



IRISH CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE CHINA 爱尔兰商会



2026: Trot, Canter or Gallop?

An Irish business perspective for the Year of the Horse

Shanghai China February 2026

WELCOME MESSAGES



Ard-Chonsalacht na hÉireann
Consulate General of Ireland

David Murphy

Consul General

Consulate General of Ireland in Shanghai

I am delighted to be invited by the Irish Chamber of Commerce China to contribute a message to this 2026 Year of the Horse Outlook report.

2025 was another active year for the Chamber and it was a pleasure to attend their events, and also collaborate with the Chamber on joint initiatives. The Chamber is a pillar of the Irish community and I would like to congratulate Peter Markey and the committee for their tireless efforts on behalf of their members. Our Ambassador in Beijing, Dr Nicholas O'Brien, was pleased to engage with the Chamber on several occasions in 2025, and he extends his best wishes to Chamber members and looks forward to the continued success of the Chamber in 2026.

The last twelve months has seen an increasing level of global geopolitical and geoeconomic uncertainty across the world, and the business environment in China is also changing rapidly, so I look forward to reading the views of the Irish business community who participated in this report. Like last year, the format provides for fresh and sector-specific perspectives which allow the readers to gain insight into the current business context in China.

The year has begun well in terms of the Ireland-China relationship, with the January visit of Taoiseach Micheál Martin, the first European leader to visit China in 2026. The visit to Beijing and Shanghai was a success and we are beginning to see positive impacts already. China remains Ireland's largest trading partner in Asia and in the Taoiseach's meetings with the Chinese leadership, the strong trading relationship between the two countries was emphasised as a key dimension of our bilateral relations.

The Consulate, and the wider Team Ireland here at Ireland House and in China, including IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, and Tourism Ireland, is excited about the year ahead and looks forward to working closely with the Chamber throughout the Year of the Horse. Congratulations on the report and all the very best for 2026.

David

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IRISH CHAMBER
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Peter Markey

Chairperson

The Irish Chamber of Commerce China

I am delighted to introduce our 2026 outlook report, insights from Irish experts living and working in China as to what to expect for the year ahead, the Year of the Horse.

No matter what way you look at it, the year just finished was dominated by one man, and his attempts to reset global trading systems. This has now morphed into the use of tariffs not just to address economic issues but to advance broader geo-political negotiations. This has posed enormous challenges to practically every other country in the world, with China taking a strong position to protect its interests. At the same time, the adoption of AI tools in the real economy continues to accelerate. How these two great trends develop in the Year of the Horse will determine whether we trot, canter or gallop and how many will fall at the water jump! Our contributors bring stimulating and unique insights to these questions.

This year, the report gives voice to many of our newer members, Curt Evans (hospitality), Anyang Li (pharma), Tadhg O'Donovan (government agencies) and Caroline Zhou (consulting/education). We also have fresh perspectives from older hands, Ian Bell (finance) and Martin O'Donnell (clean energy). Conor Healy, CEO of the Cork Chamber of Commerce, reflects on the sister city relationship in its 20th year while looking forward to its future evolution. Finally, there is a first time contribution from one of our founding members, Rita Boyle – Rita has served as Chamber Treasurer for many years and is now stepping down, having returned to Ireland. She reflects on the changes she has seen over the years and her hopes for the future.

In addition to being from different industry sectors, our experts work in a wide range of companies, including multi-nationals, Irish owned private companies and state organisations, as well as SMEs. Accordingly, the report captures diverse perspectives, with some common themes emerging. Many thanks to them all for taking the time at this busy time of year to provide their insights.

I'm sure our members will find this report stimulating reading during the Chinese New Year holiday!

Peter

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The ICCC posed the following questions to get our contributors started.

1. What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2026? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?
2. Besides sector challenges, what are the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2026? How are you planning to address them?
3. How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? How has the changing approach to tariffs and restrictions on open trade impacted your sector? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2026?
4. What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Horse in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?
5. Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2026? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?
6. What do you think we'll be all talking about in January 2027?
7. What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Horse?



Ian Bell
Senior Partner
Bluestar AMG



FINANCIAL SERVICES

As a trusted adviser, Ian focuses on helping internationally mobile clients navigate complex financial decisions with clarity and confidence. His work spans investment planning, retirement strategies, and the preservation of wealth across generations.

Ian holds a degree in Financial Services and is CISI qualified, with a strong foundation in global financial advisory standards.

Described by peers and clients as a listener, connector, and trustworthy professional, Ian builds long-standing client relationships rooted in mutual respect and consistent performance.

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What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2026? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

The challenge in 2026, as in previous years, is markets can quickly change on politics and headlines, often faster than people can find their investment logins. A good example of this was the Trump tariffs announcement. There is an increasing demand by expatriates for advice that can cover multiple countries, currencies and occupation changes. A clear goal, sufficient liquidity, asset allocation and regular portfolio updates. The basics of successful investing without the jargon. The focus will remain 'value' for clients. Year of the Horse strategy: steady trot, not sprinting after every shiny object.

Besides sector challenges, what are the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2026? How are you planning to address them?

A big challenge is the rise of financial 'influencers'. A lot of people find it difficult to know what to believe when so many online 'experts' speak confidently but are never held accountable. There are various trends, images of screenshots, instant opinions and fear of missing out which are often presented as a strategy.

This can be addressed with clear recommendations, transparency, and documented reasoning. Simply, manage expectations, use scenarios and provide action points. The goal remains clients are informed, not sold to and can therefore differentiate between signals and noise in the market.

How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? How has the changing approach to tariffs and restrictions on open trade impacted your sector? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2026?

The world is more interconnected than ever, and we are now more than ever able to work with people all over the world utilising technology. It is pivotal in maintaining client relationships globally and a focus in growing our business.

Trade restrictions and tariffs can cause considerable uncertainty in markets. This can result in market falls, as witnessed with 'Liberation Day'. Many investors feel they need to react quickly. While short term price movements are real, they are not always indicative of what will happen in the long term. As international movers, expats seek to preserve the value of their assets and not react to short term market movements. Cross border planning will remain a priority for borderless clients.

