

Polar Explorer Craig Mathieson Awarded Prestigious Polar Medal – Exclusive Interview Reveals Impact of His Youth Charity

Thursday 26 February, 2026

Edinburgh, Scotland – Scottish polar explorer and founder of The Polar Academy, Craig Mathieson, has been honoured with the Polar Medal in the King's New Year's Honours List 2026, recognising his outstanding contributions to polar exploration and youth development.

The medal, one of the UK's highest awards for polar service, celebrates Mathieson's decades of expeditions—including man-hauling to the South Pole in 2004, reaching the Geographical North Pole in 2006, and leading sea-kayaking missions along Greenland's east coast—alongside his groundbreaking work with The Polar Academy, the charity he established in 2013.

The Academy selects and trains overlooked young people (aged 13-17) facing trauma or invisibility in education, taking them on rigorous Arctic expeditions to Greenland. Through physical challenges, trust-building, and 24/7 support, it unlocks confidence, resilience, and aspiration—transforming participants into teachers, scientists, Royal Marines, and community leaders. Over 270 young people have taken part, with many now mentoring others and raising awareness.

In an exclusive video interview released on 29 December 2025, leadership coach and former British Army officer Neil Jurd OBE speaks with Mathieson about the Academy's origins, selection process, and why it succeeds where traditional systems often fail. Mathieson shares how compassion, belief in human potential, and deliberate challenges in extreme conditions build lasting change—drawing parallels to his own military and mountaineering background.

Watch the full interview here:

<https://leader-connect.co.uk/videos/interview-with-craig-mathieson-of-the-polar-academy/>

"Seeing these kids step into their potential—despite everything—is the real purpose of the expedition," Mathieson says in the discussion.

Mathieson, also 'Explorer-in-Residence' at the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and recipient of an Honorary Doctorate from Abertay University, continues to lead the charity alongside his family team.

For media enquiries, interviews, or footage: contact Neil Jurd via Leader Connect (leader-connect.co.uk) or The Polar Academy (thepolaracademy.org).

About The Polar Academy

A mental health and wellbeing charity using polar expeditions to empower Scotland's youth.

About Neil Jurd OBE

Author of *The Leadership Book*, military veteran, and founder of Leader Connect—focusing on practical leadership development.

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