# Jim Rowan warns individualism risks stalling Scotland’s collective economic future



At a recent conference in Glasgow, former CEO of Dyson, Jim Rowan, expressed striking concerns regarding the trajectory of Scotland’s economic and cultural landscape. Speaking at the Creating the Jobs of Tomorrow conference, he suggested that an overemphasis on individual achievements risks stifling collective progress. Rowan remarked, “Rather than inspire new thinking, we have to some extent romanticised this,” likening it to the nostalgia of “having a picture of Bonnie Prince Charlie on the side of a biscuit tin.” He argued that, as Scotland stands at the precipice of a new era of innovation, it is critical to shift focus towards nurturing collaboration and shared success.

Rowan's insights come at a pivotal moment, amid escalating conversations around the future of work and the skills needed to navigate it successfully. He emphasised the necessity of integrating not just technical skills but also teaching young people the art of collaboration, noting that a lack of cohesive teamwork risks damaging cultural ties. With “digital nomads” and home working leading to a fragmented workforce, he advocated for a unified approach that fosters a culture of shared prosperity. This call for synergy echoes the sentiments found in discussions surrounding the role of educational institutions in Scotland, which are increasingly recognised as vital partners in skilling the workforce for future challenges.

The need for close collaboration between education and industry has become more urgent as Scotland grapples with a growing skills gap. Reports indicate that by 2035, the educational landscape will be starkly divided, with some regions expected to see a significantly higher proportion of degree-holding adults than others. This disparity may hinder economic competitiveness if not addressed. Educational institutions are urged to work directly with local businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to ensure that training programmes align with industry needs and equip students with the skills essential for driving innovation and growth.

In tandem with these educational efforts, the looming threat of automation has raised alarms about the job market in Scotland. Projections from leading think tanks suggest that nearly half of the jobs currently held could be at risk of automation by 2030, which presents an urgent need for a reformation of the skills system. Addressing these challenges requires not only the development of new educational programmes but also support for mid-career training to help the existing workforce adapt to technological advancements. Rowan's vision aligns with this urgent call for action, as he posited that the intersection of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and energy security, could potentially create unprecedented economic opportunities if cultivated effectively.

Moreover, while urban centres undoubtedly play a crucial role in Scotland's economic future, focusing on rural innovation is equally important. The OECD has recommended expanding programmes that bolster entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas, advocating for enhanced access to vocational training and retraining opportunities for older workers. Ensuring that youth are provided with platforms for entrepreneurial training can help bridge the gap between urban and rural economic prospects.

Ultimately, as Jim Rowan aptly noted, the next five years will be critical in shaping both Scotland’s industrial landscape and its broader socio-economic fabric. It remains vital for all sectors to collaborate and ensure that the country not only adapts to shifts in technology and workforce dynamics but does so in a manner that cultivates a lasting, collective prosperity.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25221365.former-volvo-chief-says-individualism-holding-scotland-back/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://enginuity.org/news-and-views/whats-behind-scotlands-stem-skills-gap)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25221365.former-volvo-chief-says-individualism-holding-scotland-back/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/business/collaboration-between-education-and-industry-key-to-the-future-1446791), [[5]](https://www.ippr.org/media-office/skills-reform-needed-as-half-of-scottish-jobs-at-risk-from-automation-leading-think-tank-warns)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://scottishbusinessnews.net/scotland-faces-growing-skills-divide-as-regional-education-gaps-widens/), [[6]](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/enhancing-rural-innovation-in-scotland-united-kingdom_33b8c803-en.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.ippr.org/articles/scotland-skills-2030)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25221365.former-volvo-chief-says-individualism-holding-scotland-back/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.scotsman.com/business/collaboration-between-education-and-industry-key-to-the-future-1446791> - This article discusses the importance of collaboration between education and industry in Scotland to drive innovation and economic growth. It highlights the role of colleges in supporting businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), by tailoring vocational courses to equip students with the skills vital for business growth. The piece also emphasizes the need for colleges to work closely with local businesses to improve productivity and develop new products, ensuring that the workforce is prepared for future challenges.
3. <https://scottishbusinessnews.net/scotland-faces-growing-skills-divide-as-regional-education-gaps-widens/> - This report highlights the growing skills divide in Scotland, with projections indicating that by 2035, 65% of adults in Scotland will hold a degree, compared to just 29% in regions like East Yorkshire. The article underscores the need for aligned investment strategies across education and training to retain local talent and address regional disparities in educational attainment, which could impact economic growth and competitiveness.
4. <https://enginuity.org/news-and-views/whats-behind-scotlands-stem-skills-gap> - Enginuity's research delves into Scotland's STEM skills gap, noting a decline in birth rates leading to fewer school leavers pursuing STEM subjects. The study predicts a continued decrease in the number of young people entering STEM fields, despite government strategies and investments. This trend poses challenges for sustaining a workforce capable of supporting Scotland's economic transformation, particularly in sectors like renewable energy and advanced engineering.
5. <https://www.ippr.org/media-office/skills-reform-needed-as-half-of-scottish-jobs-at-risk-from-automation-leading-think-tank-warns> - A leading think-tank warns that 46% of jobs in Scotland, approximately 1.2 million positions, are at high risk of automation by 2030 and beyond. The report calls for urgent reform in Scotland's skills system to equip the workforce with the necessary skills to adapt to technological changes, emphasizing the need for mid-career training and learning provisions to address the challenges posed by automation.
6. <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/enhancing-rural-innovation-in-scotland-united-kingdom_33b8c803-en.html> - The OECD report focuses on enhancing rural innovation in Scotland, recommending the expansion of programmes that support entrepreneurial ecosystems prioritising rural well-being. It suggests improving access to skills for innovation through vocational education and training, retraining older workers, and creating opportunities for youth entrepreneurial training. The report also advocates for strengthening new firm formation and supporting social entrepreneurs to improve the delivery of innovation programmes in rural areas.
7. <https://www.ippr.org/articles/scotland-skills-2030> - This IPPR report outlines Scotland's opportunities and challenges related to demographic change, technological advancements, and decarbonisation. It highlights existing weaknesses in career progression, pay, and productivity, and identifies gaps in the skills system, particularly in mid-career provision. The report recommends the establishment of a new Open Institute of Technology to provide flexible mid-career learning routes and focuses on in-work progression, productivity, and pay outcomes to support Scotland's economy through upcoming challenges.