What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Horse in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

As wealth management continues to evolve, sustainability is moving away from being just a label. The question is less "is it green?" and more "is it resilient". The focus is on measurable risks, so governance quality, business resilience, supply chains and climate related regulation. We will touch on AI shortly, but it also feeds into sustainability in a very practical way. Better data and analytics can strengthen governance, flag supply-chain risks, improve climate and regulatory reporting, and help businesses stress-test resilience rather than just publish glossy targets.

Internally, it's the less glamourous things such as paperless workflows, better data quality and fewer non-essential meetings that could be an email or phone call. Sustainability, like investing, works best when it's consistent and repeatable.



A big challenge is the rise of financial 'influencers'...online experts who speak confidently but are never held accountable.



Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2026? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?

By 2026, AI will be a driving force that enhances business and management. Effective use can aid in the onboarding process, documenting the strategy, creating scenarios, and monitoring the investment portfolio against the defined plan. All very impressive. In terms of professional advice, being 'relatable' is a better quality than 'impressive'. As such, as an advisor my focus will remain on providing judgement, guiding clients through tough decisions and being accountable.

What do you think we'll be all taking about in January 2027?

I expect the discussion to focus less on short-term performance and more on resilience. Advice that can withstand currency shifts, policy changes, mobility, and career uncertainty. We'll likely see continued emphasis on portable wealth planning, and risk management rather than headline-driven investing. Utilitarian yet remarkably efficient.

The widespread adoption of intelligent software is likely to continue, leading companies being those that deploy AI to lift productivity, reduce costs and improve service with measurable results. The winners will be those that combine this with human accountability.

What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Horse?

Don't chase every galloping trend. Build a plan that can outlast them. If you are unsure of the approach, contact your older self at ian.bell@bluestar-amg.com and most importantly have a happy and healthy 2026.





SBA Stone Forest

Rita Boyle

Director, Business Advisory
SBA Stone Forest

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

I am a Business Advisory Director with SBA Stone Forest, an international public accounting and business advisory group, and a wholly owned subsidiary of RSM Stone Forest Singapore

The Stone Forest group was first established in Singapore over 40 years ago & today is the 5th largest accounting firm there. The firm established SBA Stone Forest in China in 2001. For over 20 years, we have been supporting the growth of internationally active companies, foreign businesses setting up or already in China, and Chinese enterprises expanding their businesses overseas. We offer one-stop, hassle-free solutions for clients, specializing in the following services: audit, accounting & contract staffing, corporate compliance and corporate secretarial services, HR and payroll advisory services, international tax & transfer pricing and CFO support services.

What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2026? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

The key challenges facing the accounting and advisory sector are:

- Fee Pressure:** With the growth in the demand for niche services, firms are facing increased competition and fee flexibility,
- Client Complexity:** Client needs are becoming more complex and there is a greater demand for cross border M&A, international tax planning and overseas IPO support requiring firms to offer more specialized services,
- Digital Transformation:** The demand for digital services and automation will drive firms to increase investment in technology and improve their service offerings.

These challenges and opportunities highlight the importance of agility, expertise and innovation for firms.

How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? How has the changing approach to tariffs and restrictions on open trade impacted your sector? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2026?

In the current geopolitical and economic climate, we are seeing clients adopting a more cautious approach to their sourcing strategies as tariffs impact supply chains and cash flows:

- Increased Costs:** Tariffs are squeezing margins, forcing price hikes.
- Operation Costs Pressure:** Higher duties plus longer lead times resulting in significant cash flow strain. Some clients may consider leveraging trade financing or duty drawback programs.
- Supply Chain Reconfiguration:** Tariffs accelerate shifts away from China.

Our advice to clients is to achieve a balance with cost efficiency and risk mitigation, leveraging a mix of tax optimization, legal safeguards and operational agility. In this time of uncertainty, we have recommended that clients focus on:

- Tax & Duty Optimization**
 - Leverage free trade agreements to reduce tariffs.
 - Explore customs valuation strategies (e.g., first sale rule, transfer pricing adjustments).
 - Consider VAT refunds where applicable.
- Operational Resilience**
 - Dual sourcing plus buffer inventory to mitigate disruptions.
 - Digital supply chain tools (AI-driven logistics, blockchain for traceability).
 - Scenario planning for further trade restrictions.

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Be curious, keep learning new things and treat others as you want to be treated.

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We are seeing a higher level of international interaction and are supporting clients via our global accounting network with;

- Local Market Entry (tax structures, entity establishment in alternative sourcing hubs),
- Indirect Tax compliance (VAT, customs duties across EU/Asia etc.), and
- Cross-border M&A (structuring deals to minimise tax risks).

Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2026? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?

AI is already having a significant impact on our sector and our firm and will continue to do so in 2026 & beyond. The impact is twofold, providing sector growth opportunities and internal organizational productivity improvements.

China's AI sector is rapidly developing offering high-value investment opportunities for global investors. There is a surge in foreign-invested enterprises establishing AI teams and technology centers across China. The industries with the greatest development opportunities are intelligent manufacturing, smart healthcare, autonomous driving, chips and intelligent robots.

The main reasons for Foreign Tech Companies investing in China are:

- 1.Talent – Access to a large pool of skilled R&D professionals and engineers,
- 2.Government Incentives – Tax incentives, and
- 3.Cost Efficiencies – Lower operational costs such as rental and local staffing.

To empower such investors to overcome localization challenges and accelerate their growth, we have tailored our professional services to support this growth sector in China. We offer a one-stop solution from legal entity establishment, payroll and human resources, accounting and tax planning & compliance, to enable companies to be up and running within 6-8 weeks.

Internally as a firm, we view AI as a tool to enhance, not replace human work. AI is supporting organizations in our sector to deliver services faster and improve customer facing functions and as a consequence is allowing us to strengthen client relationships.

What do you think we'll be all taking about in January 2027?

Given the geopolitical tensions, discussions will continue on securing supply chains and greater regionalization of production. Advances in AI, healthcare treatments and health technology.

On a lighter noteFIFA Women's world cup, cricket world cup, and Ireland winning the rugby world cup.

What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Horse?

Be curious, keep learning new things and treat others as you want to be treated. Life does not always go according to plan so be open to new opportunities when they come your way and be prepared to take some risks.





Curt Evans

Founder
Yeats Bistro



HOSPITALITY

I am an Irish hospitality professional based between China and Ireland, and the founder of Yeats Bistro, a modern Irish-European bistro concept rooted in craft, culture, and connection.

