

# TAY CITIES SME SKILLS FUND

UNLOCK YOUR WORKFORCE'S POTENTIAL

## ANNUAL REPORT 2026

PROJECT FUNDED BY:



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

## 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

As of March 2025, Scotland was home to **381,855** small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) - source: gov.scot.

These businesses make a substantial contribution to the economy, employing an estimated **1.2 million** people, which represents **56.2%** of private sector employment. SMEs also dominate Scotland's business landscape, accounting for **99.4%** of all private sector businesses and contributing **41.9%** of total private sector turnover. 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.

**381,855**  
SMEs IN SCOTLAND (AS OF MARCH 2025)

**99.4%**  
OF ALL PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESSES

**1.2 MILLION**  
JOBS PROVIDED WHICH IS 56.2% OF PRIVATE SECTOR

**41.9%**  
OF ALL PRIVATE SECTOR TURNOVER

## SMART OBJECTIVES — YEAR 6 (APRIL 2025 — APRIL 2026)



### OBJECTIVE

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

### ACHIEVEMENT

**£258,886** INVESTED IN  
TOTAL APPROVED  
APPLICATIONS

### OBJECTIVE

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

### ACHIEVEMENT

**4 REPORTS** SUBMITTED  
WITHIN REQUIRED  
TIMESCALES

### OBJECTIVE

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

### ACHIEVEMENT

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

ANGUS:15  
DUNDEE:15  
PERTH:14  
FIFE:12

### OBJECTIVE

HOLD 4 QUARTERLY STRATEGIC GROUP MEETINGS WITH PARTNERS.

### ACHIEVEMENT

**4 MEETINGS**

### OBJECTIVE

SUPPORT A MINIMUM OF 120 INDIVIDUALS THROUGH TRAINING PROVISION.

### ACHIEVEMENT

**1253**  
DELEGATES

**165**  
COURSES DELIVERED



## ANGUS

**15** BUSINESSES  
**£70,437** INVESTED

**30** COURSES  
**260** DELEGATES

## DUNDEE

**15** BUSINESSES  
**£72,190** INVESTED

**37** COURSES  
**267** DELEGATES

## PERTH

**14** BUSINESSES  
**£60,295** INVESTED

**54** COURSES  
**414** DELEGATES

## FIFE

**12** BUSINESSES  
**£55,964** INVESTED

**42** COURSES  
**312** DELEGATES

## EVENTS

### WINTER WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS - UHI PERTH NETWORKING EVENT

More than 40 businesses from across Perth and Kinross attended the Winter Workforce Connections Event at UHI Perth, bringing together a wide range of business support organisations in one place.

The event aimed to simplify access to support and help employers better understand the opportunities available to them. Many businesses often feel unsure about where to start when it comes to training, recruitment, and funding support. This event addressed that challenge by creating a single, accessible space where employers could connect directly with key partners and receive clear, tailored guidance.

Attendees had the opportunity to learn about funded training, recruitment incentives, apprenticeships, and wider business support through short, focused presentations. This was followed by networking sessions, allowing businesses to speak one-to-one with organisations including Skills Development Scotland, Business Gateway, and UHI Perth.

The event was well received, with employers highlighting the value of having all support services in one place and the clarity provided around available funding and training options. Many businesses arranged follow-up conversations on the day, showing immediate impact.

By bringing partners together, the event helped strengthen collaboration across the region and made it easier for businesses to access the support they need. It also encouraged more employers to explore funded opportunities to develop their workforce.

The success of the event demonstrates the value of a joined-up approach, ensuring businesses can access simple, practical support to help them grow with confidence.

### Connecting businesses with support through the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund



Tay Cities Training Needs Advisor, Ashley Brown, at the Winter Workforce event, November 2025, in conjunction with UHI Perth.

## EVENTS

### GET AHEAD WITH TAY CITIES SME SKILLS FUND - ANGUS NETWORKING LUNCH

Local employers and business leaders gathered at Montrose Library for the Get Ahead with Tay Cities SME Skills Fund – Angus Networking Event, designed to highlight opportunities for workforce development and connect businesses with regional support.

The event aimed to introduce new employers to the benefits of the fund, while also re-engaging businesses that had previously accessed support. A key focus was on demonstrating how continued investment in skills can help businesses remain competitive and resilient.

