STF

The Scottish Training Federation

#STFConf25




Tullos Training Awards 2025

# APPRENTICESHIPS & SKILLS CONFERENCE 2025

New Horizons; New Challenges; New Opportunities.

**www.stf.org.uk**

Sponsored by SQA

# Welcome to the STF Conference 2025!



*Caroline McFarlane, Chair, STF.*

On behalf of the Directors of the Scottish Training Federation (STF), may I offer you a warm welcome to the STF Apprenticeships & Skills Conference 2025. Our theme - New Horizons; New Challenges; New Opportunities - reflects the uncertain times we are living through in the world of apprenticeships and skills and an acknowledgement that the future is likely to bring both positives and negatives for our members.

We are delighted to once again be holding the event in the offices of SQA in Glasgow. STF and SQA have worked in partnership for many years and collaborate regularly in many areas of work, so it makes sense for us to support one-another once again. We've got lots of great speakers and workshop sessions - details are given in the pages of this brochure. So, please join in the discussion and make the most of the day. Enjoy!

## Shetland 'star' Kevin is your host again!

We're super-pleased that Shetland `star', Kevin Briggs, is hosting the STF Conference again this year.

The revered actor, who is also Vice Principal of UHI Shetland and an STF Director, will be introducing the speakers and linking various parts of the programme.

Whilst you may not recognise Kevin's face – he's only had a few walk-on parts in Shetland to date – we've heard on good authority that Ashley Jensen has tipped him to take over one of the lead parts in a future series. Never say never!







# Caroline and Kellie are in control!




*Kellie Zdanowicz speaking at the Scottish Parliament Economy and Fair Work Committee, April 2025.*

We've got several Q&A sessions at the conference this year – reflecting the general uncertainty that exists in the world of Apprenticeships and Skills.

STF Chair, Caroline McFarlane, and Vice Chair, Kellie Zdanowicz, are moderating the Q&A sessions and will move amongst delegates with the roving microphone to take questions and comments on what the speakers have said.

Caroline and Kellie are keen to hear what YOU think, so don't be shy when they ask `any questions'!



*Caroline McFarlane speaking at the STF Conference, September 2022*

# Conference first for new Minister



*Ben Macpherson MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education.*

We're delighted to welcome Ben Macpherson MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education, to his first STF Conference.

Mr Macpherson took up his current post just a couple of weeks ago and has been busy getting up to speed with the details of the Tertiary Education and Training Bill. He has already taken the Bill through the Stage 1 debate in the Scottish Parliament and appeared before the lead committee for the Bill, the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

Following his speech, Mr Macpherson will take questions from the floor. STF members are encouraged to take this opportunity to share their ideas, thoughts and concerns with the new Minister.

# Welcome to Nick Page

We're delighted that Nick Page, the new Chief Executive of SQA, has agreed to speak at this year's STF conference.

SQA is set to be replaced by Qualifications Scotland in late 2025, and much work is currently underway to ensure there is a smooth transition.

Nick is expected to refer to this in his presentation and provide re-assurances for training providers on the transfer of services from SQA to the new organisation.



*Nick Page, Chief Executive, Scottish Qualifications Authority.*

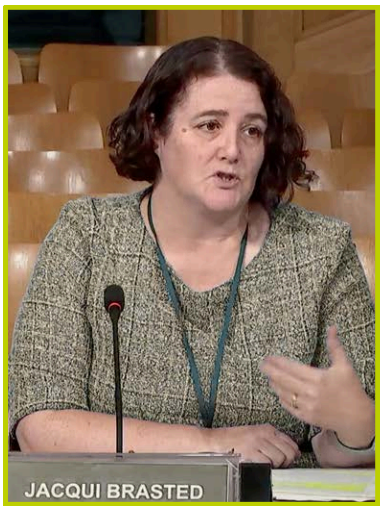
In July, he set out a range of key actions that SQA would undertake within hist first 100 days as Chief Executive. These actions included building new partnerships with industry, employers, the third sector and other stakeholders to ensure skills-based qualifications are future-focussed and unlock opportunities for learners.

# Do you receive STF Update?

Are you on the mailing list for the STF Update Newsletter? It's issued every two weeks via Mailchimp and there are bespoke versions for STF Members and Non-Members (Members get more content!). Contact **stuart.mckenna@stf.org.uk** for more information.




