

SNIFE

SCOTTISH AND NORTHERN IRELAND
PLUMBING EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION
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December 2015 CELEBRATING PLUMBING PROFESSIONALISM

A comment made by a number of those who attended the first SNIFE Awards Event in Edinburgh on 20 November 2015 was that it was refreshing to see an organisation promoting and celebrating all that is positive in today's plumbing industry. The industry and its participants don't always enjoy a positive image and this event was an attempt to show both the industry and the outside world that there are many positive things happening.

Richard Wilson, the winner of the SNIFE Apprentice Award had a good reason for not being there to collect his award in person- he was competing in the finals of the UK SkillPLUMB event in Birmingham. His employer, Sugplumb, of Aboyne in Aberdeenshire collected the award on his behalf. We can only imagine the feeling of pride and satisfaction that Richard and his employer felt when it was announced that Richard had won the UK event and had been crowned UK plumbing champion. Not a bad weekend's work!

SNIFE awards its Merit Award to an individual in the Scottish and Northern Irish plumbing industry who has given exceptional service to the industry. The 2015 Award was presented to David Osborne of Ayrshire whose invention, The Jompy, has the ability to save lives and improve health in the many parts of world which still suffer a lack of potable drinking water. Although based on a very simple concept of heating water while cooking over an open fire, The Jompy is ingenious and David has used his plumbing knowledge in a very powerful way.

Going the extra mile in providing customer service in a plumbers' merchants was the basis of the SNIFE Merchant Customer Care Award which went to Michael Fraser of William Wilson in Inverness. Nominated by a SNIFE member firm, it was clear to the judges that Michael worked tirelessly to see that the firm's customers received the products they needed when they needed them - even in challenging circumstances.

The accolade of SNIFE Business of the Year went to LW Haddow of Perth (Director Mark Haddow is pictured receiving the award) whose approach to ensuring that their customers received the best professional service impressed the judges. The strong field for this award showed that there are good examples of plumbing businesses delivering excellent service across Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Although the smiles on the faces of the award recipients (and indeed those who had been shortlisted) spoke volumes, it was, however, also good to get the positive feedback about this new initiative both from invited industry guests and from members attending. This event proved that there is much to be celebrated in the 21st century plumbing industry.

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November 2015 GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Those of us of a certain age may have smiled when we read recent newspaper advertisements headed “Milk Tray Man Wanted”. In addition to the qualities of being “charming, charismatic, thoughtful and thrill seeking”, the role needed someone “experienced in going the extra mile just to make someone feel special.”

The first SNIFE Awards event, which will take place in Edinburgh on 20 November 2015, seeks to recognise those who have gone the extra mile in plumbing industry terms. An industry often berated for poor performance should be proud of the many examples of individuals and businesses that do more than the bare minimum to deliver a professional service. SNIFE has decided that the time has come to honour the extra milers and to promote the positive aspects of our industry.

When the judges for the awards met recently, they were impressed by the different ways in which the candidates for the SNIFE Business of the Year and the SNIFE Merchant Customer Care award had taken steps to serve their clients and customers. The shortlisted businesses for these awards will attend a Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony and the winners will be announced on the night. In addition to these two new awards, SNIFE will also present the Plumbing Apprentice of the Year award and the SNIFE Merit Award. As is so often case, although there can only be one winner of each award, those shortlisted have in many senses already won in that their efforts, over and above the normal call of duty, have already been recognised in the judging process. They can all justifiably claim that they go the extra mile on a day-to-day basis in serving their clients and in raising the professional profile of the industry in which they work.

We thank all the firms who took the time to tell us about their businesses and offer our congratulations to the following firms who have been shortlisted to receive the award:

- CHC Ltd, Craigavon
- LW Haddow Ltd, Perth
- Sugplumb Ltd, Aboyne.

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Visit the [awards page](#) to read about the shortlist for the Merchant Customer Care Award.

The first SNIFE awards event might not quite make the impact which those iconic chocolates adverts made several decades ago. However, we hope that they will be the start of a process which sees the positive image of plumbing and heating being lifted.

