

South West Business Council

CIC

ANNUAL

REPORT

2025



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Partner for 2025/26 at
southwestcoastpath.org.uk



Introduction Paul Coles, CEO of South West Business Council



We hope you will gain insights into the significant strides we have made in 2024/25 and share our excitement for the future.”

Welcome to the South West Business Council's 2025 Annual CIC Report.

Whilst the 2024/25 year was a challenging one in terms of geo-politics and the impacts of the budget on business I am pleased to report that we had growth in our membership numbers as organisations seek to engage with us around our core mission of “Convene, Inform and Connect”. The sector splits of the organisations remain varied and, of course, covers profit and not-for-profit organisations.

We continue to play a strong role in supporting growth opportunities in the South-West and play a collaborative role with the likes of the Great South West in engaging with government to highlight the role the south-west can play in delivering growth across key sectors such as Defence and Energy.

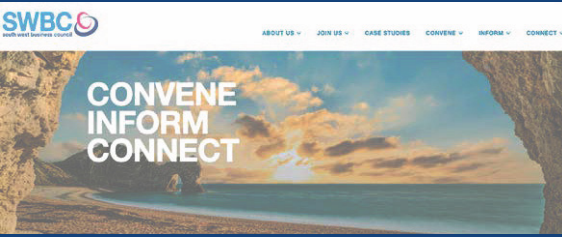
Alongside of this work is our close engagement with academia both from a research perspective and a skills perspective.

We look forward to supporting our members during the 2025/26 year.

Warm regards,

Paul Coles,
CEO, South West Business Council

Our Activities in Focus



New Website Launch



Social Mobility Conference



AI Conference



Our Annual Dinner



Our Annual Dinner



Tech South West Awards



South Devon College Skills Summit



The wide range of issues addressed by the SWBC and associated networking opportunities reflect the quality of people involved and the culture of the organisation."

Julian Gray, Director, South West Coast Path Association



Image credit South Devon College

Acting as a key voice for business in the South West



Working closely with South West Business Council has proven to be a major boon to our partnership working. I urge all businesses in the region to take up membership with SWBC."

Ian McFadzen, CEO, Ocean Conservation Trust



We continue to grow and foster partner relationships across business networks including the National Composites Centre, The Great South West, Plymouth and Exeter Science Parks.

We work closely with many of the larger colleges and Universities in the lower South West to help foster research and growth opportunities and to flag future skills requirements.

We continue with our programmes of major conferences on themes such as Energy Transition, Natural Capital, AI, and ESG. These garner both press and TV coverage.

We continue to partner and collaborate with Business West on strategic issues that affect the whole of the South West peninsula.

We continue to support the Bank of England by curating regional events for businesses to feedback to the bank on what they are seeing in their sector.

We spoke and chaired a panel event in Bristol on "The De-carbonisation effect: Powering the growth of the South West Economy" We attended a roundtable put on by the Great South West to brief Industry Minister, Sarah Jones MP, on the role the South West can play in delivering key government policies.



Promotion of training, learning and skills development

We regularly engage with our University and College members to share insights and to work together on projects of interest. We also discuss future skills requirements and the role that guest lecturing can play in growing the pipeline of talent in nascent sectors.

We are working with Young Enterprise to expand their Inspiring Futures programme, especially in areas of deprivation. We also hosted their CEO at a lunch so that they could hear directly from regional businesses.



We are collaborating with the Police and Crime Commissioners and the Home Office on a range of activities to provide meaningful “life chances” for offenders incl. building sustainable homes.

At the rate of c2 per month we are hosting member lunches in order that the attendees can share insight on what they are seeing in the economy and to also broaden their own knowledge and networks.

At the request of Vice-Admiral Andrew Burns we delivered a workshop to discuss innovation that involved ten of his key members of staff and a range of South West businesses, which has led to an ongoing engagement between participants.



The College is a long-standing member of the South West Business Council who we have always considered as one of the most effective networks of businesses.”

Laurence Frewin,
Principal & CEO, South Devon College

 South Devon College



The Crown Estate is excited to join South West Business Council”

Peter Lawrence,

The Crown Estate, Director of Coastal Infrastructure & Minerals



Development of commercial opportunities aligned with the clean growth agenda

We continue to play a strong role in identifying and promoting key opportunities in both the environmental and energy arenas.

We continue to follow and strongly support the possibilities around Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW) in the Celtic Sea especially in the supply chain and we are proud to have The Crown Estate as members.

We support the North Devon Biosphere to achieve its stated objects as we are keen to see business and the environment “work in lockstep” with this significant UNESCO designation.

We are supporting companies looking to produce hydrogen by matching them up with off-takers including the likes of maritime and logistics applications. As part of this drive, we collaborate with Hydrogen Southwest.

We have helped create momentum around the various energy related opportunities that exist at Portland and wider Dorset. These potentially include Hydrogen, Floating Off-shore wind, Carbon Capture & Small Modular reactors. It has led to the creation of the “Dorset Clean Energy Super Cluster.”

