QUOTED COMPANIES ALLIANCE

25/26

Annual Review

A Message from our Chair & CEO

Engagement 1

Campaigns & Research 2

Events & Networking 3

Policy Matters 4

Training & Support 5

Financials 6

About Us

Dear QCA Member

We are proud to present to you 12 months' progress across our campaigns, policy work, political engagement, training, member support and events.

We hope this report acts to reinforce not only what has been achieved but also where reform is still urgently needed so that quoted companies can fulfil their huge potential.

More importantly, this Annual Review should be seen as a reminder that the Quoted Companies Alliance is an organisation that is far greater than the sum of its parts.

By combining adviser and investor knowledge with companies' real-world experience we are collectively a potent force and knowledge centre for the small and midcap companies that dominate the London markets and contribute so much to the UK economy in every nation and region.

To our members, we thank you once again for investing your time and money in us.

In 2025/26, the QCA delivered:

- Our biggest-ever programme of political engagement, in London and across the UK, making connections and pressing the case for our companies with ministers, their shadows and local MPs;
- Some **44 events**, from our refreshed Annual Dinner that moved successfully to the British Museum, to breakfasts, lunches, boardroom briefings and Expert Group meetings where members could learn, swap ideas and develop their business;
- Flagship reports such as **Banking on Britain**, a clear, well-researched ask for the British Business Bank to get behind UK smallcaps, amplified through our political engagement as well as through our ongoing media work.

This year we **welcomed** changes to prospectus rules from the Financial Conduct Authority, so that companies can raise capital faster, cheaper and more simply than in the past - and from more sources including retail.

Last July's Leeds Reforms also put the focus on retail, curbing excessive risk warnings and enabling greater targeted support for would-be investors. The QCA played a small role in the development of the Invest for the Future campaign, featuring Savvy the Squirrel, which will be advertised widely.

Confirmation in the Autumn Budget that the annual tax-free cash ISA limit will drop from £20,000 to £12,000 starting in April 2027 also marked progress, although we are still eager that ISA relief is linked to investing in the UK.

Similarly, the three-year stamp duty holiday for investors buying shares in newly listed companies was positive. We hope it signals a route towards scrapping stamp duty on share trading in its entirety.

After the period end, the QCA **welcomed** the new AIM Rules as the beginning of a new era for the UK's leading growth market. The changes included a streamlined admission process, capital access window and proportionate increases to substantial transaction thresholds – all areas that we had pressed for on behalf of members during the 16-month consultation process.

There was also some disappointment. The Government's decision in January to no longer pursue the Audit and Corporate Governance Reform Bill was a notable setback, removing an opportunity to reform the deeply flawed Public Interest Entity (PIE) regime. And despite reports of an encouraging pipeline of Initial Public Offering (IPO) candidates, the number of companies trading shares in London continues to contract.

What was underscored by a summer of takeovers of quoted companies large and small is the urgent need to align the UK's investment policies with its growth ambitions. That means investing in ourselves – a message we have conveyed consistently.

Our members rallied round in November to contribute a significant number of the signatures to a London Stock Exchange-led letter to the Chancellor. It called for UK pensions to get behind UK companies by insisting that UK defined contributions pension schemes designated a "UK-weighted" fund as their default option that would allocate a minimum 25% of their investment into the UK. Such a shift remains a work in progress.

In May, on the first anniversary of the signing of the Mansion House Accord, we sent letters to every signatory, ministers and the Lady Mayor, asking why, despite good intentions, our members had felt no benefit from this initiative that is meant to catalyse investment into growth companies. We offered to help in any way we could to improve matters.

Speaking up for quoted companies was never more apparent in the last year than during a Business and Trade Committee enquiry into financing UK business and the gap that exists between early seed funding and the growth capital needed to expand.

In October, our Chief Executive, James Ashton, explained to the committee, chaired by the Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP, the value of AIM to the UK economy – but also the concerns shared by many smaller stocks about rising costs and depressed investor appetite. James was joined for the session by Stephen Streater from QCA member company Blackbird.

Our evidence was cited in the resulting report, "Investing in the UK Economy", launched at the London Stock Exchange in June. It contained plenty on the vital mission of plugging UK capital into UK companies – with some focus on growth stocks, which would be supported by an effective Mansion House Accord, dividend credit and the scrapping of stamp duty on share trading.