September 2015 SIMPLY THE BEST

21-year-old Gary Doyle from Northern Ireland should be justifiably proud of his achievement as winner of a gold medal in plumbing at the recent [WorldSkills](#) event in Sao Paulo, Brazil. These skills events, in which 1200 young people from some 50 disciplines from across the world compete, are a superb showcase and should act as a source of encouragement both to those already qualified and also to future recruits. Well done, Gary!

Not everyone can claim the crown of plumbing world champion like Gary, but more people involved in plumbing need to start blowing their own trumpet about the excellence and professionalism they offer to their customers. This is particularly true for member firms of trade associations like SNIFE who have met the organisation's strict entry criteria and can stand apart from other businesses on issues such as the employment of qualified plumbers, liability insurance and a commitment to work under the rules of schemes such as the Plumbing Industry Licensing Scheme.

SNIFE's inaugural [Business of the Year Award](#), which will be presented at a gala dinner in Edinburgh on 20 November 2015, is all about recognising excellence. The judges will soon begin the process of considering the application that have been received and we look forward to hailing the first winner and seeing that business benefit from its award in the years ahead.

There is a tendency for those running plumbing businesses to be a little shy in promoting themselves but there is nothing wrong with telling people that your business is better than that of others who may be competing for the same work. Consumers are increasingly looking to differentiate between acceptable plumbing business and those who are excellent. SNIFE members need to become bolder in putting themselves forward as being, like Gary Doyle, 'better than all the rest'.

August 2015 TIME FOR GOVERNMENTS TO STOP MEDDLING WITH RENEWABLES

It didn't take long for the new Westminster Government to announce that it had stopped funding the Green Deal. Any betting person with a little knowledge could have predicted that this initiative would bite the dust. It was poorly conceived and hardly likely to be a scheme that would have seen a mass movement towards energy efficiency and the use of renewable technologies. However, the

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announcement follows a number of other about-turns relating to various aspects of renewables and can only have further dented consumer and industry confidence.

There is a clear case for the use of energy efficient and renewable technologies but there have been too many instances where this case is weakened through Government initiatives. Financial incentives - for technologies such as photovoltaics - can stimulate markets and encourage installations which might not otherwise have been fitted. However, when the rules change - sometimes with little notice - the impact on those who have invested (particularly in organising their businesses to undertake such installations) can be devastating.

The demise of the Green Deal is one thing but there are still examples around of inappropriate Government interference in what should be a natural market place. It is about time that we saw some consistency in energy strategy and an end to short-term meddling. Plumbing and heating businesses should and will be involved in this type of installation but they urgently need a break from the uncertainty that Government intervention has created over the last few years.

July 2015

SCHOOLS ARE OUT - HAVE YOU PLANNED YOUR APPRENTICE RECRUITMENT?

With the traditional long school summer holidays now under way, there will be large numbers of young people wondering about the next stage in their development. For some, decisions to continue in formal education will have been taken (possibly subject to a nervous wait for the appropriate exam results). However, many other bright young people will have doubts as to whether another three or four years of full-time education is necessarily the best way of getting them onto the employment ladder and a future career. Some might already have secured a position or an apprenticeship but there will be others who are still not sure of the way forward.

Crafts like plumbing require a constant supply of new entrants, both to meet the demand caused by those coming to the end of their working lives and also to meet what it is currently expected to be increased demand from clients following some difficult trading years. Without an injection of the appropriate number of new recruits, the industry will inevitably face the problems of skills shortages (which are already been reported widely in parts of England and are beginning to be seen by some firms in Scotland). The number of plumbing apprentices in Scotland fell dramatically at the start of the recession and has stayed largely at the lower levels with the exception of a welcome, if modest, increase in 2014-2015. SNIFE Training Services, which manages the bulk of plumbing apprentice training in Scotland, is expecting a further increase in the 2015-2016 training year. It remains to be seen, however, whether employers will recruit enough new apprentices to use the places for which public funding support has been secured.

SNIEPF

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It isn't only school pupils who enjoy holidays in the summer months and it is hoped that those running plumbing businesses will also have some well-earned rest. While switching off from business concerns is suggested for those who wish to get the most from their summer break, we encourage everyone running plumbing businesses today to think seriously about whether the first thing on their post-summer agenda might be the recruitment of one or more new apprentices. If you have a 'To Do' list, what about putting the question about recruiting apprentices at the top of that list for your return from holiday?

