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Scottish  
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**TAY CITIES SME  
SKILLS FUND**

**UNLOCK YOUR WORKFORCE'S POTENTIAL**

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025

## INTRODUCTION

The Tay Cities SME Skills Fund, funded through the Tay Cities Deal, offers a £5,000 grant opportunity to small to medium sized businesses in the Tay Cities region to use to upskill or re-skill their workforces through training provided by academic training providers across the region.

This fund is not just about financial support; it's a strategic investment in workforces across the area. It focuses on enhancing employee experience, creating professional growth, and boosting talent retention - all vital components for sustainable business success.

## PARTNERSHIP

Partnership working is at the heart of the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund's success. By bringing together colleges, local authorities, economic development agencies, and business support organisations, we ensure that businesses across the region have access to not just funding – but the right guidance, training, and long-term support to make it truly impactful.

This coordinated approach helps us respond more effectively to the real skills needs of SMEs, tailor training to local demand, and deliver outcomes that genuinely benefit businesses and communities across the Tay Cities region.

## TRAINING PROVIDERS



## BUSINESS SUPPORT PARTNERS



## WHY THE TAY CITIES SME SKILLS FUND IS CRUCIAL

According to the Scottish Government's Businesses in Scotland: 2022 Statistics Report, the country hosts 358,575 small and medium-sized enterprises as of March 2022. These businesses contribute significantly to the economy by providing 1.2 million jobs, representing 55.9% of private sector employment.

SMEs constitute 99.4% of all private sector businesses and contribute 40.2% to private sector turnover as of March 2022. By supporting SMEs in this manner, we not only encourage their individual economic growth but also generate positive ripple effects for the broader region and business landscape as these businesses increase their spending and contribute to overall economic vitality.

The fund serves as a targeted resource to boost employee capabilities, aligning them with ever-changing industry demands. Upskilling staff can support common growth challenges such as recruitment and retainment.

The training provided through the fund can aid businesses in working towards their Net Zero strategies as their workforces can be upskilled or retrained in new and sustainable technologies.

**358,575**  
SMEs IN SCOTLAND (AS OF MARCH 2022)

**99.4%**  
OF ALL PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESSES

**1.2 MILLION**  
JOBS PROVIDED WHICH IS 55.9% OF PRIVATE SECTOR

**40.2%**  
OF ALL PRIVATE SECTOR TURNOVER

## SMART OBJECTIVES — YEAR 5 (APRIL 2024 — APRIL 2025)



**A MAJOR MILESTONE ACHIEVED!** THE TAY CITIES SME SKILLS FUND HAS SUCCESSFULLY ALLOCATED **100% OF ITS FUNDING** FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR — HITTING ITS TARGET OF **£525,000** IN FULL.

OBJECTIVE: INVEST £400,000 WORTH OF TRAINING INTO THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY WITHIN THE TAY CITIES REGION.

ACHIEVED:

**£393,886**

INVESTED IN TOTAL APPROVED APPLICATIONS

OBJECTIVE: SIGN UP A MINIMUM OF 80 NEW BUSINESSES (20 IN EACH GEOGRAPHIC AREA)

ACHIEVED:

**85** BUSINESSES IN TOTAL SUPPORTED OVER THE 4 AREAS

DUNDEE 21    ANGUS 21  
PERTH 21    FIFE 22

OBJECTIVE: SUBMIT 4 QUARTERLY IMPACT REPORTS AND FINANCIAL SUBMISSIONS TO SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT.

ACHIEVED:

**4 REPORTS**

SUBMITTED WITHIN REQUIRED TIMESCALES

OBJECTIVE: HOLD 4 QUARTERLY STRATEGIC GROUP MEETINGS WITH PARTNERS.

ACHIEVED:

**3 MEETINGS**

OBJECTIVE: SUPPORT A MINIMUM OF 120 INDIVIDUALS THROUGH TRAINING PROVISION.

ACHIEVED:

**2087** DELEGATES ACHIEVED  
**341** COURSES DELIVERED



### ANGUS

**21** BUSINESSES

**£98,762** INVESTED

**89** COURSES

**584** DELEGATES

### DUNDEE

**21** BUSINESSES

**£98,694** INVESTED

**65** COURSES

**421** DELEGATES

### PERTH

**21** BUSINESSES

**£101,365** INVESTED

**109** COURSES

**762** DELEGATES

### FIFE

**22** BUSINESSES

**£95,065** INVESTED

**78** COURSES

**320** DELEGATES

## TARGET AUDIENCE & FEEDBACK

Business owners & managers who are responsible for HR & staff development of small-to-medium-sized businesses in the Tay Cities Region (Dundee, Angus, Perth, Northeast Fife) with less than 250 employees (preferably in the 30-250 size) from any industry but particularly those working in the engineering, manufacturing, construction, hospitality and care sectors.