QCA evidence was also cited in the Treasury Select Committee's report that underlined the poor returns afforded to cash ISA savers.

Engaging on another issue, a group of members took part in a roundtable with officials from the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade on the challenges of corporate reporting, an area in which we have strived to develop thought leadership. The evidence-gathering took place ahead of a long-awaited consultation on the subject that is still due.

A Message from our Chair & CEO / Chapter 1 / Chapter 2 / Chapter 3 / Chapter 4 / Chapter 5 / Chapter 6 / About Us

Meanwhile, we strengthened the QCA team with new additions in all areas, notably events, policy and membership. We did so after bidding farewell to our long-standing membership manager Chris Stapeley and, after the period end, Ben Cornwell, our policy & research manager.

Thanks as ever must go to the hardworking and resourceful QCA team - Samar, Sheldon, Ruby, Cleo, Fabrizio, Jonathan, Reyhan, Melanie and Eve – as well as the dedicated and thoughtful QCA Board. And please take a look at our full list of members, who remain at the centre of all we do. If there is someone you think would benefit from joining our network, please let us know.

In the year to come we know there is plenty more work to do, campaigning and connecting. We press forward without our Chief Executive of last four years, James, who has decided to step down from his role. James said:

"I am proud of what the team has achieved since 2022. The QCA has grown in reach, reputation and resilience, and is better placed to make our members' case powerfully to government, regulators, investors and the media.

"I am immensely grateful to the Board, the team, our members and the many people across the public markets ecosystem who support our work."

The QCA Chair, Sangita Shah, will become Executive Chair from September 28 while the Board continues the process of appointing James's successor, added:

"On behalf of the Board, I want to thank James for his leadership, energy and commitment to the QCA and its members.

"James has been a powerful champion for small and mid-sized quoted companies at a time when the UK's public markets have faced significant scrutiny and change. He has helped strengthen the QCA's voice, broaden its reach and ensure our members' interests are heard clearly by policymakers, regulators, investors and the media."

Chair
Sangita Shah
QCA

CEO
James Ashton
QCA

Engagement

Politics was unpredictable this year to say the least. We widened our engagement noticeably, hosting member events with parliamentarians of all hues to better understand their priorities and press the case for quoted companies' considerable economic value to be recognised and further supported.