The staff at SNIEPF Training Services look forward to receiving many calls and enquiries from employers in the run-up to the commencement of the college year at the end of August/early September. They can be contacted by [email](#) or phone (0131 556 0600), further details are available on the [website](#).

June 2015

NEW TEAM AND NEW EVENTS ANNOUNCED BY SNIEPF

SNIEPF Office-bearers are elected for a term of 1 year and the SNIEPF Council meeting and AGM in Edinburgh on Friday 29 May 2015 saw the election of the new team for 2015/2016.



For the fourth time since Northern Ireland became part of SNIEPF in 1975, a member from that part of the United Kingdom has been installed as SNIEPF President. John Leonard (pictured) from Belfast follows his father, Joe, in becoming President, some 19 years after Joe's presidential year. Joe was present at the meeting to see his son receiving the chain of office as was Jim Moore of Ballymena, who was the first national President from Northern Ireland in 1986. John Leonard commented in his inaugural address that: *"The past year has seen considerable change within SNIEPF at what has been a challenging time. There have been a number of positive results of these changes including an increase in membership and greater participation in some of the schemes and services that have been arranged for our members. However, there is no room for complacency and...we need to ensure national policy reflects the needs of our membership. I look forward to playing my part in this."*

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The other office-bearers elected at the meeting were:

Vice-President: Brian Warrender (Angus & Kincardine Association)

Junior Vice-President: Gerry Woods (Glasgow & West of Scotland Association)

Immediate Past President: Alwyn Webster (Aberdeen Association).

The Office-bearers were installed at a new-style Council meeting and AGM which replaced the previous Annual Conference format. A SNIPEF Gala Dinner and Awards event is also being introduced and the first of these will take place in Edinburgh on Friday 20 November 2015.

[The SNIPEF Business of the Year and Merchant Customer Awards](#) were launched in May and are to be presented for the first time at the dinner in November. Nominations for these awards, which are designed to promote excellence amongst both SNIPEF member firms and within the merchant community, are now invited and further details can be found [here](#).

The new SNIPEF Office-bearers look forward to serving their organisation and to seeing the successful introduction of the new event and the new awards during the coming year.

May 2015

GENERAL ELECTION IS OVER - WHAT NEXT?

While the idea of having fixed, 5-year periods for the Westminster Parliament makes sense in many ways, it has also meant that the focus on 7 May 2015 seems to have meant that the campaigning for the General Election has been going on for rather a long time (although it was only about 5 weeks since the Parliament was dissolved and campaigning started in earnest). Regardless of political allegiances and views, there can be few people who didn't breathe a huge sigh of relief that the electioneering is now over and that the real work of building the future of UK plc over the next 5 year period has begun. Although many decisions which impact directly on those working in the plumbing industry are now made by the devolved administrations, it is hoped that we can see positive progress on national issues such as pensions (which didn't get much coverage during the campaign).

SNIPEF INVOLVED IN SEVERAL NEW INITIATIVES

Recent months have seen much activity by SNIPEF in a number of areas. For example, Shirley Williamson, Technical Officer delivered a successful training course on [legionella risk assessment](#) and disinfection of water systems at the end of April. The course was oversubscribed and a second course will run at the end of May. The prevention of legionella is a growing area of work for plumbing businesses which is reflected in the interest in these training courses. Later this month, the SNIPEF Council will meet in a new format meeting and AGM which will see the election of a new team of Office-bearers. This will be followed, in November, by a Gala Dinner and Awards Event at which the results of two brand new awards will be announced. The awards, to be formally launched later this

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month and are for the 'SNIFE Business of the Year' and the 'SNIFE Merchant Customer Care Award'. Details will be sent to all members shortly.

BEWARE ASBESTOS

Earlier this year we supported a campaign run by the HSE aimed at raising awareness of the issues associated with asbestos in the construction industry. HSE is seeking feedback on the campaign and they would be grateful if you could spare no more than 15 minutes to complete a simple on-line survey. Your feedback will help assess how effective the campaign has been and how they might make changes to their communications in the future. To complete the survey, just click [here](#) Responses are requested by **21 May 2015**.