I hold a Master's degree in Culinary Innovation from Dublin University of Technology, graduating with First-Class Honours, and spent over six years working in Michelin restaurants in Ireland. These experiences shaped not only my technical approach to food, but also my belief that cooking is a cultural expression — one that reflects values, landscape, and relationships as much as skill.

Yeats is not intended to be a nostalgic recreation of Ireland abroad. Instead, it aims to represent a contemporary Irish identity: confident, generous, outward-looking, and deeply respectful of ingredients. Our long-term ambition is for Yeats to act as an Irish food ambassador in East Asia, strengthening the connection between Irish and Chinese food cultures, producers, and hospitality professionals. We hope to become a reference point for the modern Irish bistro in the region — accessible, warm, and serious about food.

Just as importantly, I want Yeats to be part of the Irish community abroad — a place of familiarity and welcome for those far from home. In a quiet way, I hope it can serve as a modern Lake Isle of Innisfree: a sense of calm, belonging, and grounding, hidden in the middle of downtown Shanghai.

For me, hospitality is ultimately about trust: between kitchen and dining room, between producer and chef, and between cultures. That philosophy guides both my personal work and the direction of Yeats.

What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2026? How are you planning to overcome or take advantage of them?

Hospitality in 2026 continues to face rising costs, talent shortages, and increasingly discerning guests. At the same time, this creates a strong opportunity for restaurants with clear identity and cultural authenticity. For Yeats, the opportunity lies in positioning Irish food not as niche or nostalgic, but as relevant, modern, and globally fluent. We are focusing on disciplined menus, strong storytelling, and cooking that reflects Irish values — seasonality, restraint, generosity — while being deeply respectful of local Chinese dining culture. By doing so, we aim to build Yeats not just as a restaurant, but as a platform for Irish food culture in East Asia.

Besides sector challenges, what are the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2026? How are you planning to address them?

Our biggest challenge is growing with integrity. As Yeats develops, it is essential that quality, culture, and values are not diluted.

We are addressing this by investing heavily in people — training teams to understand Irish food culture, not just recipes — and by building systems that allow consistency without rigidity. We are also exploring the development of a small, curated Irish product range, which would extend Yeats' ambassadorial role beyond the restaurant space and create sustainable, complementary revenue streams.

How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? How have tariffs and trade restrictions impacted your sector? How do you see this trending in 2026?

International interaction has increased significantly over the past year. We are engaging more with Irish producers, European wine suppliers, visiting chefs, and international guests, while also deepening collaboration with Chinese partners and local suppliers.

The recent ban on importing Irish beef into China has now been lifted, which is incredibly welcome news.

As someone deeply committed to Irish produce, I've long valued the world-class standards Irish beef represents—sustainability, traceability, and animal welfare.

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The opportunity lies in positioning Irish food... as relevant, modern, and globally fluent

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While the ban's removal is a huge step forward, I recognize it as an ongoing challenge as it will take time for supply channels to fully resume and for a steady flow of product to be available.

When that time comes, Yeats intends to be well positioned to responsibly showcase Irish beef, sharing its quality and story with our customers.

Beyond the commercial opportunity, this represents a meaningful symbol of renewed trust and cooperation between Ireland and China, which we are excited to support.

Looking ahead to 2026, I expect fewer transactional relationships and more intentional, values-driven international partnerships.

What initiatives do you see during the Year of the Horse to enhance sustainability?

Sustainability in hospitality must be practical and embedded, not performative. At Yeats, this means designing menus that reduce waste, prioritising seasonal produce, using whole animals where possible, and building long-term supplier relationships.

The Year of the Horse speaks to endurance and steady

progress. We see sustainability as a long journey — one that aligns naturally with Irish food values and increasingly resonates with Chinese consumers.

Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2026? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource, or a replacement worker?

AI will be a tool and a resource, not a replacement. It can support forecasting, inventory management, scheduling, and menu analysis — allowing hospitality professionals to spend more time on leadership, creativity, and guest experience.

Hospitality remains deeply human. AI can support the craft, but it cannot replace warmth, intuition, or care.

What do you think we'll all be talking about in January 2027?

I believe we will be talking about values-led business — organizations that chose patience over speed, depth over scale, and relationships over transactions. In hospitality especially, resilience will belong to places that made people feel held, not just served.

There will also be renewed appreciation for spaces that offer calm and familiarity in fast-moving cities — restaurants that function not only as businesses, but as anchors for community. If Yeats succeeds, I hope it is spoken of as a small refuge for Irish and international guests alike — a modern Innisfree in the middle of Shanghai.

What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of the Year of the Horse?

Slow down. Build relationships before buildings. Trust that consistency, kindness, and patience compound over time.





Cork Chamber
Advancing business together

Conor Healy

Chief Executive Cork Chamber of Commerce

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

"Cork Chamber of Commerce has been a champion for the business community and a strong advocate for the economic development of the Cork region for over 200 years. With approximately 1,200 members together employing 130,000+ people throughout the city, metropolitan area, county and beyond, the Chamber plays a central role in shaping the region's economic landscape. Our vision is to lead a transforming an ambitious Cork City and County, with a purpose to unite, represent and support our members and community. Cork Chamber plays a key role in connecting Cork internationally and promotes the city and county for investment, collaboration, talent and trade. Through our international Chamber connections, business networks and international programmes such as our "Connecting Cork" initiative, we help our members to connect and collaborate with businesses across the globe".

What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2026? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

For the business community in Cork, 2026 will build on strong existing momentum, creating new opportunities through continued investment. As Ireland's fastest-growing city region, Cork continues to attract talent and foreign direct investment, reinforcing its position as a driver of economic growth.

Cork's strengths across life sciences, agri-food, technology and maritime sectors, combined with a world-class talent pipeline from our two universities, strongly position the region for long-term, sustainable growth. These assets underpin Cork's reputation as a globally connected city and county that competes internationally.

Cork benefits from a highly skilled workforce and a collaborative business ecosystem. The opportunity lies in building on this momentum. As a Chamber, our focus is on championing the investment and policies that will enable Cork's continued growth, supporting productivity through skills and leadership development and fostering collaboration across sectors. By building on Cork's

international connections, we are supporting our members to benefit from the next phase of Cork's growth.

Besides sector challenges, what are the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2026? How are you planning to address them?