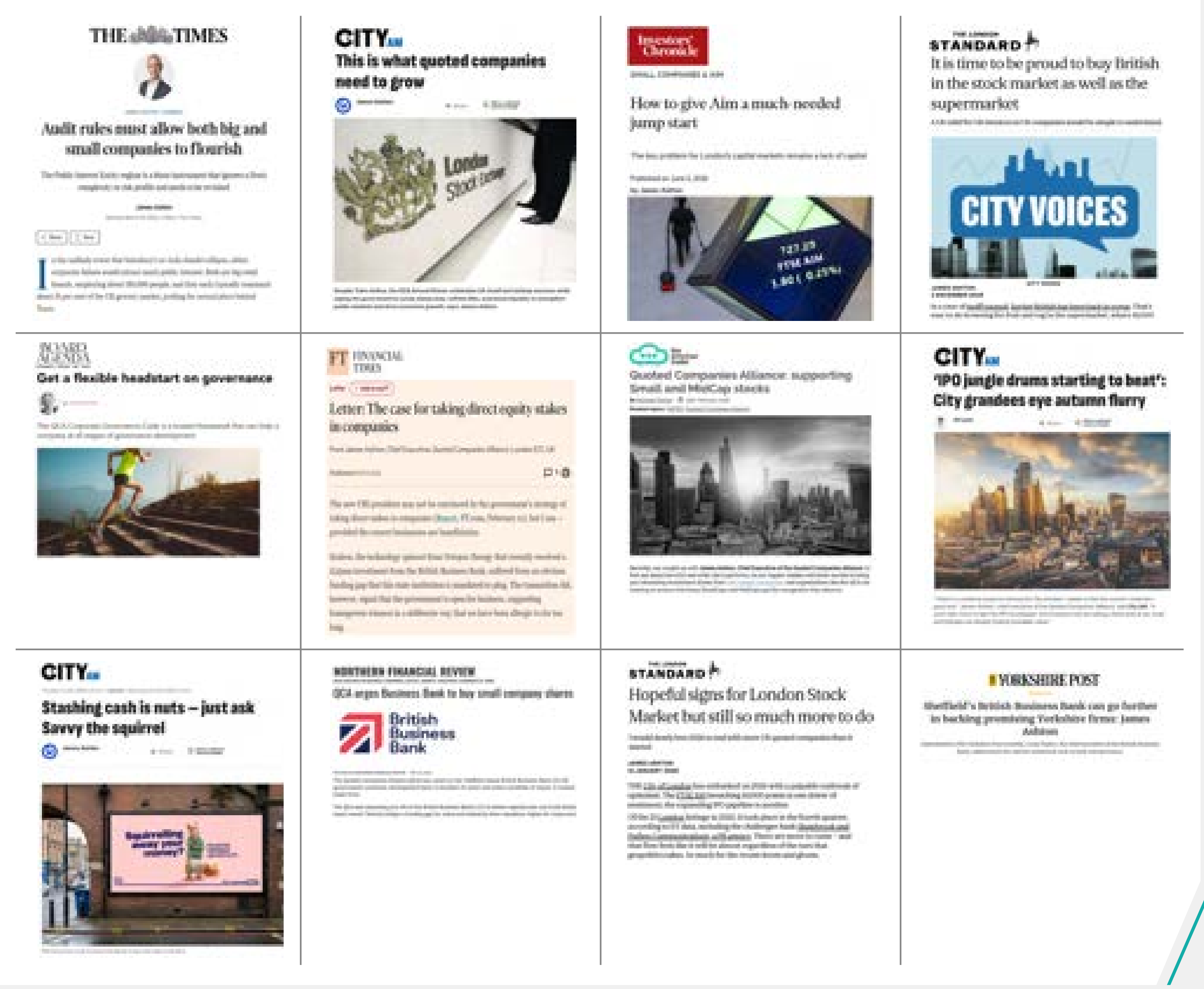
These gatherings included breakfasts with Richard Tice, the Deputy Leader of Reform UK, who explained to us in December how his party was shaping its financial services policy, as well as the Liberal Democrats' Deputy Leader and Treasury spokesperson, Daisy Cooper, who set out her vision for growth. Kevin Hollinrake, the Chairman of the Conservative Party, spoke candidly at our Leeds Dinner in March and the City Minister, Rachel Blake, delivered an opening address and met with members at our Annual Conference in June.

Even before the Andy Burnham-led government put emphasis on "good growth in every postcode" we continued our campaign to connect more quoted companies with politicians in their constituencies that are ranged right across the UK.

This initiative took us to Northamptonshire, Wiltshire, Lancashire, Cumbria and Nottinghamshire, bringing the teams at our members Alumasc, AB Dynamics, Velocity Composites, Fevara and Scancell together with their own MP during some fascinating site tours.

These **meetings** have been extremely useful in forging local links which support a greater national understanding of the investment incentives and regulatory reform required to enable our companies to boost performance.

In addition, the QCA team attended the major party political conferences in Liverpool and Manchester in autumn and held detailed meetings with the City Minister, Lucy Rigby, and the Business Minister, Blair McDougall, to build relationships, discuss our agenda and their own priorities. A further ten MP meetings were conducted in Westminster, including with several select committee members, as well as a "drop-in" event staged in April in Portcullis House, sponsored for us by Gurinder Singh Josan MP.



Our voice was further amplified in media coverage covering issues such as audit reform, retail investment and AIM rules changes in The Times, Financial Times, Sky News, City AM, Yorkshire Post, Investors' Chronicle, The Standard, The Armchair Trader and Board Agenda.

The QCA's monthly newsletter reached 8,500 subscribers – a 20% increase after we worked to extend our reach across the smallcap ecosystem. Similarly, our followers on LinkedIn grew by 29% to exceed 6,700, aided by more video content to tell our members' stories, press for positive change and highlight the range of membership benefits we offer.

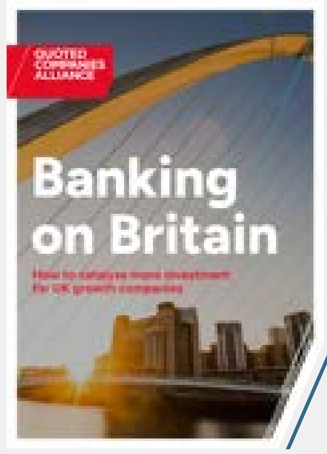
QUOTED COMPANIES ALLIANCE

2

Campaigns & Research

Where to focus our resources is always a careful decision. Just as important is the planning behind the campaigns that support our reports so that they are not left unread, lacking impact and therefore a wasted effort.

