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Skills action plan update for financial & professional services

Scottish Financial Enterprise

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Executive Summary

Scotland has been at the forefront of financial services expertise for more than three centuries. Innovating purpose driven financial solutions to help the changing needs of its customers across the globe, Scotland is the birthplace of many of the great innovations in finance from savings banks to ATMs, life and pensions companies to ESG asset management.

Today Scotland is an established, diverse and vibrant financial centre with a thriving ecosystem and talent pool, with Glasgow and Edinburgh both appearing in the top 35 of the Global Financial Centres Index. Within the index our people and talent are highly valued and that expertise remains a key part of Scotland's attraction to firms and investors.

Scotland's education sector is respected across the globe, producing some of the best talent in data and AI worldwide and one of the key reasons firms invest in Scotland. However, there needs to be better alignment between academia, government and industry to ensure our higher education system continues to live up to its heritage.

As an industry, we are increasingly collaborating with academia to ensure a work-ready pipeline of talent. We have opened additional channels with academia to ensure we are bringing together the best of our higher and further education in fields such as data and AI, an area we excel in and need to remain competitive.

Since launching our skills action plan, emerging technologies and a competitive hiring landscape have reshaped the industry. This refresh seeks to review the latest position and outline recommendations to ensure Scotland remains a global leader in financial services.

Key recommendations

Recommendations include:

- SFE to lead the sector in demonstrating effective collaboration between business and the skills system
- To provide industry insight to governments on the impact of skills related policies such as apprenticeships and education reform
- Strengthen partnerships with relevant government agencies and the Financial Services Skills Commission to identify future skills gaps and insights
- Work with industry and academia to ensure the existing and emerging workforce is prepared for the adoption of AI and data products

Sandy Begbie CBE FRSE
Chief Executive, Scottish Financial Enterprise

getinto.finance

The key objective from our skills action plan launched in 2022 was to develop and launch a skills and careers hub for financial services in Scotland.

In October 2024 we successfully launched **getinto.finance**, showcasing and promoting pathways and skills needed across our sector.

Our Young Professionals Network, with the support of DYW (Developing the Young Workforce), have been working closely with schools across the central belt to share their career journeys into the sector and how to use the getinto.finance platform.

Key Partners:

- Aberdeen
- Aegon
- Barclays
- Blackrock
- EY
- NatWest Group
- Lloyds Banking Group
- Career Ready
- Future Asset
- Investment 20/20

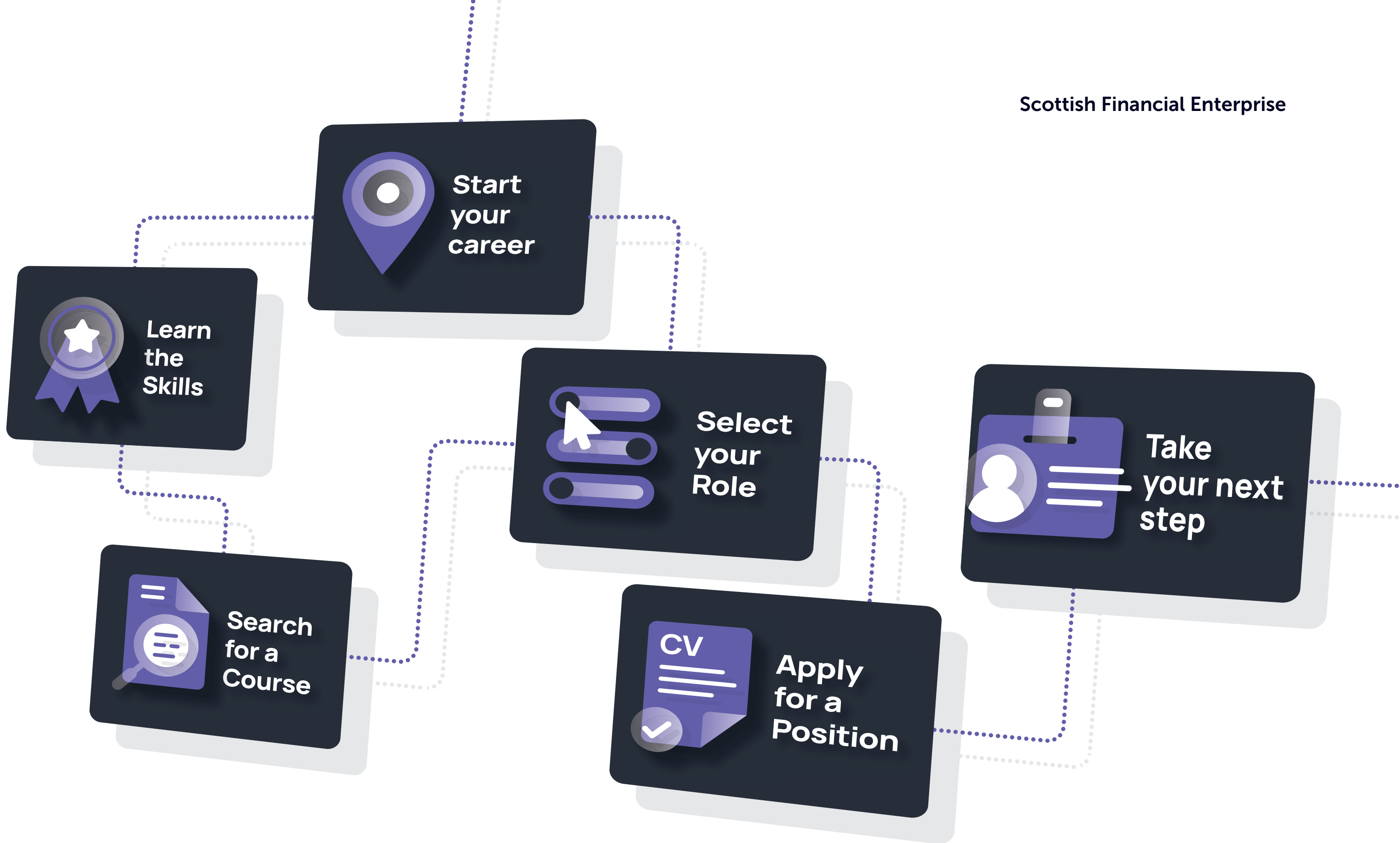
In the next phase of getinto.finance, we are looking to expand our outreach across the whole of Scotland. We want to ensure as a sector we are promoting pathways and skills across the whole of the country across higher and further education.

