online training for things like confidence building, education skills and social media.

“It has grown strongly within the past two or three years and these activities will help our women when they are supporting customers.”

Kennedy is in no doubt about the main qualities which women lack when it comes to starting up a business – “confidence and courage”.

She said: “For example, women

starting a business tend to seek finance either from their own resources or from family, relatives and friends. We want to see them have the confidence to approach the bank and discuss what they need.”

A collaborative approach is necessary for Scottish women to prosper in business. “One person alone cannot gain the necessary courage and confidence, and it does take collaboration to help women gain those qualities. Using mentors, ambassadors and role models, there is a lot of help and support for women starting up or growing their business, but previously there was not much collaboration,” she says.

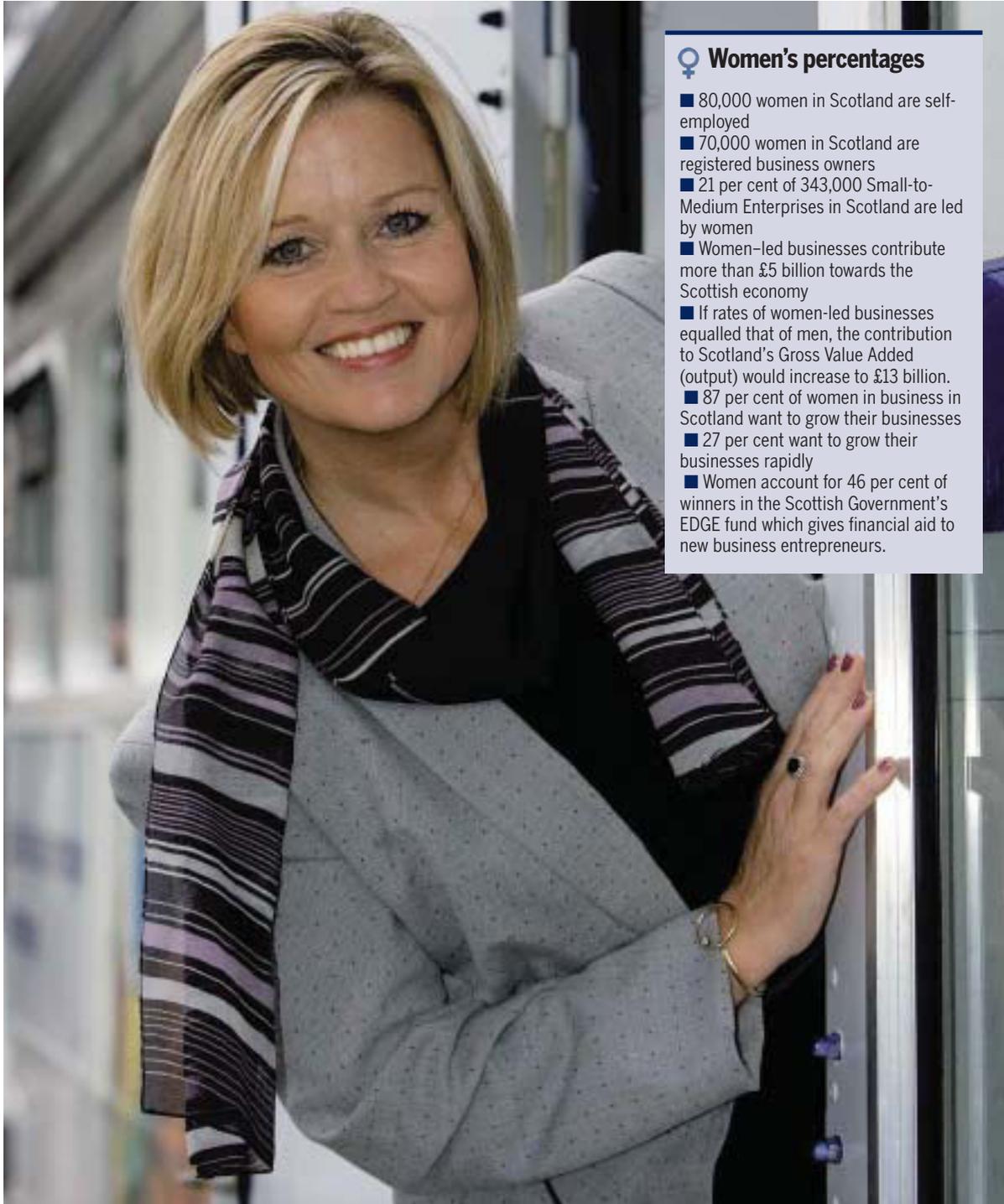
“Now we can see that among people working towards the same goal there is much better working in partnership and I can tell you that whenever we at RBS host a female-led event for women to get real business support they are always over-subscribed.”

Kennedy is convinced that the partnership working between everyone from the Scottish Government to RBS to Women’s Enterprise Scotland is having a real effect. She says: “There is a momentum building and it has sustainability which will benefit the

Scottish economy in the long run.”