Attendees heard from a range of partner organisations, including Skills Development Scotland, Business Gateway, Scottish Enterprise, Dundee & Angus Chamber of Commerce, and the Federation of Small Businesses. These sessions provided clear, practical insights into the support available for training, business growth, and workforce development.

A highlight of the event was a presentation from Esk Glazing, sharing their experience of using the fund to support staff training. Their story demonstrated the positive impact of investing in people, with improvements in confidence, skills, and overall performance.

The event welcomed 20 attendees from a variety of sectors, with very positive feedback. Employers valued the opportunity to gain new insights, explore funding options, and build connections with both partners and peers.

By bringing businesses and support organisations together, the event helped strengthen local networks and improve awareness of the resources available. It reinforced the importance of collaboration in helping businesses across Angus grow, develop their workforce, and plan for the future.

### Supporting business growth through the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund



Tay Cities Training Needs Advisor, Elaine Ritchie, at the Angus Networking Lunch, December 2025.

## EVENTS

### WEEKLY BUSINESS GATEWAY DROP-IN SESSIONS

The team attended the weekly Business Gateway Drop-in Sessions to promote Tay Cities SME Skills Fund to new and existing businesses looking to grow.

The informal, accessible setting enabled meaningful one-to-one conversations with business owners at different stages of development. These sessions were effective in identifying training needs, offering tailored advice, and supporting businesses to access funding that can accelerate their plans.

### TRANSFORM BUSINESS FESTIVAL

The team attended the Transform Business Festival to promote the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund.

This high-profile event offered an ideal platform to showcase the support available, engage with employers from diverse sectors, and encourage applications from businesses seeking to invest in staff development. The event also generated strong connections and added momentum to the growing pipeline of interest.

### MSIP PACE EVENT

The team took part in the MSIP PACE (Partnership for Continuing Employment) Event to raise awareness of available funding through Tay Cities, with a particular focus on businesses supporting individuals affected by redundancy.

This event created valuable opportunities to speak with employers navigating workforce changes and to demonstrate how funded training can help them reskill staff, retain talent, and support transitions into new roles. The conversations reinforced the role of the fund in helping both businesses and individuals adapt to labour market shifts.

## CASE STUDIES

### FIFE: CITIZENS ADVICE & RIGHTS

**Citizens Advice & Rights Fife has long been a trusted source of support across local communities, providing free and impartial advice to people facing financial, legal, and personal challenges.**

With 75 staff across nine sites, the organisation plays a vital role in supporting residents across Fife.

In recent years, demand for services has increased significantly, with over 23,500 people supported in just 12 months. At the same time, the organisation has been undergoing a major restructure, shifting towards a more community-based, in-person approach to better meet local needs.

This period of change highlighted the need to support staff with the skills and confidence required to adapt. A particular focus was placed on resilience, communication, and managing the emotional demands of client-facing roles.

Through the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund, staff accessed training including Mental Health in the Workplace, Developing Personal Resilience, and Coaching Conversations, delivered by Fife College. The flexible delivery allowed employees to take part alongside their day-to-day responsibilities.

As a result, staff reported increased confidence, improved wellbeing, and stronger communication when supporting both clients and colleagues. The training also encouraged personal development, with one team member progressing into a Service Delivery Manager role after gaining the confidence to apply.

With support from the fund, Citizens Advice & Rights Fife has been able to invest in its people during a time of change - helping to build a more resilient, confident workforce ready to meet growing demand.

### Strengthening staff confidence through the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund



**citizens  
advice**

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#### Client feedback

Thanks to funding, the Citizens Advice & Rights Fife team had the opportunity to complete training in Mental Health in the Workplace, Developing Personal Resilience, and Coaching Conversations. These sessions have made a lasting difference - boosting confidence, strengthening wellbeing, and improving how they support both colleagues and clients.

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## CASE STUDIES

### DUNDEE: IC FIRE & SECURITY

IC Fire & Security is a Dundee based company specialising in fire safety and security systems, including alarms, CCTV, and access control. With a team of 24 staff, the business has built a strong reputation for reliability, compliance, and customer service across a wide range of sectors.