During the year we selected a handful of areas – investment, investor relations and governance – where we thought we could make a real difference to members. By contributing new evidence we have sought to meet an acute need, call for clarity and support greater understanding, communicating our findings to a broad set of stakeholders in each case.



Banking on Britain sought to highlight what we thought was a curious anomaly: why was the British Business Bank, the UK's economic development bank, not deploying any of its expanded capacity into public companies, focusing instead on private ones?

We developed a very clear ask, for the Bank to assemble a £1bn portfolio of smallcap investments, bridging funding gaps for many and indirectly driving valuations higher for many more.

Many of these companies experienced a funding gap, we found, where start-up reliefs tail off before institutional interest takes up the baton. Our proposed move would broaden market liquidity and improve price discovery for smaller companies, as well as energise the IPO pipeline.

The report was launched at a busy breakfast event, attended by HM Treasury and the London Stock Exchange, socialised at meetings with Aquis Exchange and the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade and featured on Sky News and in the Yorkshire Post.

A Message from our Chair & CEO / Chapter 1 / **Chapter 2** / Chapter 3 / Chapter 4 / Chapter 5 / Chapter 6 / About Us

Meeting Expectations: AGMs in the Digital Age stemmed from members' uncertainty over AGM planning. We felt it would be useful to take a closer look at an area that had evolved rapidly towards virtual formats during the COVID-19 pandemic but had become confusing because of a legal grey area and multiplicity of options.

From talking to members and investors and exploring good practice in several international markets, we considered costs and technology and how to improve engagement without sacrificing the core tenets of shareholder democracy. And, of course, we did it through the lens of small and midcap companies.

Ahead of its Modernising Corporate Reporting consultation, which is also expected to cover the future of AGMs, we put together some asks for the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade including recognising the legal status of virtual AGMs and ensuring shareholder consent is required for format changes. We made the point strongly that companies deserve the flexibility to decide on their own AGM format.

Supporting Growth Flexibly was the first opportunity to review adoption of the latest version of the QCA Corporate Governance Code, which was published in late 2023.

After reviewing the whole market, we found that QCA Code penetration remained considerable. Some 92% of AIM-quoted companies currently adopt the QCA Code, rising to 97% of AIM-quoted UK companies.

Also of note was that AIM companies were making greater use of the QCA Code's flexibility: 20% of followers stated they do not fully apply the Code, twice the proportion of two years ago. We collated examples of how companies explained their deviations to investors.

In addition, our research found that the smallest companies were the most likely to take advantage of the Code's flexibility: more than 30% of companies with a sub-£5m market cap explain how they depart from the Code; deviation was half that rate for those with a market cap in excess of £100m.

3

Events & Networking

It was a bumper year for bringing members together.

In June, some 250 members and other stakeholders attended the QCA Annual Conference, the largest showcase of our campaigning work and policy asks – and a brilliant networking opportunity.

Entitled “Scaling for Success” to emphasis the public markets’ strength in supporting growing companies, the event opened with an address from the City Minister, Rachel Blake who insisted “we must champion our success stories, be relentlessly practical about what needs to change, and disciplined about turning reforms into outcomes”.

Panel discussions covered:

Channelling capital into growth companies (featuring Nemone Wynn-Evans from LGPS Central, the Pension Protection Fund’s Kate Jones and Ashok Gupta of New Capital Consensus);

What’s still missing to get growth going (with Marcus Stuttard from the London Stock Exchange, Peel Hunt’s Steven Fine and Rakesh Shaunak from accounting group MHA);

And how to tackle excessive corporate reporting (featuring Professor Ken Lee of Loughborough Business School, Linda Timson from the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade and Brad Ormsby of Judges Scientific).

Also taking part in stage sessions were the chief executive of the Financial Reporting Council, Richard Moriarty, Mark Austin, chair of the Dematerialisation Market Action Taskforce and Andrew Griffith, Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Trade. Read our report or watch the video of the day.