Supporting both careers advisers and students across higher education, getinto.finance aims to be the go-to channel to routes into financial services.

As the industry body for financial and professional services, we support our members to communicate pathways into the sector at school, college and university level through getinto.finance. We aim to embed the platform into school classrooms and college and university support services, be the primary contact for our member firms into schools and work as the convenor in relationships with further education.

We aim to be the key channel into government and the voice for industry across apprenticeships in our industry, highlighting the barriers and opportunities within our sector.

To support the next phase in the development of getinto.finance, it's expansion and the link across academia and industry, we have brought together our SFE industry Skills Steering Group.



The Skills Steering Group hosts:

- Senior leaders across our members firms with direct influence on skills. For example HR, talent, social mobility leads etc.
- Developing the Young Workforce, Skills Development Scotland and Financial Services Skills Commission representatives
- Heads of colleges and university departments and business schools

Connecting the supply and demand side for skills in our sector will need continuous effort. This is necessary for us to identify and fill future skills gaps.

Industry Momentum

- Scotland's financial services sector is key to Scotland's economy, now worth £17.7bn in GVA annually, driven by global investment and technological transformation.
- Industry-academia collaboration is stronger than ever, with joint efforts to align education with evolving skills demands.
- Initiatives like getinto.finance have reached schools, colleges, and universities, building awareness and access to careers in finance.

In the past two years we've seen additional job creation in the sector with key highlights including:

- **Blackrock** has expanded its Scottish presence, with its Edinburgh site now its fourth largest office globally.
- **JP Morgan** choosing Scotland as its location for its European tech hub.
- **Morgan Stanley** celebrating 25 years in Glasgow and now employing over 2,500 people.
- **Barclays UK** expanding its Glasgow campus which now employs more than 8,000 people.
- Edinburgh being the largest asset management centre in the UK after London with over 13,100 people employed in the sector, including at global firms such as **Baillie Gifford** and **Aberdeen**.
- **Lloyds Banking Group** now has 14,500 employees in Edinburgh, it's largest centre across the UK with **Natwest Group** also employing 11,000 people

Skills in Demand

Forecasting future skills requirements can be challenging, however, it is necessary to ensuring the industry remains agile and competitive. This may involve building a sector led talent ecosystem that supports continuous upskilling and reskilling of both current professionals and new entrants, along with promoting pathways and opportunities into our sector.

Key focus areas include:

- Data analytics for interpreting complex datasets, identifying trends, and making informed decisions that enhance customer experience and operational efficiency.
- Cyber security will play a critical role in protecting sensitive financial information, ensuring regulatory compliance, and defending against increasingly sophisticated threats.
- Software engineering will underpin the development of robust digital platforms, enabling automation, personalised services, and seamless user experiences.
- Green and sustainable finance, to build on recommendations from GEFI's Scottish Taskforce for Green and Sustainable Financial Services

These disciplines will be critical to driving innovation and resilience in the sector. By investing in these capabilities, the industry will aim to future proof its workforce and maintain its global relevance.