# STF welcome for Jacqui Brasted




*Jacqui Brasted, Director of Access, Learning and Outcomes, Scottish Funding Council.*

We are excited to welcome Jacqui Brasted, Director of Access, Learning and Outcomes at the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to her first STF Conference.

Jacqui has worked at SFC for more than three years and recently appeared before the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee to answer questions on a range of issues including the Tertiary Education and Training Bill.

In her spare time, Jacqui is a keen quizzer and writes and takes part in a monthly pub quiz.

At the conference, STF members can quiz Jacqui about SFC, the TET Bill or other matters relating to apprenticeships and skills. Cheers!

# First appearance for Helen



*Helen Allison, Performance Manager, National Training Programmes, Skills Development Scotland*

We're looking forward to hearing from Helen Allison, Performance Manager for National Training Programmes, Skills Development Scotland. Helen has attended several STF conferences in previous years as a delegate and workshop host, but this is her first time as a main speaker.

There is much to celebrate with Apprenticeships at the present time and we expect Helen will highlight some of the successes of the programme during her presentation.

With over 30 years of experience in the apprenticeship and skills arena, it's fair to say that Helen knows a thing or two about the subject – so members are encouraged to get their questions at the ready for her Q&A session!

# An Inspector calls!

Morse, Clouseau, Taggart? No, we bring you Inspector Connelly for this year's STF Conference!

We're delighted to welcome back Peter Connelly, HM Inspector of Education, to provide an update on refinements being made to the inspection of Modern Apprenticeship programmes.




*Peter Connelly, HM Inspector of Education, Education Scotland, speaking at the STF Conference in 2019.*

Peter last spoke at the 2019 STF Conference (six years ago – where has the time gone!) but will be familiar to members from his regular Teams workshops. What we want to know is – who is Inspector Connelly's favourite Inspector?

## Do you want to join the STF Board?

A number of STF Directors are due to retire at the forthcoming AGM in November. Would you consider joining the board? Any STF member organisation can put forward a candidate for election to the STF Board, provided that: (1) they have been a member for at least three months, and (2) their subscription is up to date.

Being a member of the STF Board offers the opportunity to represent the wider interests of the work-based training industry in Scotland. STF Board members share a range of tasks including regular meetings with MSPs, SDS, Scottish Government, SFC, SQA, and other stakeholder organisations. Further details available from: stuart.mckenna@stf.org.uk

## Apprenticeship survey results



*Stuart McKenna, Chief Executive, Scottish Training Federation.*

We've had a good response to our recent pulse survey seeking feedback on the current challenges members are experiencing in the delivery of Apprenticeships.

MA Contribution Rates are the biggest concern. These have not been reviewed for more than a decade and simply don't reflect the cost of delivery. Some members have been successful in getting employers to contribute to the cost of training – but others say it is impossible in some sectors where employers are unwilling or unable to pay. STF members are clear that a review of MA Contribution Rates must be carried out urgently.

Another issue raised by members is that they are unable to meet employer demand for fundable apprenticeship places. The current cap of 25,500 places each year is too low and should be increased to nearer 30,000 according to feedback.

A presentation on the headline results from the survey will be made at STF AGM on 26 November 2025.

## How to write a winning award application!




*Direct Partners are crowned winners of the Leading in Learning Provision category at the 2025 Scottish Apprenticeship Awards, Perth Concert Hall, February 2025.*

How do you write an application that wins a Scottish Apprenticeship Award? Now you can find out by attending the `Marketing of Scottish Apprenticeships' workshop in the afternoon session of the conference.

Debra and Beverly from Direct Partners – winners at this year's Scottish Apprenticeships Awards – will be on hand to share their experiences and give some top tips on the writing process.

There's lots more in the workshop too – so if you want to be a winner – this is the workshop to go to!

## Are you compliant?

Four members of the Compliance Team from SDS are at this year's conference to help members with enquires and provide information on emerging issues of importance.

The team have a workshop running in the morning session – but are available all day for a quick chat over coffee or lunch.

Employed status (HMRC checks) has generated a lot of concern over the last 12 months – and is one of the topics that will be covered in the workshop. But there are lots of other interesting topics being discussed too, so this is a workshop well worth attending.