**VIEW DARREN'S STORY**



**OWNER, DARREN REID  
GARDENING SERVICES**

## BALGILLO NURSERIES

### STRENGTHENING TEAM CONFIDENCE WITH THE TAY CITIES SME SKILLS FUND

Since opening in 2008, Balgillo Nurseries has grown into a well-established childcare provider with four nurseries. Owned and operated by Pam and Kim, the business has a team of 30 staff members delivering high-quality early years education.

#### THE CHALLENGE

Pam and Kim recognised a gap in soft skills across the team, particularly around communication. Staff needed support with confidence, eye contact, and managing difficult conversations.

#### DISCOVERING THE TAY CITIES SME SKILLS FUND

Through Skills Development Scotland, they were introduced to Dundee and Angus College. The Tay Cities SME Skills Fund offered a cost-effective way to provide structured training.

#### TAILORING THE TRAINING

Elaine from D&A College helped design a bespoke customer service programme covering:

- Nursery-specific customer service
- Conflict management
- Communication for a supportive workplace

#### FLEXIBLE DELIVERY & STRONG IMPACT

Training was delivered online and in person, with 20 staff completing it. Staff became more confident, teamwork improved, and relationships with parents strengthened.

#### SMOOTH APPLICATION PROCESS

Elaine guided Pam and Kim through the paperwork, making the funding process simple and efficient.



## FLORA GARDENING

### BOOSTING GROWTH THROUGH TAY CITIES SME SKILLS FUND

Founded in 2011 by Ionut and Stefania Pasare, Flora Gardening is a family-run business in Dundee with eight team members. Ionut's passion for professional development drives their success.

#### A COMMITMENT TO UPSKILLING

Flora Gardening has previously trained staff with D&A College. When Ionut learned about the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund, he saw it as an invaluable opportunity: **"It helps us expand our skills, making us more competitive for larger projects."**

#### STRATEGIC TRAINING INVESTMENTS

Ionut enrolled himself and two team members in a 3-day 360 Degree Excavator course. The qualification enables them to take on larger projects, clear sites, and work with private clients and contractors. Additional training included:

- Conflict management, improving communication and client relations
- Procurement and sales training, enhancing operations and profitability

**"We already have a strong team, but this training makes us even better."**

#### LOOKING AHEAD

Flora Gardening's experience with the fund has been overwhelmingly positive. Ionut plans to continue working with Dundee and Angus College to explore more training options, helping his team stay competitive as the business grows.

**"If the grant is available, why wouldn't you take advantage of it? It's an investment in your people and your future."**

## MSIP

### LEVERAGES TAY CITIES SME SKILLS FUND TO BUILD STRONGER TEAM

Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc (MSIP) is a joint venture between Michelin, Dundee City Council, and Scottish Enterprise, focused on green mobility and decarbonisation. As it opened up post-COVID, MSIP recognised the need to strengthen internal collaboration and customer-facing skills.

#### THE CHALLENGE

With teams coming together after a period of remote and siloed work, MSIP's leadership saw an opportunity to build cohesion, improve communication, and sharpen customer service. To maximise training impact, they sought funding support and were introduced to the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund.

#### SOLUTION: TARGETED TRAINING, FULLY FUNDED

Marketing and Innovation Director Gill Simpson worked with Training Needs Advisor Elaine Donnachie to develop a tailored plan. This included:

- A two-day 'Effective Teams' course for all staff
- One-day leadership training for managers

**"It sparked important discussions about what skills we really needed. The sessions gave us practical tools and lightbulb moments — especially around the customer journey,"** said Gill.