In Cork we have a very diverse business community, and as a chamber, we must be ready to advance and advocate on behalf of that broad membership we represent. In a period of rapid change, businesses are at very different stages of digitalisation, sustainability readiness and international exposure and their needs are evolving quickly.

To address this, we will continue to engage deeply with our members, expanding our policy positions and enhancing the relevance of our events, networks and training programmes. Internally, we are also focused on agility, making sure the Chamber itself can adapt quickly and continue to be a trusted, influential voice for Cork business.

How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? How has the changing approach to tariffs and restrictions on open trade impacted your sector? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2026?

Over the past year, the level of international interaction for Cork Chamber and our member businesses has continued to deepen. At a time of increased uncertainty in global trade, it is more important than ever that our team is ready to engage internationally and to represent the interests of our members and our region.

This has been reflected in a series of high-level engagements, including two Cork City Council missions to Shanghai, a mission to Jiangsu Province, as well as reciprocal visits to Cork by the Nanjing Peoples Municipal Government. These engagements were further strengthened through participation in the Ireland-China Senior Officials' Programme, organised by the Department of Foreign Affairs in partnership with the Shanghai Foreign Affairs Office.

We have seen sustained engagement with our international partners, reflecting both the strong outward-facing nature of the Cork region and the adaptability of our business community. As global trade policies, regulatory frameworks and market conditions

continue to evolve, our members are responding by seeking new markets and strengthening strategic partnerships. These shifts have increased demand for practical supports around market intelligence and internationalisation.

In this context, Cork Chamber's services have become even more critical. Through our Enterprise Europe Network project, we have supported companies to navigate regulatory change, identify cross-border opportunities, access EU funding and connect with international partners. Our Connecting Cork initiative has also played a key role in fostering international relationships, welcoming inward delegations and promoting Cork as a globally connected region.

While some sectors are experiencing more cautious international engagement, many Cork-based businesses are interacting more, not less, with foreign customers, suppliers and colleagues. Looking ahead to 2026, we expect this trend to continue. Cork's strong talent base, connectivity and collaborative ecosystem position the region well to navigate evolving trade dynamics and to continue building meaningful international relationships in the years ahead.

What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Horse in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

During the Year of the Horse, sustainability will continue to be a defining thread that connects Cork Chamber's work across strategy, advocacy, partnerships and operations, guided by our newly launched Cork Chamber's Sustainability Strategy and Report, which sets out a clear framework for accountability and long-term impact. As a leading voice for business in the region, Cork Chamber is focused on driving real environmental and social impact while laying the foundations for a transforming, ambitious and resilient Cork city and county.

Through ongoing engagement with our members and stakeholders, we are supporting businesses to embed sustainability into decision-making, operations and growth plans. Beyond our organisation, we are working closely with businesses, local authorities, charities and not-for-profits to advance sustainable practices across the region. Collaboration, innovation and shared learning are central to this approach, enabling the business community to adopt low-carbon, circular solutions, strengthen social inclusion and contribute meaningfully to Cork's long-term resilience.

Cork Chamber-led initiatives such as the Sustainable Cork Programme and our Cork Offshore Renewable Industry Forum, alongside our wide-ranging social and environmental partnerships, continue to demonstrate our tangible impact in supporting the sustainable growth of Cork's economy. A strong, sustainable region is essential to long-term economic stability, talent attraction and Cork's continued success as a leading place to live, work and invest.

Ireland is now entering a decisive phase in its climate ambitions, and Cork has a unique role to play. The rapid enablement of offshore renewable energy will be critical to meeting national climate targets, enhancing energy security and securing a sustainable economic future for both the region and the country. Cork Chamber will continue to advocate for the infrastructure, policy certainty and investment needed to unlock this opportunity.

We are proud to have been appointed Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Ambassadors by the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment and to contribute actively to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This commitment has also been recognised through the Chambers Ireland 2025 Award for Sustainability & Biodiversity, highlighting our work to embed biodiversity into business practices, and the World Chambers 2025 Award for Best Collaboration of Chambers, Business and Government, recognising the impact of our partnership-led Local Green Deals initiative with Cork City Council.

Taken together, these initiatives reflect how, during the Year of the Horse, Cork Chamber is translating ambition into action through a clear strategic lens, leading a collaborative, forward-looking sustainability agenda that supports businesses to adapt, innovate and grow responsibly. By championing sustainable economic development, accelerating climate action and strengthening social and environmental resilience, Cork Chamber is helping to ensure a more sustainable, competitive and future-ready Cork region for the years ahead.

Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2026? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?

AI will have an impact across the business community in 2026, particularly in areas such as productivity, data analysis, customer engagement, and decision-making.

Through Skillnet Cork Chamber, we are actively supporting members to understand and adopt AI in a practical, responsible way. This includes targeted training programmes, leadership development and upskilling initiatives that help businesses prepare their teams to work effectively alongside new technologies. Our focus is on ensuring that businesses of all sizes can access the skills and confidence needed to leverage AI for competitiveness and growth, while also understanding the governance and ethical considerations that come with it.

What do you think we'll be all talking about in January 2027?

By January 2027, we expect conversations to centre on competitiveness, climate transition and talent, approached with a sense of optimism and opportunity reflective of the Year of the Horse. Businesses will be asking how Ireland and regions like Cork can remain attractive places to invest, work and live in a more competitive global environment, while also identifying the new opportunities that change and transition can bring.

We will also be talking about what has worked in terms of infrastructure delivery and housing supply, as well as the areas where progress still needs to accelerate, with a shared focus on building momentum and unlocking opportunity for long-term, sustainable growth.

What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Horse?

Focus on building strong relationships and stay adaptable. Change is constant, but collaboration and a willingness to learn will always matter more than trying to predict every turn in the road.



Anyang Li

**President, Trinity College Dublin Shanghai Alumni Chapter.
Researcher, Med J (Yixuejie)**

PHARMA

With more than ten years of training and work experience across the medical field, Anyang has focused on the intersection of medical communication and clinical mental health. Her research centers on the effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction in addressing psychiatric comorbidities in patients with chronic diseases, with a particular interest in how evidence-based clinical practices can be sustainably translated into public health tools.