## SQA and STF MOU to be re-signed



*Stuart Leitch, Chair, STF, and Janet Brown, Chief Executive, SQA, sign the MOU in 2008.*

SQA and STF have enjoyed a close working partnership for many years.

This is reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that operates between the two organisations.

The MOU has recently been updated and will be re-signed. by Nick Page, Chief Executive, SQA and Caroline McFarlane, Chair, STF, at the conference.

Previous MOUs have been signed by previous SQA Chief Executives, Janet Brown and Fiona Robertson and STF Chairs Stuart Leitch and Lorna Trainer.



*Lorna Trainer, Chair, STF, and Fiona Robertson, Chief Executive, SQA, sign the MOU in 2022.*

# AGENDA

**09.45** **Conference Welcome**
**Caroline McFarlane**, Chair, STF and **Kevin Briggs,** Vice Chair (Events), STF

**09.55** **Welcome from SQA**
**Nick Page**, Chief Executive, SQA

**10.00** **Keynote Speaker, *followed by Q&A***
**Ben Macpherson MSP**, Minister for Higher and Further Education

**11.00** **Update from the SFC, *followed by Q&A***
**Jacqui Brasted**, Director of Access, Learning and Outcomes, SFC

**11.30** **Workshops preview**
**Stuart McKenna**, Chief Executive, STF

**11.40** **Workshops**
*Delegates can choose one of the following workshops.*

1. **SQA**: Core Skills and Meta Skills in Modern Apprenticeships
2. **Scottish Government & SDS:** Training Provider Engagement Sessions - Update and Next Steps
3. **Skills Development Scotland:** Compliance Update
4. **Scottish Funding Council**: An Overview of the Scottish Funding Council

**12.30** **Lunch**

**1.20** **Refinements to the HMIE inspection of MA programmes**
**Peter Connelly,** HM Inspector of Education, Education Scotland

**1.40** **Update from Skills Development Scotland, *followed by Q&A***
**Helen Allison,** Director of National Training Programmes, Skills Development Scotland

**2.05** **Update from SQA, *followed by Q&A***
**Nick Page**, Chief Executive, SQA

**2.30** **Workshops**
*Delegates can choose one of the following workshops.*

1. **SQA**: AI in Qualifications and Assessment: Navigating the Future
2. **Scottish Government & SDS:** *Repeat of morning session*
3. **Skills Development Scotland:** The Marketing of Scottish Apprenticeships
4. **Scottish Funding Council**: *Repeat of morning session*

**3.15** **Close**

# Speakers



**Ben Macpherson MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education**

Ben Macpherson is the Minister for Higher and Further Education and the MSP for the Edinburgh Northern & Leith constituency. He grew up in the Scottish capital and graduated at the University of York before studying law at University of Edinburgh and becoming a lawyer in the city.

Mr Macpherson served as Minister for Europe, Migration & International Development from June 2018 to February 2020, then Minister for Public Finance & Migration until being appointed Minister for Rural Affairs & the Natural Environment in December 2020. In 2021 he became Minister for Social Security & Local Government, a post he held until leaving government in March 2023.



**Nick Page, Chief Executive, SQA**

Nick Page is the Chief Executive of SQA and was appointed to the role in July 2025.

He has 30 years' "classroom-to-boardroom" experience: a former teacher, Director of Children's Services and Council Chief Executive with track record of improving outcomes and values-led delivery.

In his new role he has pledged to deliver positive change. He will drive ongoing transformation of SQA and work in partnership with educators, learners, the wider education and skills community, the Scottish Government, employers and industry to ensure success of Qualifications Scotland.



**Jacqui Brasted, Director of Access, Learning and Outcomes, Scottish Funding Council**

Jacqui Brasted is Director of Access, Learning and Outcomes at the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), where she leads on institutional engagement, outcome agreements, learning and quality, skills and work-based learning, student interests, access, governance, fair work and the assurance and accountability framework. She was also previously an independent governor and Chair of the Audit Committee at Bath Spa University.

Prior to taking up her role at the SFC in March 2022, Jacqui ran her own consultancy, supporting higher education providers on governance, regulatory and other matters. Jacqui started her consultancy after working for 11 years at the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Office for Students in a variety of roles. In her spare time, Jacqui writes and presents a monthly quiz at her local pub and also enjoys long distance walking, having most recently completed the 630-mile South-West Coast Path.