April 2015

SNIFE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR 2015 - A CHANCE TO RECOGNISE EXCELLENCE

There are times in the life of a trade association like SNIFE when it feels that the emphasis is always on the negative. Whether it is customers who have encountered a problem with work done by a SNIFE member firm, an employer who has issues with the performance of one of its employees or a business that has faced a problem with a defective item of equipment, the starting point always seems to be with a negative issue. While SNIFE is proud of providing practical and effective assistance to its members, it would be all too easy to think that we only ever focused on solving problems.

In reality, of course, there are many more examples of positive good practice occurring on a daily basis in the service provided by the plumbing industry to its clients. The problem is that we tend not to hear about them as frequently as we hear about the less positive issues. SNIFE is about to launch an exciting new award that will provide an opportunity to highlight the great work carried out by member firms and the high standards of the businesses they run.

The **SNIFE Business of the Year 2015** award aims to recognise and celebrate excellence in technical skill and ability, excellence in customer service and a commitment to raising standards in the plumbing and heating industry. The inaugural presentation and ceremony will form part of a prestigious event taking place in Edinburgh on Friday 20 November 2015. A number of other industry awards will be made, recognising excellence in different aspects of our industry. We are delighted to invite member firms to attend the first Annual Gala Dinner and Awards evening in the historic Caledonian Waldorf Astoria Hotel, Edinburgh. Numbers will be strictly limited so if you wish to receive an advance booking form, please let us know by [emailing your contact details](#).

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SNIPEF member firms will shortly receive details of this exciting new award. Businesses can nominate themselves or can be nominated by others and details of how the business, large or small, meets the criteria can be demonstrated through the submission of supporting evidence.

Applications will be assessed by a judging panel including senior SNIPEF representatives and those from outside the organisation with a particular interest in excellence in plumbing. Not only will the winning firm will receive an attractive prize, but it will also have the opportunity to proudly use the **SNIPEF Business of the Year 2015** badge on vans and promotional literature.

So, let's focus on the positive rather than the negative in 2015! At SNIPEF we know that the good work of our members often goes unnoticed so we encourage you to tell us what you do well so we can share some of the many positive stories that lead us to take pride in professional plumbing.

If you are a Twitter user you can keep up with all the latest updates by following us [@SNIPEFnews](https://twitter.com/SNIPEFnews).

March 2015 WORLD PLUMBING DAY IS FOR ALL!

Wednesday 11 March 2015 is the sixth of [World Plumbing Day](#). This day, which was created by the World Plumbing Council, aims to promote the importance of the plumbing industry in both developed and developing countries. Plumbers and their organisations across the world are encouraged to undertake activity in support of World Plumbing Day which is aimed to raise awareness that plumbing must not be taken for granted.

One of the world's leading proponents of the links between good plumbing and good health is Professor Mala Rao who has supported World Plumbing Day since its inception by speaking at events and recording a video which was used to promote this event. In a [recent piece](#) written for SNIPEF, Professor Rao acknowledged that while there has been progress in regard to those who now have access to safe water, much still needs to be done in the area of sanitation (with about one seventh of the world's population still resorting to open defecation).

Recognising that developed countries tend to take plumbing for granted, Professor Rao exhorts plumbers everywhere to be more proactive in continuously striving to improve access to safe water and sanitation and to help build professional capacity (through training). She also promotes the sharing of good practice such as codes of practice and registration from the developed to other parts of the globe.

Much of what SNIPEF and its member firms do relates to World Plumbing Day. The Plumbing Industry Licensing Scheme is an example of best practice and the apprenticeship training programme operated by SNIPEF Training Services is second to none.

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[World Plumbing Day 2015](#) sees [a symposium on plumbing](#) and health at the Royal Society of Public Health in London followed by the Annual Lecture of the Worshipful Company of Plumbers where the speaker is another world expert on the link between plumbing and health - Professor Jamie Bartram. SNIFE is involved in supporting both events.

