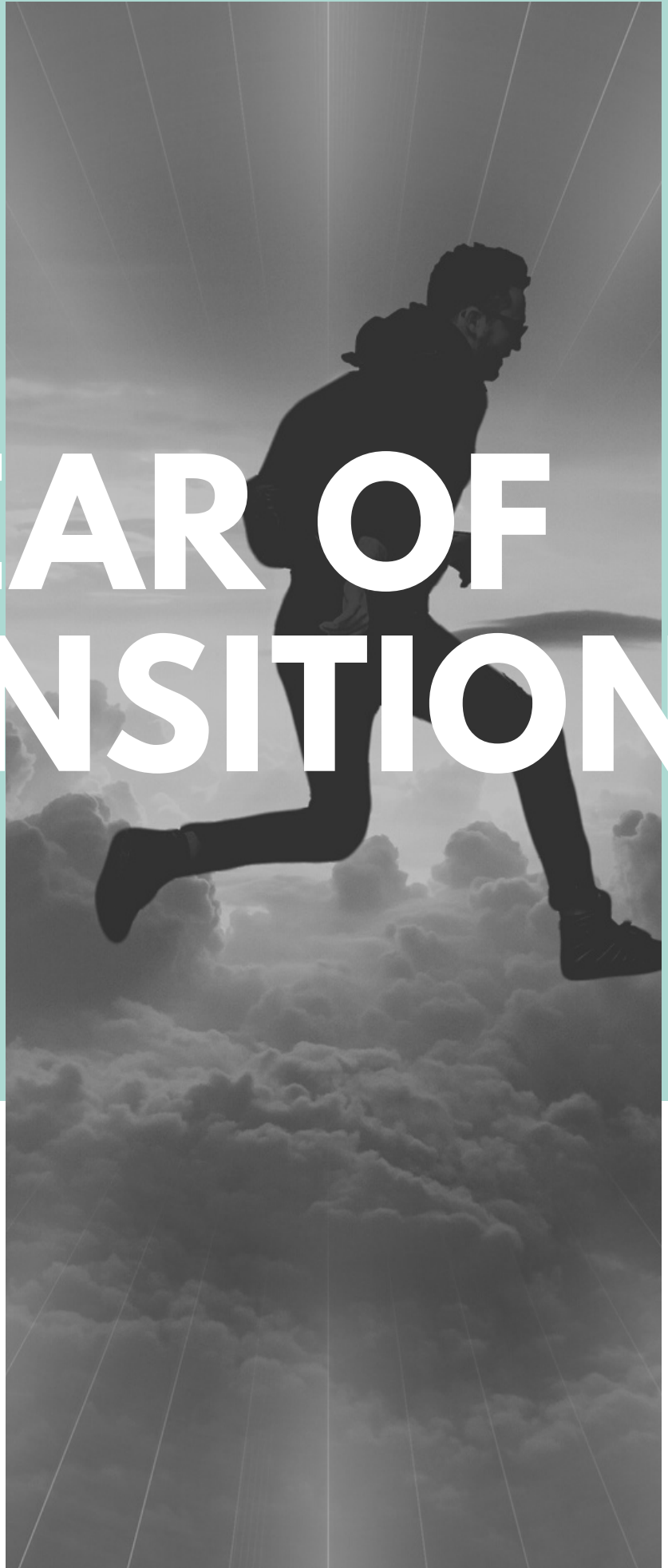


A YEAR OF TRANSITION



BY SARAH CHEW, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF TECHFEST



The Energy transition has been a huge industry focus for some time, and it's something the team at TechFest is dedicated to as we adapt our resources to reflect industry activity to help educate the future workforce, or as we call them, the Heroes of Tomorrow.

