

ADVERTISING FEATURE

# Museum is fired up to find new chief

Most recruiters are looking for a high level of energy, but this workplace is devoted to it, finds **Ken Mann**

**S**CARS of past industrial development aren't always cast in the role of ugly, untouchable blots on a landscape.

In Scotland, coal mining – once the proud powerhouse of the economy and a totem of our commercial identity – continues to provide an important keystone in education and historic appreciation through the National Mining Museum Scotland (NMMS). Forget the old stereotypical

mind's eye image of unapproachable curators, glass cabinets and cobwebs. This is a facility with its own palpably loud voice and man-made visual drama, partly staffed by ex-miners who can captivate visitors with technical detail and anecdotes from real personal experience.

Far from being at the last chapter of an engaging story, this Midlothian jewel of a visitor attraction – set on a large site that originally opened in 1895 as The Lady Victoria Colliery,

Scotland's first "super-pit" – seeks to look ahead, placing the saga of a carbon-fuelled era within the bigger picture of energy and its importance to Scotland and the world.

NMMS, close to the new Newton-gange Station on the Borders Railway which will open in September, now seeks a Chief Executive to steer that course. Henry McLeish – the former First Minister of Scotland, Chair of the Board of Trustees at the Museum and appropriately a man with mining roots in his family – agrees that NMMS is much more than a collection of artefacts. So how important is it that the selected candidate for the job fully embraces coal as an industry and the function of NMMS as a live provider of an energy story, from past to present and future?

"It's a fair point," says McLeish. "Obviously we're looking for someone who is dynamic, who can inspire, someone who is competent at the job. That said, mining has played a vital part in Scotland's story, in Scotland's economy and in Scotland's industrial development. I think we will have people applying who recognise that for two reasons. Firstly, they will understand the formidable contribu-

tion it has made to our past but secondly, they will see it as part of a continuing carbon story. I believe that we can find someone with an appreciation of where coal has fitted in and how its contribution can be a platform for the future energy story."

But this person will be expected to do something that is less usual in the museum sub-sector of visitor attractions – and that is to examine growth potential. In the last year, NMMS attracted 68,000 visitors, representing a healthy increase of 15 per cent on the previous year. For 2018, the bar is set high – 100,000 visitors is the aspiration to be achieved within three years. There are already signposts as to how that might be achieved.

"There is a big carbon story and we want to be viewed as being an important part of it," the Chair adds. "Museums must come alive and that's a recognition of the importance of children in our plans – how best to relate the story of coal, its importance and the unfolding chapters of energy provision, linking to Scotland's position in all of that."

"I'd like children, the next generations, to understand the total narrative for Scotland. From a practical

point of view, we'd like to more vigorously explore working with some of the big energy companies and the utilities, seeing whether jointly we can develop something in Scotland which takes in the totality of energy – carbon and all the modern technological developments, North Sea oil and gas, and the renewables sector."

Finance is never far from the agenda and links of the type mentioned have resonance in securing a stable future – NMMS is already bucking austere times. McLeish acknowledges what he calls "very generous" Scottish Government assistance to NMMS, but insists that the financial base must develop and diversify. "We've got to

look outward to relevant companies and industry to invest in us, contributing to a plan to achieve that increasing number of visitors. We've done extraordinarily well in recent times in bringing visitor numbers to the current level."

The Board comprises people who are passionate about the industry and have ideas about the way forward.

Ultimately, its members are looking for similar passion in a CEO, combined with expertise. "We'll be looking for someone who can speak their mind – somebody who provides complementarity," says McLeish.

As a footnote, the selected CEO will be joining what is one of the finest examples of an industrial heritage project in Europe. The former surface assets – a vision of brick, steel and iron – exudes the atmosphere of a dynamic past. Work remains to be done, following the blueprint of an ambitious conservation programme started in 2009, some buildings remain in a semi-derelict state, awaiting conservation and new uses.

Henry McLeish remarks: "We're never satisfied, we've got to do better – and that's the challenge for the future." Perhaps that's the best open job description a CEO could have.



**NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:** The story of coal as told at the National Mining Museum Scotland has played a major part in the development of the country.



**OPPORTUNITIES:** The new chief executive will be expected to open new areas.

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