**Helen Allison, Performance and Operations Manager, Skills Development Scotland**

Helen Allison is the Performance and Operations Manager in the National Training Programmes Directorate at Skills Development Scotland. Her role involves collaborating with a wide network of stakeholders across Scotland to effectively commission and manage contracts for the Modern and Foundation Apprenticeship provision on behalf of the Scottish Government.

With approximately 30 years of experience in the skills and learning landscape in Scotland, her work has ranged from designing and implementing national youth and adult employability programs to operationalising new skills initiatives. She has worked in partnership with organisations across the public, third and private sector, Colleges, Universities and Scottish Government etc. She has a great passion for apprenticeships and skills initiatives that support economic growth and skills development for individuals.

# Speakers



**Peter B Connelly, HM Inspector and Lead Officer Work Based Learning, Education Scotland**

As a Senior HM Inspector of Education, Peter leads inspections and reviews of colleges and apprenticeship programmes. Peter is a leader and influencer of national strategic curricular and skills initiatives in secondary schools, Further and Higher Education establishments and private training organisations, in Scotland and the UK.

He acted as a consultant on the development of the International Apprenticeship Toolkit for The British Council. He is Lead Officer at Education Scotland for Work Based Learning involving close liaison and direct involvement with government, SDS, colleges, training providers, local authorities and employers to support the development of the links between the curriculum and skills required for employment. In addition, Peter acted as Chair of the City and Guilds Scottish Advisory Committee and was member of the Quality Standards Committee and Council member of City and Guilds in London. He is an Honorary Member of the City and Guilds for his contribution to vocational and technical education.



**Caroline McFarlane, Chair, STF; Director, Limelight Careers Ltd**

Caroline is a Director at Limelight Careers Ltd, a training provider involved in the delivery of both Modern and Foundation Apprenticeships.

Serving as an STF Director since November 2013 she believes STF to be an invaluable source of help and support – and critical link between key stakeholders supporting National Training Programmes in Scotland. Caroline was elected as STF Chair in January 2024. Prior to this she was elected as Vice Chair for Events in December 2021 and Joint Vice Chair for Apprenticeships in December 2022.

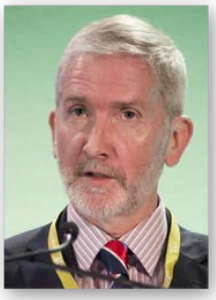


**Kevin Briggs, Vice Chair Events, STF; Head of Student Experience, Shetland UHI**

Kevin Briggs is the Head of Student Experience for UHI Shetland, with responsibility for the provision of apprenticeships for the benefit of Shetland. The department works with local employers to establish their needs and find an appropriate training solution through the Modern Apprenticeship frameworks.

In August 2021, the 3 tertiary organisations in Shetland merged to form UHI Shetland, encompassing Shetland College UHI, NAFC UHI and Train Shetland. During the merger, Kevin w as seconded to the role of Depute Principal to help oversee the merger and provide continuity of support for staff. As part of the restructure, Kevin then reverted to his role of Vocational Training Manager and Head of Student Experience. Kevin's principal role is the overseeing and delivery of the Modern Apprenticeship contract for the organisation, but he also taken responsibility for other vocational areas such as Foundation Apprenticeships and Flexible Workforce Development Fund.

Kevin is also a Director for the Scottish Training Federation where he is able to represent the views of rural areas and the college sector. He was elected to the STF Board in November 2021. Kevin was elected as Vice Chair Events in November 2022 and November 2023.



**Stuart McKenna, Chief Executive, STF**

Stuart is Chief Executive of the Scottish Training Federation (STF) and was appointed to the role in February 2015. For the last 30 years, he has worked for a range of different organisations engaged with skills and training, in roles which have been mainly focussed around promoting Modern Apprenticeships. Prior to joining STF, Stuart was the Director of Skills at GoSkills – the Sector Skills Council for the Passenger Transport sector. He has also worked with Scottish Government, Sector Skills Alliance Scotland and COSLA.

From 2003-2007 he was Vice Chair of the Board of Management of Cardonald College in Glasgow. Stuart is currently a Non-Executive Director of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQF Partnership). He is also a member of the Apprenticeship Approvals Group (AAG) and the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB). In March 2021, he was appointed to the SQA Advisory Council and is also a member of SQA's Qualifications Committee.