*“If women started up businesses at the same rate as men, billions of pounds would be added to the value of the Scottish economy”*





**♀ Women's percentages**

- 80,000 women in Scotland are self-employed
- 70,000 women in Scotland are registered business owners
- 21 per cent of 343,000 Small-to-Medium Enterprises in Scotland are led by women
- Women-led businesses contribute more than £5 billion towards the Scottish economy
- If rates of women-led businesses equalled that of men, the contribution to Scotland's Gross Value Added (output) would increase to £13 billion.
- 87 per cent of women in business in Scotland want to grow their businesses
- 27 per cent want to grow their businesses rapidly
- Women account for 46 per cent of winners in the Scottish Government's EDGE fund which gives financial aid to new business entrepreneurs.

› Margaret Kennedy of RBS believes initiatives such as Women's Enterprise Scotland, below, are having a really beneficial effect



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# Starting point for the ladies who launch

RBS's Inspiring Women in Enterprise project aims to redress gender imbalance in business ownership, writes **Martin Hannan**

**W**OMEN are from Venus, men are from Mars, but on Planet Enterprise, there's no doubt which gender makes the running.

Less than one-fifth of new businesses in the UK are owned or run by women, and that's a hefty imbalance which RBS is committed to tackling with a programme that is already creating new businesses and jobs.

Launched in November 2012, RBS's Inspiring Women in Enterprise project aims to help 20,000 women to explore and "unlock their enterprise potential," as the mission statement has it, by the end of 2015.

By the end of last year, some 6,000 women across the UK had already been assisted by the programme, with approximately half of them supported by the RBS and Natwest Women in Business teams and the other half supported by external partnerships and grant funding.

To date, Inspiring Women in Enterprise has funded five enterprise support organisations in Scotland, out of a total of 32 across the UK. Those five Scottish organisations have supported 150 women on their

enterprise journey and directly created 17 new businesses.

Thom Kenrick, head of sustainability programmes for RBS, leads the team which is progressing the Inspiring Women in Enterprise project and which, among a host of activities, is responsible for grant funding to charities and social enterprises that work to help women start businesses.

He says that in creating the programme, RBS was responding to a perceived need to specifically help women entrepreneurs as part of the bank's general drive to assist business customers that need extra support.

"It is well documented that women start up businesses at a much lower rate than men," says Kenrick. "Only 21 per cent of new businesses in

*"We see no reason why there won't be a more even distribution in start-ups over the long term"*

Scotland are women-owned or women-run, so that is a very small number in comparison to men.

"We also know that young people have lower start-up rates than older people, and that start-up social enterprises, which are businesses created to have a specific social impact, also have additional barriers in their way, so we looked at these three audiences out of all the businesses that we help in a year and these were the ones which appeared to most need additional support.

"We have the resources and skills and capability to help them, and we saw that there was a demand for that support, so it is a good match."

The reasons for women starting up businesses at a much lower rate than men are several and complex, as was found by a report commissioned by RBS from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor organisation.

Kenrick explains: "Some of the reasons are cultural, and that's down to the expectations we have as a society and that women have of themselves, for instance over childcare.

"There are specific reasons to do with perception of opportunities and perception of skills. Generally



speaking, women are less likely to rate themselves as having the access to the opportunities and skills necessary for starting up a business.”

As well as its own Women in Business teams, RBS is committed to working in partnership with a wide range of external organisations who are involved in this field.

Kenrick says: “Partnering with other experts and being part of that system is a much more effective way of reaching people that need support and having an impact than if we tried to do everything on our own.”

Though reluctant to single out any of the success stories which the programme has engendered, Kenrick was happy to suggest Edinburgh-based Women Onto Work as a classic example of how the Inspiring Women in Enterprise programme can assist an organisation that supports women trying to become their own boss.

He says: “Women Onto Work does one-to-one mentoring with women who identify themselves as having barriers to getting back into work and they very much present self-employment as an option.

“With our support, they have helped 49 women and directly created three businesses.”

Each new business supported by the programme creates at least one job, with the potential for many more.

“It’s still early days but we are beginning to track some of that job creation,” says Kenrick. “We already know of businesses that are not just about self-employment, but that are already creating jobs and actively seeking to create more.”

Kenrick is confident that Inspiring Women in Enterprise will meet its target of assisting 20,000 women by the end of next year, but he would like to see it go further.

He says: “RBS as a whole deals with 100,000 start-ups in a year, so we know that women are nowhere near parity with men in starting businesses.

“But we see no practical reason why, over the long term, you will not see a much more even distribution in start-ups.

“In ten to 15 years’ time, we will hopefully see that anybody can consider the enterprise option regardless of their gender, age or circumstances.”



**Case Study Lynn Mann**

# Supernature's success built on Mann's experience

LYNN Mann had a variety of jobs before she found the role into which she is now settled and that she sees as her long-term future.

Now happily building up the Supernature cooking oil business which she began with her husband Chris just three years ago, Gorebridge-based Mann reveals that she had 22 jobs in all before starting Supernature at their farmhouse.