In the past three years, she has continuously advanced the dissemination and practical application of mindfulness and mental health knowledge by:

- Independently developed a structured mindfulness curriculum integrating cognitive-behavioral therapy principles and evidence-based mental health practices
- Founded Medical platform to deliver clear, practical, and trustworthy mental health information to the public
- Implemented public-interest mental health programs across corporations, universities, and community settings, providing emotional regulation and stress-management tools tailored to diverse populations

She is committed to advancing low-cost, scalable, and sustainable models of mental health support—bringing psychological well-being out of specialized clinical settings and into everyday life, empowering individuals to better understand themselves, manage stress, and build lasting resilience in both mind and body.

Challenges

We are living through rapid change.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping industries, many traditional jobs are disappearing, and medical technology is advancing faster than ever.

Yet, at the same time, the world is facing instability—political tension, economic pressure, and even war.

In healthcare, technology is improving, but doctors and nurses feel less satisfied at work, and patients do not feel better supported. This mismatch shows that society is changing faster than people can mentally and emotionally adapt.

What I genuinely hope to draw attention to is this: we may be facing a broad and deepening global mental health crisis.

A small but unusual experience at the library recently triggered this reflection. I went there with my laptop, and when I tried to charge it, I discovered that among nine individual seats by the window, seven power outlets were not working. I informed a librarian, who reacted with great surprise, because no one had ever reported the issue before.

To me, this seemingly trivial detail reveals something unusual.

First, it is highly unlikely that seven outlets failed at the same time; the problem must have existed for quite a while.

Second, I cannot be the first person to encounter it. So the real question is: Why has no one said anything? Why do people keep silent?

A broken outlet is a minor issue, and the library is an equal, public space, anyone has the right to speak up. Yet the fact that so many people encountered the problem but chose not to report it suggests something deeper: a neglect of personal needs, hesitation to express concerns, and an invisible worry about possible consequences.

If silence can occur even in a non-hierarchical public setting like a library, what happens in environments with strong power structures—such as workplaces or academic institutions? I cannot know the story behind every unspoken moment, but these behavioral patterns deserve serious examination.

This is why I must emphasize: mental health challenges are no longer hidden, they are visible, widespread, and rapidly becoming a global concern.

Opportunities

At around the same time, I experienced an event that had a very low chance of happening. This made me reflect on a simple but important idea: When something unlikely still occurs, it shows that change and possibility are still present. Even under pressure, there is room for hope and action.

This suggests that individuals are not passive characters in a fixed script.

We each have the ability to shape our own lives—but only if we remain aware and intentional in what we do.

Awareness is crucial. Most people live much of life on “autopilot,” repeating familiar habits without much

thought. When we are not paying attention, the mind assumes that uncommon events are “impossible.”

So when something unexpected happens, it is easy to overlook or dismiss it.

However, small events can signal the beginning of broader change.

A useful analogy is guilt bamboo, a plant that grows across many countries yet blooms at the same time. This shows that what seems separate can respond in similar ways. Today, people in many places may be experiencing a shared shift: noticing stress more clearly & questioning quiet acceptance, and slowly waking up to the need for expression and change.

This awareness is emerging among researchers, clinicians, and the general public. Such a shared awakening may become an important strength in addressing rising mental health challenges.

But awareness alone is not enough. We need solutions that are practical, fair, and able to benefit all sides, not ones built on cost or sacrifice.

Current global conflicts make this very clear. Violence and instability do not stay confined to one region; they create worry, fear, and psychological strain everywhere. Watching silently, without response, can add to emotional pressure and a sense of helplessness. This is why speaking up, however small the action may seem, matters.

As Lu Xun wrote: “If we look away today, there will be no one to speak for us tomorrow.” Silence is one option, but it is not the only one.

We can choose participation and cooperation. Together, we have the capacity to face collective challenges, not by avoiding conflict, but by working toward solutions that do not harm any group.

Individual Efforts

First, we must place care for ourselves at the center. This means taking responsibility for our own physical and mental health, instead of letting external forces define what we should feel, accept, or endure.

Second, we should extend care to the people, animals, and environments around us. Positive action often grows outward: when an individual acts with awareness and goodwill, the impact can spread far beyond one person.

Importantly, we do not need to wait for large systems to change before making a difference. Many meaningful shifts start from daily decisions.

Take public health as an example:

Lung cancer is now the leading cancer among women in China, and over 97% of female patients have never smoked. Second-hand smoke, kitchen fumes, and air pollution are major risk factors. Individual behavior can make real contributions:

- Share this information with people who may not know it
- Gently remind smokers about the risks to others
- Choose walking instead of driving short distances, reducing air pollution

Each choice may seem small on its own, but the effects accumulate:

one reminder can change a belief; one reduced exposure can protect someone's lungs; one short walk instead of a car ride improves local air quality; and one person's understanding can trigger awareness in many more. Individual power may feel limited, but individual awareness is never isolated. Every action, speaking up, caring for someone, making a healthier choice has the potential to spark a wider chain reaction.

Irish Culture as a Source of Strength

Ireland and China share a meaningful historical resonance.

Both nations have struggled for independence and identity, preserving culture, language, and collective memory through conflict and hardship.

Because of this history, we understand the value of peace and the weight of what is hard-won.

Although my time studying in Ireland was brief, it left a deep and lasting impact. The people I met and those shaped by that culture shared common qualities: kindness, openness, and inclusiveness, yet with clear personal boundaries. They engage with the world in a way that is gentle but firm, calm yet self-defined. Simply being around them creates a sense of peace.

Through this experience, I learned that gentleness is not weakness—it is a form of strength. Respecting differences and maintaining healthy boundaries can shape an entire cultural mindset.

I believe encounters carry meaning. Choosing Ireland was the first important journey of my life. Because of it, I became a better, more grounded version of myself. Choosing to return to China was the next step—to bring back the warmth, openness, and resilience I experienced, and to continue that energy in my own community.

When I reflect on how Irish culture offers momentum today, one symbol comes to mind: the Celtic four-leaf clover. It arises from a rare natural variation—only one in a million—yet each leaf holds symbolic weight: Hope, Faith, Love, Luck. In Celtic tradition, the clover is more than a decorative motif. It expresses the belief that even in uncertain circumstances, we can trust in small miracles and in the power of the individual to spark change.

To me, that is the essence: Irish culture does not solve problems for us, but it offers a stance, a way of being. It teaches us to stay kind without losing clarity, to protect our boundaries, to speak with courage, and to share what warmth we have, even in complex times.