March 8 is International Women's Day which was first marked over a century ago. This international day attracted considerable media interest (as it does every year) and highlighted that there are still many issues relating to women which need to be tackled. It is unlikely that the image and respect of the plumbing industry will improve after just a few celebrations of World Plumbing Day. However, we must all hope that significant change comes quickly- it can, after all, be a matter of life and death.

February 2015

THE NEED FOR WORLD PLUMBING DAY REMAINS AS GREAT AS EVER

Established in 2010 to raise awareness across the world that plumbing is important and needs to be treated seriously, World Plumbing Day will be celebrated for the sixth time on 11 March 2015.

The issues which are relevant to this annual event vary dramatically from country to country. In developing nations, basic plumbing systems as known in places like the United Kingdom, often don't exist. Our TV screens regularly show the tragedy of situations such as those in India, where electrical appliances including TVs and mobile phones are more likely to be seen in some homes than a toilet. Even where sanitary facilities have been provided (often by international charities), it isn't unusual for people to ignore them and continue to use the great outdoors as their toilet. In situations like that it is education rather than infrastructure that is required. Good progress has been made in achieving targets for increased access to supplies of good water in developing countries although the problems with lack of sanitation remain serious and are a major contributor to deaths, particularly among the young and the infirm.

For most people living in the United Kingdom today, the days of no water supply and outside privies are either a very distant memory or something that one is only aware of through films and the tales of our grandparents. However, it is still the case that these basic necessities of life and good health are generally taken for granted and the role of the plumber in installing and maintaining these systems is either totally ignored or simply not appreciated. Although we are unlikely to see headlines announcing that 'plumbing can kill', that is the reality of the situation with increasing evidence of deaths, even in developed countries, resulting from poor plumbing - legionella and cross connections being two of the causes.

Too many people today still look down on the lowly plumber with contempt rather than respecting the role they play as one of our society's health workers. Although there has been an improvement in the calibre and educational background of young people choosing plumbing as their career in recent

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times, negative impressions still abound in our schools. One SNIFE member recently reported back from a secondary school careers event that the majority of young people he spoke to did not see plumbing as a career they would choose to follow.

World Plumbing Day is merely one day in the year when the industry is encouraged to stand up and make a noise about the valuable role played by our industry in the hope that the media and ordinary people will spot the activity and come to a realisation that we are an industry not to be taken for granted. We must all hope that the foundations of the first five World Plumbing Days will be strengthened in 2015 and that over the decades ahead the need for the industry to plead to be taken seriously will diminish.

January 2015

SNIFE HOPES 2015 WILL INDEED BE A HAPPY NEW YEAR

It has become traditional when meeting someone for the first time after midnight on 1 January to wish them a "Happy New Year". Greetings referring to health, prosperity and happiness are often included. It is also traditional to look back and reflect on what has happened in the year just ended.

In plumbing industry terms, it has been a long time since the industry as a whole has been able to say that it has experienced what can be described as a good (or "guid") year. Most industry-related conversations have concentrated on negatives such as the impact of the latest recession, poor prices, unfair competition and business failures. While these have to be accepted as unavoidable facts of life in an industry like plumbing, the time has to come when the positives outweigh the negatives. SNIFE hopes that 2015 will prove to be one of those years.

Although there are always exceptions, there are a number of signs of encouragement for plumbing at the start of 2015. Apprentice recruitment in Scotland has seen an increase of some 10%-15% in the current year. While getting us nowhere near the position pre-recession, this is a move in the right direction which must reflect the attitude of employers to their future workload. While many firms still report levels of work being no better than when the recession kicked in, there are others who are busy and beginning to build up a workload for several months ahead. SNIFE saw a net increase in its membership in 2014 and there are encouraging signs about further growth in membership this year. The range of services provided to members is being developed and there are plans for some new services which will enhance members' businesses.

Plumbing has a history spanning thousands of years and is important today as it ever was. Indeed, the range of work being undertaken by plumbing businesses is growing with increased emphasis on issues such as legionella prevention and the use of renewable sources of energy. There is no doubt that the industry has a long future - the only uncertainty is how soon the balance of industry talk is more positive than negative.

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While not making any predictions about 2015, SNIFE wishes that it will truly prove to be a Happy New Year for plumbing as a whole when we come to reflect on things in about 360 days from now.