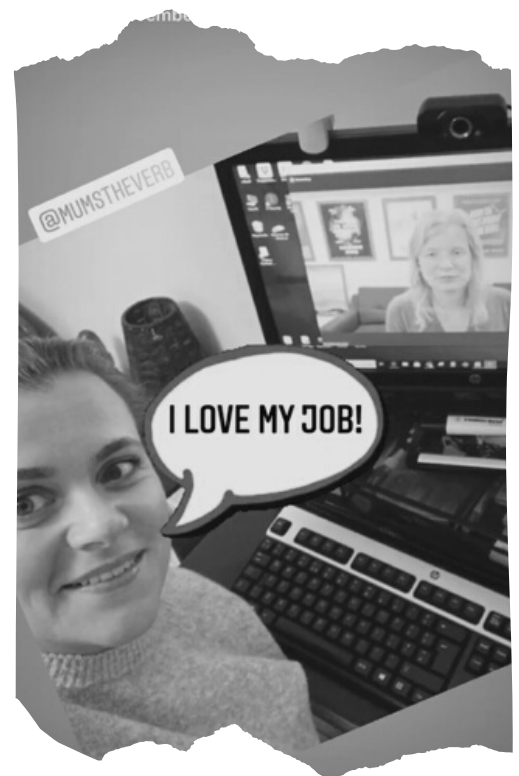
While the energy sector is transitioning into cleaner sources to help our environment, the pandemic has forced us to make changes in ways we could never have previously imagined. The rise in remote working and home schooling has not only reduced emissions, it's accelerated the transition into a new digital world, meaning TechFest has had to significantly adapt the ways we engage with our audiences.

The last year has been challenging yet exciting as we've worked to engage more young people in the energy transition without physical events. Although the transition to digital events had its difficulties, we've successfully removed participation barriers and opened the door to a whole new world of learning opportunities.

Operating as a remote team, we were keen to continue our mission to promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to a wider audience, particularly with families facing increasing pressure to work from home while overseeing their children's remote learning. We recognised the need for online educational resources and launched TechFest at Home in April, showcasing STEM based activities.

Our toughest challenge to overcome was our much-loved TechFest festival, which usually attracts over 25,000 visitors to Aberdeen each September to celebrate and engage in STEM. We developed TechFest Goes Digital, supported by joint principal sponsors bp and Shell, which took place virtually from November 5-25 and included a wide range of online events and activities for the general public, as well as a separate schools programme. Facilitating the delivery of fun digital workshops and presentations straight into the classroom, this provided a vital bridge between industry and schools.

Our switch to digital brought some huge benefits that would have been impossible in normal circumstances. We secured presenters from as far afield as San Francisco and it was a milestone for TechFest to reach a global audience, with viewers from all over the UK as well as South America, the US, Cyprus, France, Lithuania, Netherlands and Slovakia. During the digital festival, our website was viewed more than 8,500 times as a result of powerful social media content which drove bookings.



The second half of our annual calendar usually sees the return of our STEM in the Pipeline and STEM in the Installation competitions. These important programmes offer senior pupils the chance to gain valuable experience and speak to a diverse range of professionals, providing a real taste of a career in STEM. We had to get creative to come up with ways to continue this digitally, while incorporating and highlighting the energy transition for pupils.

The 2020 STEM in the Pipeline Energising the Transition competition, sponsored by the Oil and Gas Authority and supported by bp, Chrysaor, Ithaca Energy and OPITO, took place in the form of an online essay. Competitors had to produce solo work that was relevant to industry, including a high level of technical content. With interest from nine schools across Aberdeen City and Shire, topics included renewable electric power generation and the potential of hydrogen fuel.

Our 2020 STEM in the Installation project, sponsored by CNOOC International, was also significantly revised to become a virtual assignment and focused on how the energy industry is transitioning to reduce carbon emissions as much as possible. Using CNOOC's Buzzard platform, pupils were challenged to develop a proposal to install and connect an offshore wind farm to the facility, generating power for the installation and reducing the amount of gas import required to provide electricity. Pupils were able to chat to industry mentors via email and Zoom, maintaining that important training aspect, despite lockdown restrictions.

I'm really proud to reflect on what the TechFest team has delivered and the ways we've adapted our programmes to educate remote audiences while completely revising projects to suit an ever-changing landscape.

We're all eager to return to some previous form of normality, but I think it's key to remember that as with energy transition, our newfound routines and resources have made some positive impacts to our lives, including greater flexibility - and we have prevented some pollution too.

We're excited to continue to adapt our resources to focus more on the energy transition and renewable energy, showing how this can be a stimulating and rewarding career and contribute to the global movement towards net zero. However, as an organisation, we're going to make the most of our new digital skills, enhancing our ability to educate far more than just the North-east of Scotland in the world of STEM.

TechFest's digital content, including TechFest at Home and all festival information, is available to view on the TechFest website, along with selected content on Facebook and YouTube.