#### STRONGER TEAM, SEAMLESS PROCESS

The training helped break down silos, improved communication, and built a stronger sense of shared purpose. Gill described the process as simple and efficient: **"It took less than an hour of my time. The Fund team handled the heavy lifting, and we had approval within a week. The techniques we learned are already making an impact and will continue to strengthen our team."**

# EVENTS

## D&A COLLEGE CAMPUS LAUNCH EVENT

UNLOCKING TALENT - THE 2024 RETENTION REVOLUTION  
31ST JANUARY 2024

The “Retention Revolution” launch event brought together local businesses, regional partners, and academic institutions to spotlight the importance of investing in employee experience. Attendees learned about the benefits of the fund, as well as the diverse training opportunities offered by institutions including Dundee and Angus College, Fife College, UHI Perth, the University of Dundee, and Abertay University.

Guest speakers included Jade Robertson of Little Lies and Jimmy Urquhart of Discovery Flexibles, who shared their inspiring business journeys, highlighting the challenges they've overcome and the transformative impact of investing in staff development. Their stories left a lasting impression on the audience, reinforcing the value of continuous learning and growth.

The event also featured a motivational speech by Stevie Baxter, whose powerful message encouraged attendees to seize new opportunities and strive for their full potential.

Together, the event set a positive and energising tone for the future of workforce development in the region.





## EVENTS



## FIFE - SME SKILLS FUND

KINGSBARN'S DISTILLERY & VISITORS CENTRE

27TH MARCH 2025

This event showcased how local businesses can leverage the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund to upskill their workforce and drive growth.

Attendees heard firsthand from the Kingsbarns team about their positive experiences with the fund and the tangible benefits they've realised through targeted training programmes. Ashley Brown, Tay Cities Training Needs Advisor, also provided valuable insights into how SMEs can access up to £5,000 in training grants to support workforce development across the region. Representatives from Fife College highlighted the tailored upskilling opportunities available, designed to meet the specific needs of local businesses.

The event also featured valuable networking opportunities, enabling business owners and industry professionals to connect, share experiences, and build new relationships.

To round off the evening, guests enjoyed a private whisky tasting of the award-winning Doocot whisky, guided distillery tours, and an exclusive shopping experience at the venue's bottle shop.

## EVENTS

### PERTH - FUTURE READY

UHI PERTH

27TH NOVEMBER 2024

Ashley Brown, Tay Cities Training Needs Advisor, was delighted to attend the Future Ready event at UHI Perth on Wednesday, 27th November 2024. The event brought together local employers to explore how they can future-proof their workforce through funded training opportunities.

Ashley was on hand to promote the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund, which offers grants of up to £5,000 to help businesses upskill or reskill their teams. With valuable contributions from the UHI Perth Business Engagement Team, Tay Cities advisors, and guest speakers, the session provided a wealth of insights and practical guidance. Employers also had the opportunity to network, share ideas, and learn from others who are investing in the growth and development of their people.

The poster features a collage of images: a group of people at a networking event, a woman smiling at a desk, and a man in a suit. The text is overlaid on these images. The main title 'Future Ready' is in large white letters. Below it, 'Upskill your Workforce with UHI | PERTH' is written in white. A black box at the bottom contains details about the event, including the date, time, and location, along with a brief description of the opportunity.

# Future Ready

## Upskill your Workforce with UHI | PERTH

This is an excellent opportunity for local employers to explore how we can collaborate to upskill your workforce, learn about training opportunities and network with other local employers.

-  Wednesday 27 November 2024
-  10am-12noon
-  UHI Perth, Academy of Sport and Wellbeing

## EVENTS



## ANGUS - BUSINESS GATEWAY TRANSFORM BUSINESS FESTIVAL

CARNOUSTIE GOLF HOTEL

20TH FEBRUARY 2025

Ann Kerr and Adele were delighted to attend the Transform Business Festival at the Carnoustie Golf Hotel on 20th February 2025. This dynamic event, organised by Business Gateway and Elevator, brought together entrepreneurs, start-ups, and businesses of all sizes from across Tayside for a full day of inspiration, learning, and connection.

Attendees had the opportunity to engage in energising guest speaker sessions, bite-sized learning workshops, fireside chats, and 1-1 advisory sessions. The day also featured an Ecosystem Village, where Ann and Adele joined fellow partners and exhibitors to showcase the support available to businesses across the region.

The keynote speech from Cally Russell, CEO and co-founder of Together, offered a powerful message about resilience, innovation, and the role of business as a force for good. His journey, including the creation of Lost Stock during the pandemic, inspired attendees to think differently and embrace opportunities for positive change.

The event was a fantastic opportunity for Ann and Adele to connect with local businesses, discuss how the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund can support workforce development, and promote training grants of up to £5,000 available to SMEs.



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