# Workshops

## Morning - 11.40-12.30

### 1 SQA: Core Skills and Meta Skills in Modern Apprenticeships

There are proposed changes to the way core and meta-skills are included in Modern Apprenticeships. This workshop is an opportunity to discuss these proposals and inform the future by sharing your experiences and needs in the delivery and assessment of these skills.

***Host:*** *Lee-Anne Murray, SQA*

### 2 Scottish Government & SDS: Training Provider Engagement Sessions - Update and Next Steps

Over the past year, SDS and Scottish Government officials have undertaken a series of meetings with a sample of Modern Apprenticeship Training Providers, who delivered a mix of frameworks. Discussions were focused on the strengths and challenges of the current system and how funding influences and shapes delivery. This session will be an opportunity to hear a summary of the feedback and explore what we can do collectively to continue to improve apprenticeship delivery.

***Hosts:*** *Linzie Liddell and Jane Duffy, Scottish Government & Helen Allison, Skills Development Scotland*

### 3 Skills Development Scotland: SDS Compliance Update

This workshop from the SDS Compliance Team will cover a range of topics, including:

1. SDS Compliance Purpose, Scope, Review Findings, Response, Provider Feedback
2. Identifying Review Areas: Data Analytics; Pilot Work: Employed Status
3. Counter Fraud; Investigations; ECCTA*
4. Improvement Plans: Clarity on checks/balances to be addressed.

**The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act (ECCTA) introduced a new offence of 'Failure to Prevent Fraud'. This comes into effect on 1st September 2025. The offence applies to all bodies in UK that meet criteria: more than £36 million turnover; More than £18 million in total assets; more than 250 employees. SDS meets the criteria.*

***Hosts:*** *Irene Coll, Iain Brown, Elaine Anderson and Emma-Jade Higginson, SDS*

### 4 Scottish Funding Council: An Overview of the Scottish Funding Council

This workshop will provide an overview of the work and activities of the SFC. It will also look at the benefits of the current skills reform agenda and the preparatory work that is underway to ensure a smooth transition of apprenticeships and national training programmes from SDS to SFC.

***Hosts:*** *Jacqui Brasted and Sharon Drysdale, SFC*

# Workshops

## Afternoon: 2.30 - 3.15

### 1 SQA: AI in Qualifications and Assessment: Navigating the Future

This session will explore the impact of artificial intelligence on learning, teaching and assessment, directly discussing its implications for your qualifications and assessments. The sessions will delve into the current landscape, sharing insights, and covering the biggest concerns and hopes you have for the future.

Engage with peers, share your experience so far, and collaboratively navigate the challenges and opportunities AI presents.

***Host:*** *Theo Pengelley, SQA*

### 2 Scottish Government & SDS: Training Provider Engagement Sessions - Update and Next Steps

Over the past year, SDS and Scottish Government officials have undertaken a series of meetings with a sample of Modern Apprenticeship Training Providers, who delivered a mix of frameworks. Discussions were focused on the strengths and challenges of the current system and how funding influences and shapes delivery. This session will be an opportunity to hear a summary of the feedback and explore what we can do collectively to continue to improve apprenticeship delivery.

***Hosts:*** *Linzie Liddell and Jane Duffy, Scottish Government & Helen Allison, Skills Development Scotland*

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***Hosts:*** *Jacqui Brasted and Sharon Drysdale, SFC*

### 4 Skills Development Scotland: The Marketing of Scottish Apprenticeships

This workshop will provide an update on 2025-26 campaign activity – including employer marketing, the Scottish Apprenticeship Awards and Scottish Apprenticeship Week. The interactive session will feature Scottish Apprenticeship Award winners Direct Partners and capture training provider feedback on the marketing of Modern Apprenticeships.