As the company continued to grow, leaders identified a need to strengthen management skills across the organisation. While technical expertise was strong, there was a focus on improving leadership consistency, communication, and collaboration—particularly between office-based staff and engineers working on the road.

Through a Skills for Growth Review with Skills Development Scotland, this gap was clearly defined. The business recognised that investing in leadership development would support future growth and help create a more unified approach across teams.

With support from the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund, IC Fire & Security accessed Leadership & Management training and coaching, delivered by Dundee and Angus College. The programme combined group sessions with one-to-one coaching, alongside personality profiling to support individual development.

The training has helped managers build confidence, improve communication, and develop practical skills in areas such as team motivation and handling difficult conversations. Early feedback highlights improved collaboration, clearer decision making, and a more positive working environment.

By investing in its leadership team, IC Fire & Security is strengthening its internal culture and building a solid foundation for continued growth.

**Building stronger leadership with the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund**



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#### Client feedback

We structured our training into two parts, combining group leadership sessions with one-to-one coaching. The programme was engaging, practical, and highly relevant to the challenges we face. It gave us the opportunity to reflect, develop our skills, and apply learning directly to real situations.

Overall, the process, from funding application to delivery, was smooth and well supported. We've gained valuable insights and development opportunities that will have a lasting impact on our team and the business.

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## CASE STUDIES

### ANGUS: ESK GLAZING

**Esk Glazing is a family-run business based in Arbroath, with a team of 36 employees and plans for continued growth. With a strong reputation in their sector, the company is focused on strengthening its internal culture and improving how teams work together.**

During a Training Needs Analysis, leaders identified key areas for development, particularly around communication, leadership, and maintaining consistent standards across the business. There was a clear ambition to address cultural challenges and ensure staff at all levels felt confident representing the company.

Two priority areas were identified: Leadership & Management training to support managers in embedding company values and improving communication, and Installation Team training to enhance customer-facing skills and on-site professionalism.

Through the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund, Esk Glazing secured support to deliver both programmes. Training was tailored to meet the specific needs of the business and involved both managers and wider team members.

Early feedback has been very positive, with staff responding well to the engaging and practical approach. Improvements in communication, confidence, and team cohesion are already being seen across the organisation.

With support from the fund, Esk Glazing has been able to take meaningful steps towards building a more connected, values-driven workplace culture.

**Driving cultural change  
with the Tay Cities SME  
Skills Fund**



#### **Client feedback**

Elaine provided fantastic support throughout the application process and helped ensure the training was tailored to our needs. The sessions have been engaging and have connected with our team in a really positive way.

The whole process has been hugely beneficial, and this training wouldn't have been possible without the funding and support provided.



## CASE STUDIES

### DUNDEE: BUTTONS & BOWS NURSERY

Buttons & Bows Nursery in Dundee was referred to the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund by Kathryn Hill of Skills Development Scotland. Nicola, the Nursery Manager, described the process as straightforward from the outset, highlighting the strong support received during the Skills for Growth Review and the seamless transition to the Tay Cities team, making accessing and using the funding simple.

Buttons & Bows used the funding to address priorities identified in the review, investing in accredited training in Leadership and Management, Customer Service Skills, and Mental Health First Response. Leadership development was a key focus, with four staff attending three tailored sessions.

The trainer's engaging and supportive approach - adapted to the nursery's internal challenges - created a safe, open environment and used role play and practical exercises to help staff apply learning in real time, strengthening team cohesion.

In addition, ten staff members completed a one-day Mental Health First Response course. This was especially impactful given the nursery already had a working group focused on mental health. The training encouraged open discussion, generated strong engagement, and introduced new ideas that are now informing ongoing wellbeing initiatives. Staff feedback suggested there was appetite for even more in-depth learning in this area, underlining its relevance and value.

Since then, five staff have started an accredited Leadership and Management qualification. The nursery is also exploring ASN training to better support children with additional needs and hopes future funding could support environmental improvements, such as upgrading outdoor and sensory spaces.

### Early learning support from the Tay Cities SME Skills Fund



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#### Client feedback

Our trainer was so helpful and supportive in the leadership sessions, her knowledge and experience was very helpful to us moving forward.

The Mental Health training was so emotional but really helped us look deeper into how to support others going through a hard time and we found places we never know existed for help.

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