Related to the above energy projects we are working with the National Composites Centre to identify the opportunities to grow the UK supply chain opportunities. This is particularly relevant for Floating Offshore Wind.



Promotion and support of trade mission opportunities

Our Chair also chairs the Great South West's Internationalisation Board to foster new investment opportunities and has convened a strong board to build momentum.

We are working with a number of businesses to help identify investors whether domestic or Foreign Direct Investment on projects totalling over £1bn.

We helped promote and attended a two-day, Maritime focussed event in Plymouth which covered areas like Marine Autonomy, Defence, Energy etc.

We attended the Great South West's Parliamentary event which helped to promote the region's Defence sector.

We helped curate a senior stakeholder event to celebrate the launch of KLM's regular service between Exeter and Schiphol.



The South West Business Council champions our mission and helps us make a difference in the BAME community."

Jabo Butera, Managing Director, Diversity Business Incubator



Key activity and support of inward investment opportunities

We work with our professional services members to help identify and promote inward investment opportunities especially in the energy transition and natural capital arenas.

We have supported the Gravity team and recent announcements relating to the Agratas battery plant that will be located there.

We also work with members to help identify other sources of funding that they can draw on to grow their business in the South West.

We are supporting Altilium with their expansion plans in the South West. Their technology can recycle c90% of rare earth minerals from end-of-life EV batteries.





Organising conferences and networking events

We held a major conference on “Decarbonising the UK” at the University of Plymouth which promoted the capabilities of our members such as Wales and West, The Crown Estate and 1Energy.

We have initiated a series of lunches where the guests represent business, academia, local government and third sector to discuss what is being evidenced in the regional economy.

We helped curate, in conjunction with Tech South West, the creating and launch of the “North Devon Angel Investor Network.”

We helped curate the “Skills Summit” put on by the CEO of South Devon College. Additionally, we helped curate and publicise the Petroc College “100 Apprentices in 100 days campaign”.

In September 2024 we convened a conference on ESG, with Jonathon Porritt CBE as key note. In the light of global events, we wanted to debate/reinforce the importance of maintaining a focus on the ESG agenda.

We provide support to the Bank of England in helping them engage with regional stake-holders.

We held our annual dinner at The Box in Plymouth which saw over 120 senior stakeholders across the South West gather to hear a keynote speech by Vice Admiral Andrew Burns.



Our membership of SWBC provides us with a focused view of the South West economy, including new and growing sectors, to benefit our mission of developing skills pathways to meet employers needs.”

Chris Evans, Interim Director of Innovation, Impact and Business, University of Exeter



Partnering with the South-West Business Council, who know so much and have such great relationships and networks in the region, means we can move quickly to realise opportunities and add value where its most helpful.”

Sarah Fasey, Social Value Lead
Microsoft UK



Stakeholder Engagement

Activities include:

We engage on a regular basis with MPs, Members of the House of Lords and central government departments on matters relating to the South West.

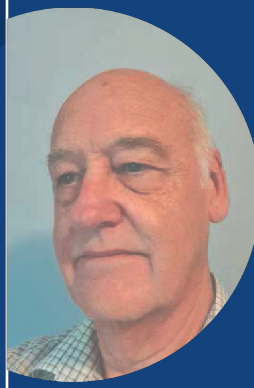
We support our members in joining the board of regional focused entities to share insight and learning.

We collaborate with other business membership networks including the likes of the ICAEW, SW Tourism Association; the National Composites Centre, Engineering UK; the Chambers of Commerce, the FSB etc.

We have engaged with the new Devon and Torbay Combined Authority to share insight about the economic opportunities and challenges we are seeing.

We pride ourselves on having a diverse board, which ensures we have strong reach into a very broad set of stakeholders.

Operations Team



ANDREW SEARLE
Head of Operations

Andrew looks after member invoicing; supplier payments and the accounting function in general. He also works with the rest of the team to support the South West Business Council's growing network of members and is principally responsible for managing key accounts.



PAUL COLES
Chief Executive Officer

Paul leads the South West Business Council team and oversees the delivery of core strategic objectives. He acts as the main interface, alongside our Chair, with members and key stakeholders. Paul has a passion for innovation and digital which he brings to bear when seeking to advance the South West economy.



LEAH ERDRINK
Marketing and PR Manager

Leah is responsible for day-to-day digital marketing and PR activity for the South West Business Council and plays a key role in the development and implementation of creative and strategic campaigns.



JOANNE VAN HAAFTEN
Membership Coordinator

Jo works closely with the CEO, Operations Manager and the Boards to support the South West Business Council's operations. She also liaises with members and helps organise events, including quarterly conferences and the SWBC Annual Dinner.



SWBC
south west business council



Joining the South West Business Council underlines our commitment to driving innovation and collaboration across the region"

Dr Christian Marston, Founder, Altidium



To find out more about becoming a member of the South West Business Council, please visit: www.southwestbusinesscouncil.co.uk/membership



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www.southwestbusinesscouncil.co.uk