What do you think we'll all be talking about in January 2027?

I hope by then we will be discussing practical ways to protect the environment and animals, taking better care of ourselves, our friends, and our families, and using AI not to replace our work, but to make daily life easier and more meaningful.

What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Horse?

Love real people and do real things.



Tadhg O'Callaghan

Director China
Enterprise Ireland

Government Relations

Enterprise Ireland works in partnership with world class Irish companies to accelerate their development in global markets thereby contributing to employment and economic value add in Ireland. Here in China, I lead our team providing market entry and scaling supports to innovation rich Irish companies seeking to grow their exports to China.

What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2026? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

China wants to increase its self-sufficiency in all sectors. Given the experience of Covid and the geopolitical turbulence in the last few years, it is understandable that the country would want to guarantee its supply chain security and boost its own industries. On a broad front, the goal is to increase exports, develop high-tech industries and encourage greater consumer activity at home.

At Enterprise Ireland, our role is to find the best opportunities around the world and link them with Irish firms with the right capability and do it at the right time. Our organisation develops and assists companies of varying sizes across almost every industry. The challenge for us, given China's apparent ambitions, is finding where to fit in.

The opportunity lies in our own economic development story. Over the past 50 years, Ireland has attracted investment from across the world, and through the help of the government, has developed cutting-edge companies in life sciences, engineering, aviation and other sectors that can help fill the gaps that China will need to fill as it continues its advancement up the value chain. As it does so, and as we continue our own development, we will work to find the best routes to partnership.

Besides sector challenges, what are the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2026? How are you planning to address them?

While Ireland has a huge amount to offer the Chinese consumer, the drive for self-sufficiency may result in the selection of Chinese suppliers and vendors in favour of our own. We need to stay aware of the pressures and expectations that our Chinese partners face and offer them solutions that they cannot easily

attain at home. This means taking a delicate approach and demonstrating clearly the value proposition of our companies.

Beyond this, offering clear communication in general is imperative to achieving success in 2026. Our team is often an interlocutor between Irish and Chinese businesses. In this capacity, we have to be clear and focused about what the conditions are like on the ground in China and offer specific advice on how an Irish company might succeed here. In terms of communication to our Chinese partners, it is not realistic to say that we can offer solutions to all of their problems. Ireland has produced some of the best companies in the world, but it is critical to show how and where they can align.

How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? How has the changing approach to tariffs and restrictions on open trade impacted your sector? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers/suppliers/colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2026?

The mood music around China hasn't been very positive in recent years. There is a feeling that it is a very difficult place to operate in and, for some, particularly those with large operations in the US, maybe an unwise market in which to invest. The number of visitors is low in terms of visiting clients, but there is a steady rate of engagement for companies that see an opportunity here and have spent the time developing local partnerships.

My own view is that ten years ago, there was an overly rosy picture of the opportunities in China. That opinion has perhaps swung the other way now, but I think it is due a correction. China does offer great opportunity, but for those with the right capability. Our job is not to convince our clients about China, one way or another, but to give them the facts on the ground and help them as best we can.

I think we will see an increase in visitors in 2026. I think there will be far fewer 'speculative' efforts at the Chinese market and those that do visit are companies that have done research and already have a sense of where and how they can fit in.

What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Horse in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

Enterprise Ireland has ambitious targets when it comes to sustainability and reducing carbon emissions. One of

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Our job is not to convince our clients about China...but to give them the facts on the ground and help them as best we can.

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our strategic goals for the next three years is to reduce CO2 emissions by 35% for EI-supported companies. In tandem with this goal, we have allocated significant investment for RD&I initiatives with a focus on sustainability and green technology.

In Ireland, we provide supports and grants to our companies, ranging from climate action vouchers which help them draw up sustainability plans all the way up to capital investment assigned to manufacturing businesses to upgrade their facilities and bring them closer to being carbon neutral.

In terms of our presence in China, we have excellent companies in agritech and green energy who have enjoyed success here. In nutrition and sustainability, our agritech companies are recognised in China as global leaders. Though China is in the lead when it comes to solar energy and offshore wind energy, we have seen positive developments for our companies in these sectors and expect to see much more of them in China in 2026.

Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2026? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?

Within our own organisation, I see AI as being a tool. It seems to improve by the month, and we have already seen how well it can annotate and translate in real time. This is very helpful for meetings and for cutting out more tedious tasks. It can be of great help with research and with making presentations. I'm a late convert to AI, but like a true millennial, have been boring my younger colleagues with my enthusiasm for it now.

More generally, I think AI will have deep and lasting implications for almost all sectors. It is already being used to great effect in stem cell research, drug discovery, DNA analysis etc which can only be a good thing. Like any new technology, AI being good or bad will depend on us and by that logic, will most likely result in negative side effects too.

Our work at Enterprise depends greatly on person to person interaction and building trust. AI will not replace that easily and so I would definitely not see it as a replacement worker for us in the immediate future. It will almost certainly be a replacement worker in some fields, however, and it's essential to keep opening new doors if old doors shut. It's worth noting that many AI-related jobs have been created in Ireland recently, such as Paypal in Dublin, Datavant in Galway and Qualcomm in Cork being notable examples.

What do you think we'll be all talking about in January 2027?

I think, but mainly hope, that there will be more clarity in the relationship between China and the United States. The current tension and uncertainty has left many sectors frozen in terms of decision making and has had a knock-on effect for the rest of the world. The 'clarity' will ideally be an improvement in relations between the two powers and a return to more open, free trade.

Unfortunately, it's probably more likely that the global economy will become more fragmented with investment being kept closer to the target markets. We have already seen this 'near-shoring' in the US where Irish, European and Asian countries have increased their investment so as not to be subject to tariffs. Many new investments in the EU are also being made to serve the European market only, and I think we will see more of this across the world. It's possible that in January 2027 we will be talking about how best to navigate between the different 'camps'.

For good or bad, clarity of any form will be a big relief and, once we have it, it will be easier to plot a course in between. With the recent successful visits of the Taoiseach and President Macron, I think the EU is on a good path to working effectively with China and showing we're a reliable and essential partner.

What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Horse?