***Host:*** *Tom Stewart, SDS*

# Delegates

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Helen | Allison | SDS |
| Elaine | Anderson | SDS |
| Anneliese | Archibald | Xtra-mile.com |
| Karen | Baird | STF Board |
| Lynda | Basnett | SQA |
| Michelle | Batt | MGT |
| Graeme | Bennett | MGT |
| Julie | Bilotti | Scottish Government |
| Monica | Black | Limelight Careers |
| Ed | Blackburn | SDS |
| Jacqui | Brasted | SFC |
| Kevin | Briggs | STF Board |
| Iain | Brown | SDS |
| Robert | Bruce | Enginuity |
| Lynsay | Bryce | Xtra-mile.com |
| Pauline | Burns | SDS |
| Charlie | Cameron | AquaTerra Training |
| Emma | Carey | SQA |
| Irene | Coll | SDS |
| Peter | Connelly | Education Scotland |
| Jaq | Devlin | Ambition Centre for Training |
| Nikki | Doolan | Rainbow Room International |
| Sharon | Drysdale | SFC |
| Jane | Duffy | Scottish Government |
| Niall | Evans | Lantra |
| Derek | Farrell | Babington Business College |
| Marisa | Farrell | SQA |
| Natalie | Ferguson | Tala Training Ltd |
| Olwyn | Gaffney | SHARE |
| Paula | Glancy | Qualitas International |
| Beverley | Glenwright | Direct Partners |
| Donna | Godden | Tala Training Ltd |
| Samantha | Graham | Childcare Management Centre |
| Susan | Greig | Aberlour Futures |
| Angela | Hamilton | BAE Systems PLC |
| Alison | Hamilton | SDS |
| David | Hannah | QA Ltd |
| Fiona | Harper | SECTT |
| Linda | Healy | Busy Bees Education and Training |
| Fiona | Henderson | Falkirk Council |
| Cath | Henderson | Scottish Government |
| Emma-Jade | Higginson | SDS |
| Martina | Hofner | Esteem Training Limited |
| Marian | Hopkins | Glasgow City Council |
| Rossana | Houston | Qualitas International |
| Steven | Hughes | Sibbald Training |
| Caroline | Hunter | SQA |
| Chris | Irons | AAT |
| Karen | Jamieson | Museums Galleries Scotland |
| Jacqueline | Kerr | SDS |
| Louise | Kirkpatrick | Rewards Training |
| Steven | Lamont | Falkirk Council |
| Linzie | Liddell | Scottish Government |
| Gary | Logan | Advance Training (Scotland) Ltd |
| Lesley | Lowrie | Gosta Training |
| Charlotta | Lundahl | Share |
| Sean | Lynch | West Dunbartonshire Council |
| Debbie | Macgregor | Gosta Training |
| Ben | Macpherson | Scottish Government |
| David | McAleese | STF Board |
| Elaine | McAuley | Busy Bees Education and Training |
| Claire | McCallum | RT Resources Ltd |
| Maureen | McCann | STF Board |
| Helen | McCanney | Pitman Training |
| Maxine | McClintock | SAAB |
| Elaine | McCubbin | RT Resources |
| Tracey | McEwan | Tarff Valley |
| Jen | McEwan | STF Board |
| Caroline | McFarlane | STF Board |
| Michael | McHugh | SDS |
| Paul | McKee | BAE Systems |
| Stuart | McKenna | STF Board |
| Jacqueline | Mclellan | Education Scotland |
| Joanne | Molloy | SDS |
| Pamela | Morrice | MGT |
| Heather | Munro | Tigers STA |
| James | Murphy | Pitman Training |
| Lee-Anne | Murray | SQA |
| Carolanne | O'Neill | The Tell Organisation Ltd |
| Hannah | Owen | City & Guilds |
| Melissa | Owens | Tigers STA Ltd |
| Nick | Page | SQA |
| Theo | Pengelley | SQA |
| Gail | Pincott | BPP Holdings |
| Stephen | Poggi | QA Ltd |
| Frank | Quinn | SDS |
| Niel | Ritchie | Sibbald Training |
| Carol | Robertson | SDS |
| Maria | Roushias | STF Board |
| Emma | Scott | SDS |
| Alasdair | Smith | SQA |
| Lisa | Smith | STF Board |
| Tom | Stewart | SDS |
| Chris | Stockwell | SRUC |
| Julie | Sweeney | Qualitas International |
| Fiona | Tait | BPP Holdings |
| Sharon | Taylor | Childcare Management Centre |
| Sarah | Thomson | Ambition Centre for Training |
| Debra | Tracy | Direct Partners |
| Lorna | Trainer | STF Board |
| Adam | Wardrop | Tarff Valley |
| Nick | Wilson | AAT |
| Kellie | Zdanowicz | STF Board |