Last September, our Annual Dinner was a big hit on its relocation to the British Museum. Beginning with a champagne reception in the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery, the largest attendance in a decade enjoyed a splendid night.

Guests toasted AIM's 30th anniversary and celebrated great British success, inspired by the decorated Olympic rower Baroness Katherine Grainger who spoke eloquently about resilience, challenge, leadership and growth – qualities CEOs need just as much as elite athletes.

Speeches also came from Dame Julia Hoggett, CEO of our headline sponsor the London Stock Exchange, as well as Gareth Davies, the Shadow Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Review pictures from the night.

A Message from our Chair & CEO / Chapter 1 / Chapter 2 / **Chapter 3** / Chapter 4 / Chapter 5 / Chapter 6 / About Us

We enjoyed getting out of London with a renewed commitment to meeting more of our members closer to where they are based day-to-day.

April's Manchester Dinner welcomed senior officials from the Financial Conduct Authority and Financial Reporting Council, Helen Boyd and Miranda Craig, who compared notes on the reforms they had been involved in and took questions in a Chatham House setting.

At the start of March, we were on the other side of the Pennines for our Leeds Dinner, which featured the Conservative Party chairman, Kevin Hollinrake, the Yorkshire Post's Chris Burn and our own Gervais Williams, QCA President.

"This House believes that boards need to do more to engage with investors." Our second QCA City Debate featured the motion that continues to be a big conversation topic in boardrooms.

Chaired by Barry Gamble, the four debaters – Alexander Denny, Virginia Bull, Jon Prideaux and Paulina Roszkowska – put forward some compelling narratives, with reference to memorable activist investor campaigns from years gone by. Members and guests also had plenty to say from the floor, as well as over drinks afterwards. The motion was carried. Watch the video.

QUOTED COMPANIES ALLIANCE

4

Policy Matters

Our seven Expert Groups – Accounting, Auditing & Financial Reporting (AAFREG), Corporate Governance, Legal, Markets, Share Schemes, Tax and the Investor Working Group – remain vital in guiding our policy stances and market understanding.

Without the time members contribute to the regular flow of government and regulatory responses our work would be much less impactful. We thank all of the 130 members of the groups that steer our thinking.

The Expert Groups met a total of 19 times in the year. With an average attendance of 11 members on each occasion, meetings were large enough to capture diverse views from the across the market but small enough to feature detailed discussion.

We worked with Expert Group Chairs and Deputy Chairs to shape agendas ahead of time so that meetings were always useful and productive. We also overhauled note taking to ensure we were capturing all key points and areas to follow up on.

A key benefit for members was that meetings almost always featured guest speakers to share their insight on relevant topics, update on market practice and stimulate conversation. During the year, Expert Groups welcomed speakers from the Financial Conduct Authority, HM Treasury, London Stock Exchange, Financial Reporting Council, Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, MUFG, Investment Association and the two major proxy agencies, ISS and Glass, Lewis.

In the 12-month period, we submitted nine policy responses, a reduction from the prior year which gave us capacity to extend engagement on behalf of members and undertake some specific research projects.

One sizeable piece of work bookended the year. Our response to the London Stock Exchange's discussion paper "Shaping the Future of AIM" was submitted in June 2025 and a subsequent response to proposed changes to the AIM Rules for Companies was made in July 2026. In between, we canvassed opinion among Expert Groups following the publication of the LSE's feedback statement in November.

Other **published responses** included:

- The Financial Conduct Authority's consultation on aligning the UK Sustainability Reporting Standards (UK SRS) with international standards (March);
- A call for evidence from HM Treasury on Tax Support for Entrepreneurs (February);
- Aquis Exchange's consultation on Aquis Support Services (October);
- The Takeover Panel's invitation to comment on Dual Class Share Structures, IPOs and Share Buybacks (September);
- The Business and Trade Committee's inquiry into financing the real economy (September).

We welcomed Jaspal Sekhon (Hill Dickinson) as Chair of our Legal Expert Group in January, succeeding Mark Taylor following his appointment as the QCA's Deputy Chair.

Review our **Expert Group membership and meetings calendar**.

QUOTED COMPANIES ALLIANCE

5

Training & Support

Our new flagship training course, the QCA Director Growth Programme, launched strongly in October at the London Stock Exchange, offering an intensive, two-day agenda designed to equip directors with the toolkit to thrive in the boardroom of today's growth companies.