With so much going on I think it's helpful to focus on what's within your own immediate control. Ireland is a small country with an outsized influence on the world. Nonetheless, despite this influence, we are still very much dependent on the actions of much larger countries. Rather than try to anticipate what the superpowers are going to do, I think it's more useful to double down on what we're good at and stick to our own principles. In this way, our identity as an open, pro-free-trade country with innovative companies and a world-class workforce will help protect us from whatever changes and challenges that might come.

Likewise, in my own job, it's important to realise that you can only control so much. Thinking too much about what could happen might be a distraction from doing your own job properly. If we plan properly, work hard and support our clients and colleagues, then the rest will most likely fall into place.



Martin O'Donnell

OGMA

GREEN ENERGY

OGMA is a New Energy company tailoring energy solutions and capital for renewable energy projects worldwide while simultaneously facilitating upstream importation of key raw materials into China. Founded initially in 2010 as a sustainable engineering and design consultancy we have pivoted into providing solutions for major clients worldwide to expedite the energy transition.

OGMA is led by Martin O'Donnell who since graduating from Engineering in UCD has over 20 years experience in China, advising clients on sustainable best practices, international trading and procurement and is at the cutting edge of the New Energy transition.

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What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2026? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

The renewable energy sector in 2026 is shaped by twin engines of growth: explosive AI-driven power demand and the global imperative for energy security and grid modernization.

Key Opportunities:

AI Data Center Demand: The surge in AI is creating unprecedented, stable electricity demand. Companies that can provide integrated "AI-ready power solutions"—combining renewables, storage, and backup—will capture a high-value market.

Grid Modernization Needs: Globally, slow grid development is creating bottlenecks for new renewable projects. This drives urgent demand for energy storage and flexibility resources (like demand response) to stabilize grids.

Emerging Market Growth: Regions in South America, Southeast Asia and Africa, driven by both electrification needs and "diesel replacement" economics for businesses, present significant growth markets for distributed solar and storage solutions.

Key Challenges:

Supply Chain Reconfiguration: Policies in the U.S. and the EU's Net-Zero Industry Act are forcing a shift from globalized to localized supply chains.

Intensifying Competition: The industry is consolidating. Competition is evolving from selling hardware to providing integrated technology and solution packages, squeezing profits for pure equipment manufacturers.

Impact capital: Projects have an initial high capital expenditure to get built but the pay back can be as little as 5/6 years. This initial impact capital is a challenge to secure for both speculative and approved sites.

Besides sector challenges, what are the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2026? How are you planning to address them?

Beyond sector-wide issues, there are internal and strategic challenges.

Navigating "Geopatriation": The trend of "geopatriation"—moving data and operations to sovereign or regional infrastructure for compliance and risk reduction—requires significant strategic adjustment. For a company operating globally, this means potentially building more localized operational and data management hubs and familiarisation with different markets. To address this we have operations in Ireland, Hong Kong and Shanghai with a view to further local hubs in Dubai.

Technology Integration Pace: Keeping pace with converging technologies (AI, IoT, new battery chemistry) demands continuous R&D investment and agile integration into product and service offerings to avoid obsolescence. This involves continuous education, attending key industry sector events and conferences.

Geopolitical and economic landscape: Keeping abreast of the changing international trade policies and localised green incentives is almost a full time job in itself!

How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? How has the changing approach to tariffs and restrictions on open trade impacted your sector? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2026?

The landscape of global trade and interaction in the energy sector has fundamentally shifted.



Companies will increasingly deploy Domain-Specific AI models to optimize the performance and longevity of renewable assets, moving from generic AI tools to tailored systems...



Impact of Tariffs & Restrictions: Tariffs and "friend-shoring" policies have moved supply chain localization from an option to a necessity. To access high-margin markets like the U.S. and EU, establishing local production, partnerships, or joint ventures is often mandatory to qualify for subsidies and avoid duties. This complicates logistics and increases upfront investment. For now OGMA is focused on markets other than the US so it hasn't had much direct impact on us.

Trend in International Dealings: While final assembly and manufacturing may localize, international collaboration on R&D, technology licensing, and complex system integration remains high. The nature of interaction has shifted from simple goods trade to deeper, more strategic partnerships and knowledge exchange. OGMA role is to create local partnerships in various markets and be the bridge between projects worldwide and the design, manufacturing and know-how on the ground here in China.

What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Horse in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

In the spirit of the Year of the Horse—symbolizing perseverance, energy, and forward motion—sector initiatives are expected to focus on execution and systemic integration.

From Pilot to Project: Focus will shift from announcing pilot projects to scaling up proven integrated systems. Expect more ground-breaking on large-scale "renewables-plus" projects, such as combined solar, storage, and green hydrogen production facilities aimed at producing green fuels for hard-to-abate sectors like shipping.

AI for System Optimization: Companies will increasingly deploy Domain-Specific AI models to optimize the performance and longevity of renewable assets, moving from generic AI tools to tailored systems that maximize energy yield and predict maintenance needs.

"Horsepower" for the Grid: A major theme will be providing "grid-forming" or "grid-strengthening" technologies. Like a steadfast horse provides reliable power, new storage systems with grid-forming inverters will be deployed to

actively support grid voltage and frequency, making renewable-dominated grids more resilient.

Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2026? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?

AI in 2026 will be far more than a tool; it will become core infrastructure and a collaborative partner. AI as Infrastructure: Companies will invest in AI supercomputing platforms to handle complex tasks like global asset optimization, weather and generation forecasting, and real-time market trading.

Strategic Company Approach: Leading firms will develop Domain-Specific Language Models (DSLMs) trained on proprietary engineering, weather, and grid data. These models will assist in designing optimized systems, automating technical reports, and providing predictive maintenance insights with high accuracy.

At OGMA, we see AI as a tool and resource, one that opens up multiple possibilities from analysing supply chain optimisation to creating financial and data models for prospective projects worldwide.

What do you think we'll be all taking about in January 2027?

The Securization of Supply Chains: Recent events in South America highlight the geopolitical manoeuvres to secure sources of critical minerals, rare earths as well as fossil fuel energy, essential for clean energy products.

Major AI-Energy Synergy Projects: There will be more pressure on purpose-built "AI data center + dedicated renewable microgrid" complexes, setting a new standard for tech infrastructure. Ireland has recently announced AI data centres must obtain 80% of their annual energy demand from renewable sources generated within Ireland within 6 years.