To effectively learn and adopt emerging technologies in financial services, employers will need to cultivate a range of behavioural skills that support adaptability and continuous growth.

- Encouraging curiosity and a proactive mindset will drive individuals to explore new tools and seek out learning opportunities.
- Resilience and openness to change will help them navigate the uncertainty and challenges that often accompany digital transformation.
- Strong collaboration and communication skills will be essential for sharing knowledge, troubleshooting issues, and integrating new systems across teams.
- Critical thinking and problem-solving abilities will empower employees to apply technology in meaningful ways, enhancing efficiency and innovation.

These behavioural traits will be just as vital as technical proficiency in building a future-ready workforce.

Financial Services Skills Commission

Financial Services Skills Commission

The Financial Services Skills Commission (FSSC) promotes skills-based learning through its Future Skills Framework, a strategic initiative designed to help financial services organisations identify and invest in the capabilities needed for long-term success. This framework outlines 13 core technical skills and behaviours that are critical across the sector, including areas like data analytics, software development, digital literacy, machine learning/AI, cyber security, and agile methodologies.

Key features of the FSSC's skills-based learning approach include:

- **Clear skill definitions:** The framework provides consistent definitions to guide training and development.
- **Career pathways:** It supports the creation of new and emerging career routes within financial services.
- **Skills assessments:** Tools for evaluating current workforce capabilities and identifying gaps.
- **Accreditations:** Development of recognised credentials for professionals working or aspiring to work in the industry.

This helps firms prioritise investment in talent, remain competitive, and adapt to evolving demands

To future-proof Scotland's financial services workforce, the Future Skills Framework systematically identifies and addresses emerging capability gaps. This framework focuses on high-impact areas such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, cyber security, and digital transformation. These fields are rapidly reshaping how financial institutions operate, innovate, and serve customers. By aligning workforce development with these evolving demands, the sector can ensure it remains competitive, resilient, and responsive to technological change.

Promoting lifelong learning helps tackle skills gaps and retention rates, while also empowering individuals to adapt to new tools and workflows and fostering a culture of curiosity and growth. Lifelong learning also supports career mobility, helping professionals transition across roles and specialisms as the sector evolves.

The most in-demand skills will span both technical and behavioural domains. On the technical side data analytics, software engineering, and cyber security are prioritised to support digital innovation.

Equally important will be soft skills such as communication, adaptability, and collaboration, which enable teams to work effectively across disciplines and navigate change with confidence.

Strategic actions will include aligning training programmes with organisational workforce planning and integrating skills mapping into core HR processes to ensure that talent development is not only reactive but also anticipatory, driven by business needs and future trends.

Strategic Actions

- Over the next 18 months, collaboration with the Financial Services Skills Commission (FSSC) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) will be critical to assess these areas, help refine priorities and assess industry findings.
- Continue to build a connective ecosystem between education, industry, agencies and Government.

aegon

AEGON: skills based hiring

Aegon faced a fundamental problem: traditional, competency-based interviews were prioritising financial services experience over the right behaviours. While candidates could answer technical questions, too often this was prioritised over their skills and potential. The challenge was clear – hire for potential, not background and reignite hiring managers' passion for recruitment.

To achieve this we implemented two crucial aspects:

- **Arctic Shores** – allowing us to manage the rise in AI applications, aligns skills from the offsite, harness engaged candidates and crucially, provide a feedback report to all candidates who completed this stage to set them up for their interview with Aegon or other employers
- **Immersive Assessment** – designed assessment aligned to the skills of the roles rather than traditional competency questions. This places candidates into a team based scenario to collaborate to stop and art heist (concept attached)
- CV's we removed from hiring managers throughout the process

Aegon Results for skills based hiring:

107% **increase in careers site visits**

68% **in applications**

98% **offer acceptance rate**

36% **increase in hires from outside FS**

2% **no show rate for assessment – down from 35%**

98% **acceptance rate – up from 98%**

98% **candidate satisfaction rating (including unsuccessful candidates)**

Aegon has hired chefs, nail technicians, highway maintenance workers, individuals who had retired and from sectors like hospitality and retail.

Preparing the workforce for emerging technologies

To support the adoption of emerging technologies in financial services, approaches such as modular training, micro-credentialing, and industry-led upskilling initiatives are beginning to arise. Modular training offers flexible, bite-sized learning opportunities that allow employees to build relevant skills at their own pace, making it easier to stay current with rapid technological change. Micro-credentials provide targeted recognition for specific competencies in areas like data analytics, AI, cyber security, and digital transformation. This enables professionals to demonstrate expertise without committing to lengthy programmes.