Including practical case studies, interactive discussions and networking opportunities with peers, we designed the course in partnership with Murray Steele, a veteran of the Cranfield School of Management who has delivered programmes for the Financial Times and European Bank of Reconstruction and Development. The board consultant Patrick Dunne, author of the seminal text Boards, also led modules, and a panel of seasoned directors and advisers shared their own experiences. Watch our **testimonials video**.

The DGP was part of a concerted effort to better support directors' learning and knowledge gathering. We now label all of our events with the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) hours they offer. In the last year, QCA events offered a total of 75 CPD hours and plenty were awarded to members who attended workshops and webinars.

Another example of our ongoing learning was the QCA Directors' Briefing we introduced in February. This one-hour webinar provided a concise update for busy company directors on the policy matters, regulatory changes and other industry developments that may be pertinent to the discussion at their next board meeting. Many members watched back the recording, which is complementary to our set of newsletters. Its success means it has now been programmed quarterly in partnership with Engage Investor. Watch the latest **QCA Director's Briefing**.

In addition, we experienced improved demand for the QCA Corporate Governance Code Workshop that we ran several times in person and also virtually as more companies chose to migrate to the 2023 version of the QCA Code. The day-long event, to which some complimentary access is included in QCA membership, ran in tandem with our popular remuneration committee workshop.

Last July we completed the refresh of our series of boardroom guides which are designed to help growing companies develop good practice that will attract and retain investors and build long-term value. The new QCA Remuneration Committee Guide and QCA Audit Committee Guide marked significant updates on previous editions, while the QCA Nomination Committee Guide was produced for the first time. The trio followed on from the new QCA Environmental and Social Guide, which was released some months earlier.

To ensure that we were reaching more members outside London and covering a wide variety of topics, we continued our programme of webinars. This year we covered: the company debate over switching from AIM to the Main Market, the latest from Takeover Panel, equality, diversity and inclusion matters and the impact of AI on the boardroom. Watch back our **webinars**.

QUOTED COMPANIES ALLIANCE

6

Financials

Treasurer's Report*

(for the year to 30 June 2026)

"I am pleased to report on the financial performance for the year to 30 June 2026. Overall, the organisation has delivered a resilient financial performance, with income ahead of budget and a deficit materially lower than anticipated.

Subscription income was £1.03m, which was broadly in line with budget. The reduction in membership numbers to 252 from the prior year was primarily attributable to delistings, while our overall market share has remained largely unchanged, indicating that our underlying competitive position remains stable.

Additional income was particularly strong this year with the annual dinner income exceeding budget, reflecting continued support from our members with healthy attendance and sponsorship.

Expenditure remained well controlled, although people costs were higher than planned due to organisational changes. The deficit primarily reflects the planned investment in the development and launch of the new executive training programme during the year, with an underlying positive EBITDA for the year standing at £29,000. The organisation also retains its strong liquidity position with cash balances of just over £1m as of 30 June 2026.

The focus for the coming year will be to maintain this financial discipline, build on the strength of our income streams and ensure that investment in our people and programmes continues to deliver value to members."

Treasurer

Thin Chambers
CFO, Innovate Finance

* The Treasurer's Report and Annual Accounts are subject to formal sign-off by the external auditors.

About Us

The Quoted Companies Alliance champions the UK's community of 1000+ small and mid-sized publicly traded businesses and the firms that support them: nomads, brokers, accountants, lawyers, registrars, consultants and investors.

We believe the public markets can be the best place for companies to source the funds to grow, operate transparently and distribute wealth, fairly.

The QCA seeks to influence policy in dialogue with regulators and government, showcase the latest thinking on leadership, investment, technology and governance through our events and research, and provide a forum to share good practice among our members, whose market capitalisations range from £1m to more than £1bn and are quoted on the Main Market, AIM and the Aquis Stock Exchange.

Informed by our seven Expert Groups drawn from the membership, we campaign to ensure that regulation is proportionate, while maintaining the necessary protections for investors. Our QCA Corporate Governance Code is followed by the majority of AIM companies.

Small and midcap companies represent 91% of the quoted sector. They employ around 2.1m people and contribute more than £25bn in annual taxation.

Our goal is to create an environment where their potential is fulfilled, helping to ensure a healthy and resilient UK economy.

Why join the QCA? Read more **here**.

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