The "Integration Bottleneck": Headlines will likely focus on the scramble for grid connections and storage as the queue of approved but unbuilt renewable projects grows, debating policy and investment solutions.

What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Horse?

"Get out of the building, build your network and expertise in the energy transition"

Getting out and talking to people, see what customers need, what are their pain points and what solutions you can provide is key to understanding and building the trust and knowledge shared within a diverse community—from engineers to policymakers to young local entrepreneurs—will unlock more doors and solve more complex problems than any individual expertise ever could. Listen actively, share openly, and always connect the technical to the human.



Caroline Zhou

Institute of Strategic Leadership & Coaching

EDUCATION

Founded in 2012, ISLC (The Institute of Strategic Leadership and Coaching) is recognized in the Asia Pacific region for its executive coaching services, leadership development programs, and ICF-accredited coach training pathways from ACC to MCC. We support multinational and Chinese organizations through executive coaching, leadership training, and strategic development. With deep roots in China and a global faculty footprint across Asia and Europe, we are committed to developing leaders who can thrive in a VUCA and BANI world.

What challenges and opportunities do you see for your sector in 2026? How are you planning to overcome/take advantage of them?

In 2026, the coaching and leadership development sector in China continues to face structural challenges. The shrinking presence of multinational corporations, tightened corporate budgets, and the still-limited adoption of coaching among Chinese private and state-owned enterprises have reduced demand for traditional high-end executive services. At the same time, clients increasingly expect measurable ROI, while AI-enabled coaching tools are putting pressure on pricing and differentiation. In response, we are sharpening our focus on outcome-driven coaching, clearer goal setting, and business-linked impact measurement, while clearly positioning human coaching as distinct from consulting, mentoring, and mental health support through depth, contextual insight, and relational trust.

Despite these challenges, significant opportunities remain. Globally, the coaching market continues to grow, and China remains a high-potential market, particularly as more Chinese companies expand internationally. The growing need for cross-cultural leadership, global mindset development, and support during transformation, digitalization, and AI adoption is driving demand for high-quality coaching and leadership programs. We are actively aligning our offerings to support leaders navigating global expansion and uncertainty, while exploring more scalable coaching formats to extend access beyond top executives to middle managers and emerging leaders.

Besides sector challenges, what are the biggest challenges you and your company face for 2026? How are you planning to address them?

One of our main challenges for 2026 is the increasing competition in China's coaching market, with many new providers entering the space and making it harder for clients to distinguish high-quality executive coaching. In addition, the growing perception that AI coaching could replace human coaches requires clearer communication of the unique value of human, relational, and context-based coaching.

To address this, we are strengthening our brand visibility and market education through more targeted marketing initiatives, particularly video-based content, while maintaining our positioning in high-quality executive coaching. At the same time, we are expanding our reach to new client segments, including organizations in second- and third-tier cities, and investing in long-term relationships by engaging leaders earlier in their careers through selective pro bono coaching initiatives.

How has the level of international interaction evolved for you and your business over the last year? How has the changing approach to tariffs and restrictions on open trade impacted your sector? Are you dealing more or less with foreign customers /suppliers /colleagues/visitors? How do you see this trending in 2026?

Over the past year, our international interactions have continued to grow, particularly with multinational clients across Asia and Europe. An interesting trend is that HR teams at European headquarters often reach out to us to provide coaching and leadership programs for their leaders in China. This is partly due to limited access to local coaches or certain global online coaching platforms within China, creating a unique opportunity for us to serve China-based leaders.

Although changes in tariffs and trade policies have had limited direct impact on our business, they influence our clients' strategies and budgets. As organizations adjust operations, there is an increased focus on leadership development, change management, and cross-cultural collaboration.

Looking ahead to 2026, we expect international engagement to continue expanding, combining virtual and in-person formats, as organizations prioritize cross-border leadership development and strategic growth.



....the growing perception that AI coaching could replace human coaches requires clearer communication of the unique value of human, relational, and context-based coaching.



What initiatives do you see happening during the Year of the Horse in your sector/company to enhance sustainability?

In our sector, sustainability is increasingly seen as a long-term commitment to developing people, organizations, and societies in ways that are resilient and ethically grounded. One notable initiative is the ICF Sustainability Coaching Coalition, a global alliance of coaching and mentoring professionals addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges through coaching-oriented solutions. They encourage coaches to integrate sustainability awareness and systemic thinking into their practice for long-term positive impact.

We are inspired by these initiatives and integrate sustainability principles into our coaching and leadership programs, supporting leaders in building resilient, purpose-driven, and sustainable organizations.

Do you see AI having an impact in your sector in 2026? What is your company doing to address AI? Do you see AI as a tool, a resource or a replacement worker?

We expect AI to increasingly shape the coaching sector in 2026, particularly through virtual coaching platforms.

The market is projected to grow from USD 3.8 billion in 2025 to USD 11.1 billion by 2035, with AI enabling intelligent matching, feedback analysis, and data-driven progress tracking. These platforms offer scalability, cost efficiency, real-time availability, and reduced bias.

However, AI and virtual platforms have inherent limitations: they cannot replicate human empathy, handle complex leadership challenges, or fully address cultural nuances. User acceptance also varies, with many executives preferring human coaches.

We view AI as a tool and resource to augment coaching, not a replacement. Our approach focuses on blended models, combining AI insights with human coaching, leveraging technology for efficiency and measurement while preserving human judgment, relational depth, and strategic guidance at the executive level.

What do you think we'll be all taking about in January 2027?

By January 2027, we believe the conversation will have shifted toward how Chinese companies can stay competitive and thrive globally, rather than simply how to enter international markets. There will likely be clearer signals of China's economic stabilization, with discussions focused on what a sustained GDP growth of around 5% looks like in practice and how the recovery is translating into business confidence. At the same time, we expect to see a gradual return of expatriates to China, alongside renewed dialogue on rebuilding cross-cultural leadership capabilities and global connectivity.

What one piece of advice would you give your younger self at the beginning of this new Year of the Horse?

Be fearless and just do it



Bliain na gCapall Shona Daoibh

Happy New Year of the Horse

马到成功



The IRISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CHINA – ICCC

Our mission is to represent and support the Irish business community in China in promoting, developing and maintaining business relations by providing access to information, resources and networking opportunities.

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