

Kevin McIver is Business Development Manager for Quantum and Photonics at Heriot-Watt University. With a background in Physics and Mathematics, he has made impactful contributions across the secondary, further and higher education sectors, professional membership organisations and the UK's quantum technology sector. Today, he works at the interface between academia and industry, helping to build partnerships that accelerate innovation, commercialisation and real-world impact from cutting-edge research. He has supported collaborative research proposals worth more than £184 million and is recognised as a highly connected figure within the UK Quantum and Photonics community.



CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY TO WORKING IN THE FIELD OF QUANTUM?

After graduating in Physics and Mathematics, I started my career as a physics teacher before moving into vocational education, where I worked with employers and learners to develop skills and career opportunities. I then worked for the UK's largest Actuarial membership body, building global partnerships between financial industry bodies and academia to support research programmes, leading to the creation of the ARC – Actuarial Research Centre.

I made the decision to incorporate this experience with my passion for physics, leading me into the quantum sector with QuantIC – the UK's hub for quantum imaging, based at the University of Glasgow and ultimately to Heriot-Watt University, where I now support quantum and photonics collaborations and innovation activities.

It has been a bit of a varied journey, but there's a common theme of working to support industry and academia collaborations.

WHAT TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE GAINED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

Relationship building is probably the most important. Getting out and actually talking to people, listening to them, understanding their motivations and developing relationships based on trust allows you to create successful collaborations. I have also developed strong stakeholder management, communication and influencing skills, as well as the ability to adapt quickly to new sectors and technologies.

Being adaptable and able to get up to speed quickly really helped me in the beginning of my actuarial and quantum roles. What I always say to people working in a role like mine is, you don't need to know everything, you just need to know the key aspects of the technologies and the research to enable you to have initial engagement with industry before you then bring in the experts.

WHAT DOES YOUR CURRENT ROLE INVOLVE AND WHAT WOULD A TYPICAL DAY AT WORK BE FOR YOU?

My role focuses on connecting researchers, businesses and other organisations to create exciting collaborative projects and innovation opportunities. A typical day could involve meeting companies, supporting funding proposals, facilitating partnerships, speaking at events or discussing new research opportunities with academics.

I also work with an amazing team at Heriot-Watt University who support interaction and collaboration across a breadth of sectors.

No two days are ever the same.

WHAT WORK EXPERIENCE WOULD YOU SAY COULD BE BENEFICIAL FOR SOMEONE CONSIDERING A ROLE IN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT?

Any role involving communication, relationship management or stakeholder engagement can be valuable. Business development is about understanding people's needs, building trust and creating opportunities. Experience in networking, project management, customer engagement or partnership development can all provide a strong foundation.

Developing interpersonal skills will help to interact, communicate, and build relationships with stakeholders. Be reliable, approachable and quick to respond. To be successful in a business development role you have to be able to facilitate and guide discussions between stakeholders successfully. It's one thing setting up a meeting and then letting people talk, but sometimes you need to bring that together and influence the right people at the correct level to contribute as well, so some facilitation experience would be beneficial.

IS THERE A PARTICULAR APPLICATION OF QUANTUM TECHNOLOGIES THAT YOU ARE PARTICULARLY EXCITED TO SEE THE DEVELOPMENT OF IN YEARS TO COME?

It is difficult to choose just one. Over the years I've had the opportunity to explore some of the exciting technologies being developed in this space. Quantum sensing, communications and computing all have the potential to deliver significant benefits across healthcare, security, transport and many other sectors. What excites me most is seeing these technologies move from the laboratory into everyday applications.

I look forward to living in a world where technologies from across the National Quantum Technologies Programme, some of which I perhaps supported, that genuinely improve lives.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?

I would like to see greater diversity across STEM subjects and careers, particularly in physics and engineering. We need to ensure that talented people from all backgrounds feel that these fields are accessible and that they can see themselves represented within them.

I would challenge universities to support more women represented in senior grades in academic institutions. Often school pupils, undergrads and Early Career Researchers cannot identify with the male heavy influence in university Physics - including Quantum and Photonics. We need to look to break down the barriers to engaging and supporting women and other underrepresented groups in STEM subjects, producing recognisable role models for all.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE CONSIDERING PURSUING A CAREER IN STEM, PARTICULARLY IN A ROLE LIKE YOURS?

Having a career in science, technology, engineering or mathematics is really rewarding. Stay curious and don't be afraid to explore different career paths. STEM offers opportunities far beyond research and engineering, including business development, innovation and commercialisation. It's incredibly rewarding to work with people who are developing technologies that could make a real difference to people's lives.