

TECHFEST

A Message
From our
Managing
Director,

SARAH CHEW

These are unusual, challenging and worrying times for all of us. Who could have predicted that a COVID-19 pandemic would sweep the globe, resulting in so many things we take for granted being severely restricted in an unprecedented effort to keep us all safe?

Sunday lunch with the family, trips to the park, weekends away and trips to the cinema with friends - all on hold for the foreseeable future to avoid putting extra pressure on our NHS.

With new cases being reported every day, enforced isolation and many countries still on varying levels of lockdown, it's difficult to see anything positive in any of this.

However, there are some things we can be grateful for.



Communities pulling together to support each other, neighbours checking up on vulnerable people and leaving essential supplies on the doorstep, the now much-anticipated Clap for the NHS - and in our house, all the key workers - on a Thursday night and an opportunity to slow down and spend time at home.

STEM subjects have come into their own over the past few weeks, connecting people like never before and inspiring future generations, while STEM careers are at the forefront of the current situation.

The “stars” of the coronavirus pandemic aren’t social media influencers or reality TV personalities - instead the heroes are the doctors, nurses and care workers working on the frontline to care for those who are ill.

They are the scientists and researchers working in labs testing patients and using the latest science innovations to develop a vaccine. They are the teachers who are adapting to new ways of supporting our young people every day. These and other key workers are the ‘keystones’ in our society, as engineers would put it.

Where would we be without technology? Today’s IT infrastructure has allowed millions of office workers to set up a makeshift desk at home and carry on working from their dining table (or in my case a quiet spare room that also includes a child’s desk for my new ‘colleagues’), helping to keep many businesses running.

We have quickly learned to adapt and downloaded apps such as Zoom and HouseParty to have virtual nights out with friends and keep in touch with grandparents and classmates.

Of course, many children are missing being at school but the latest advances in technology allow teachers to connect with their pupils through digital tools such as Google Classrooms and continue with lessons remotely.

Digital learning platforms such as the CREST science awards have allowed parents to set their children engaging tasks and challenges - and get a quiet moment to do their own work.

We have quickly come up with new ways of carrying on with the everyday things we normally just get on with, while many businesses have diversified to be able to produce useful and vital supplies, such as distilleries manufacturing hand sanitiser and schools making PPE masks for medical staff. The creativity and adaptability has been incredible.



A lot of us are using this time to do daily workouts or virtual tours of museums across the world and thanks to the vast amount of online content you can virtually do anything you have ever wanted to. For some that might be learning a new language, brushing up on your cooking skills or seeing a Westend show, while for others it has reignited a passion for learning.

With a huge impact on the UK economy and a devastating human toll, it's premature to consider the positive legacy of this difficult time in our history but we have shown we are a resilient nation with the ability to think outside the box.

These are the skills I want our young people to recognise, with a real understanding of what they can do for our society and why such skills are more important than how much you earn or what car you drive.

Perhaps in the future we will continue to stay connected with friends in a virtual sense as well as in real life. The human connection and its role in our positive mental health is something we say we understand but its removal has been an awakening of our appreciation for a hug or a handshake, gestures we will never again take for granted.

We may travel less - we have shown that many people do have the ability to work at home if necessary and video conferences can work well and save huge amounts of time, which could reduce unnecessary journeys as well as

benefiting the environment.

Hearing some turn their previous commuter time into time to spend on other things like making dens, baking or even meditation - we all have the same number of hours each day but how we chose to spend them is so personal to how we approach our lives.

Events such as our annual TechFest festival could benefit from technology, such as using video links and big screens to bring new speakers to a local audience here in Aberdeen without the time constraints of a three-day visit or cost of travel.

We are also very excited about the chance to profile the 'silver lining' innovation that has come from this time as Live Wire Production's **Engineer 'n' Our Lives** programme, which we collaborate with, helps pupils to develop solutions to the problems we have faced and prepare us for the future.

Learning from others, building on opportunities and supporting our communities while continuing to inspire our children and young people can only be a good thing. The real-world examples of how STEM subjects and those who are passionate about them have played their part will forever help our young people to be inspired and motivated to understand how we can all make a difference.

Focusing on the positive and facing the sun each morning can only help meet the challenges we face and will face in days, weeks and months to come, and having our community of friends, family, colleagues and neighbours new and old standing next to us means we feel stronger together.



Sarah.