Since 2011, the cold-pressed rapeseed oil has gained a huge following among foodies everywhere, and the fledgling firm has expanded with support from the EDGE Fund, E-Spark, Business Gateway and RBS.

Now the Manns have taken on three employees to deal with the increasing demand, especially for their award-winning flavoured oils.

Juggling the roles of wife, mother and entrepreneur has not always been easy, but her experience in multiple jobs has

made Mann confident she can handle anything that comes her way, which is vital as she prepares for Supernature's first export drive.

She is delighted to be part of the Women's Enterprise Scotland Ambassador programme: "I sense that a cultural shift is beginning and a new future is dawning; there is a real buzz and vibrancy around Scottish businesses," she says.

"As a women's enterprise Ambassador, I hope to share my experiences and inspire others to consider this exciting, challenging and rewarding path."



*"I sense that a cultural shift is beginning and a new future is dawning"*



## Case Study Kirsteen Stewart

# Stewart doing it in fine style

KIRSTEEN Stewart is one of the first Ambassadors for Women's Enterprise Scotland, and she is a perfect example of a smart, creative, organised and ambitious woman making her way in the business world.

What's more, Stewart is conquering that world from her home in Kirkwall, Orkney, from where she dispatches the beautiful accessories and fashion designs that discerning customers are snapping up, both at her Orcadian base and online – she has clients across the globe.

Her eponymous label and brand began on her kitchen table, but the

success of her designs and quality goods has enabled Stewart to expand significantly since going full-time with her own business in 2007.

She now has five employees and numerous outworkers, and is determined to build the business globally, as well

*“I'm committed to creating opportunities for others and supporting the development of new talent”*

as encouraging other women to develop their own businesses.

Grateful for the support she has had from organisations as diverse as The Prince's Trust and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Stewart says she is keen to repay that backing by promoting the cause of women's enterprise.

She says: “As my business develops, I'm committed to creating opportunities for others and supporting the development of new talent and potential.

“I am delighted to have become a Scottish Women's Enterprise Ambassador.”





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» Women In Enterprise, with the help of RBS, has already helped 6,000 women in the UK. Picture: Thinkstock

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# Helping women put down roots

**Martin Hannan**

WHEN it comes to entrepreneurship in Scotland at the moment, to borrow a phrase from that great Scottish songwriter Annie Lennox, the sisters are doing it for themselves.

Several organisations and groups have been set up by women, for women, to promote the cause of getting women into business, and the RBS programme Inspiring Women in Enterprise and the Scottish Government are putting serious resources into this drive.

One of the leading organisations is Women's Enterprise Scotland which is a community-interest company that promotes exactly what its title suggests - anything to do with the contribution that women's enterprise makes to the Scottish economy.

Jackie Brierton, pictured right, is the co-founder and chair of Women's Enterprise Scotland, and she is clear about the group's aims.

She says: "The objective of Women's Enterprise Scotland is to get more women in Scotland into business because there is a gender gap that is still apparent, with only one in five new businesses being owned or run by women.

"There is a culture that starting up a business is a male thing and not a female activity, though with the growth of micro-businesses in recent years we are seeing many more women starting businesses.

"The potential for Scotland's economy if we could attract more women into business is substantial."

Women's Enterprise Scotland has already published a framework and action plan which involves mentoring and networking, a role model project, helping with markets and finance,

and gender-specific support.

A lot of work is going into informing women about matters such as where to go for support and how to get finance, whether that be from banks or investors.

The organisation has also announced its first ambassadors, two of whom are profiled on these pages.

Brierton says: "Our first five ambassadors are all amazing women with different businesses, and the idea is that people can access information about how they started and how they have built their businesses.

They are not famous or high-profile, rather they are women who have the experience of overcoming sometimes huge hurdles to create and develop businesses.

"In two years' time we hope to have 30 of these role models for women to follow."

Brierton has considerable experience of enterprise support "in the raw" as she is the enterprise co-ordinator of GrowBiz, a community-based enterprise in east and Highland Perthshire which aims to support anyone wishing to start or develop a business or social enterprise. It, too, has received support from the RBS Inspiring Women in Enterprise project.

"GrowBiz has been going for seven

years now and in that time we have worked with more than 600 clients," says Brierton.

"GrowBiz works with individuals who want to start up businesses or groups who want to start social enterprises. We also provide help to people who want to grow their businesses.

"It is very much geared to supporting people living in the more rural areas and in the small towns such as Coupar Angus, Blairgowrie and Aberfeldy."

GrowBiz uses peer-group meetings and one-to-one mentoring sessions in its support programme, and women have been particularly attracted to that approach.

Brierton explains: "Something like two-thirds of our clients at any one time are women, which shows that the business support model we use works.

"That was one of the reasons we applied to the Inspiring Women in Enterprise programme run by RBS - it is all about helping women to get the confidence to start businesses in the first place.

"We put a project proposal together that was about supporting women in the Coupar Angus area and since we started it back in October last year we have actively helped 52 women of whom 13 have started businesses."



*“The potential for Scotland’s economy  
if we could attract more women  
into business is substantial”*



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