Meanwhile, industry-led upskilling initiatives ensure that training remains aligned with real-world demands, helping organisations equip their workforce with the capabilities needed to implement new technologies effectively. Together, these approaches encourage a culture of lifelong learning and empower employees to confidently navigate the evolving digital landscape.

These approaches create a more agile and responsive talent pipeline by allowing learners to acquire targeted, job-relevant skills without committing to lengthy degree programmes. Modular training enables individuals to build competencies step-by-step, while micro-credentials offer recognition for specific skills that employers value in fast-moving areas like data analytics, AI, and cyber security. This flexibility makes it easier for education providers to align with industry needs and for learners to transition into financial services roles more quickly.

By collaborating with education providers and shaping curriculum around emerging technologies and behavioural skills, the sector can create a more coherent, demand-driven ecosystem that supports both entry-level talent and ongoing professional development.

FinTech Scotland is at the heart of a thriving cluster of over 260 firms. This is supported by a wide range of partners that recognise the importance of developing the FinTech sector to create more jobs, economic growth and opportunities.

Strategic Action

- These initiatives will be explored through further research through our Skills Steering group and key partnerships across our member firms and academia.
- Continue to strengthen partnership with FinTech Scotland to ensure emerging technology is at the heart of future skills.

Fragmented Career Pathways and Skills Messaging

The financial services sector faces a persistent challenge in presenting clear and cohesive career pathways. With a wide array of roles spanning banking, insurance, fintech, and asset management, the lack of unified messaging around skills and progression can leave potential entrants confused or disengaged, as can outdated or inaccurate impressions of roles in financial services. This not only affects young people exploring their options but also career changers and returners who may struggle to identify accessible entry points, including at later stages of their careers.

To address this, the sector must invest in coordinated outreach, transparent skills frameworks, and consistent communication that demystifies the journey from education to employment and beyond.

Support is needed for careers advisors to ensure they are equipped to provide pupils and students with relevant and accurate information on career pathways.

We continue to promote getinto.finance across the education sector to provide careers advisors with a platform to highlight pathways and skills needed to enter the sector.

Broader outreach and communication plans are set for the next 18 months to expand out outreach from the central belt to the wider Scotland.

Competition for Talent Across Sectors — Why Financial Services?

More than ever, our sector is competing for talent across the board. Roles in data science, cyber security, and software engineering are in high demand across sectors, and financial services must articulate a compelling value proposition to stand out. Beyond competitive salaries, the sector offers unique opportunities to shape global markets, drive innovation, and contribute to economic resilience.

We must work as an industry to communicate this to the market.

Through the work of our members and partners, as well as higher education institutions we plan to use a collective voice to do so.

Social Mobility

Despite significant progress, our sector must ensure we are doing more to encourage diversity across gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic backgrounds.

getinto.finance is pushing to challenge industry perceptions and stereotypes through inclusive opportunities and outreach, showcasing diverse role models, and community engagement.

Pathways into the sector through apprenticeships is a strength across the sector we can better promote through our network of schools, colleges and universities.

As an industry body, we can support in being the point of contact for industry on apprenticeship schemes of all levels.

More research into barriers for our members regarding apprenticeships and how we can support at a government level with be explored in coming months.

Use Cases

J.P.Morgan

Winner of our 2024 Skills and Inclusion Award

JPMorgan Chase is strategically investing in Scotland's future workforce, partnering with dressCode, The Prince's Trust, and SmartSTEMS to enhance digital literacy among young people. The firm provides Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships, offering accredited career pathways, while the Aspiring Professionals programme delivers technology work experience, boosting social mobility. Academic volunteers deliver career insights, ensuring opportunities reach young people from underrepresented communities.

SCOTTISH WIDOWS

Winners of our 2025 Innovation award

Scottish Widows tackled widespread pension apathy and high poverty risk using the AI-powered Pension Mirror. Blending behavioural science, social proof, and a touch of vanity, the tool scans a user's face to guess their age and instantly compares their savings to their peers. This novel approach successfully transformed passive savers into active planners, generating over 750,000 digital interactions and achieving a remarkable 193% uplift in app registrations.

Looking Ahead

To remain competitive, future-ready and able to adapt to the ever-changing skills landscape, Scotland's financial services industry must:

- SFE to play a convening role to ensure the higher education system is equipped to respond to the needs of the industry
- To provide industry insight to governments on the impact of skills related policies such as apprenticeships and education reform
- Strengthen partnerships with relevant government agencies and the Financial Services Skills Commission to identify future skills gaps and insights
- Work with industry and academia to ensure the existing and emerging workforce is prepared for the adoption of AI and data products

By enabling faster, more responsive pathways into employment, and by aligning training content with real-time industry needs, these approaches will strengthen collaboration between educators and employers, improve workforce agility, and ensure a steady flow of talent equipped for the future of financial services.

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