



Social Entrepreneurs Fund

End of Year Report
24/25

Background

The Social Entrepreneurs Fund launched in 2009 as a groundbreaking, world-leading funding programme which radically reshaped and strengthened support available to Scotland's social entrepreneurs. Since then, it has received over 3,500 applications, made over 1,000 awards, and distributed over £11m in awards funding. The Social Entrepreneurs Fund continues to be the main mechanism for stimulating and supporting new social enterprise solutions in Scotland.

SEF comprises four distinct programmes: Pounds for Purpose, Start It, Build It, and Step Up. Each year, Pounds for Purpose helps at least 10 young people to test their social enterprise, Start It launches at least 50 new social enterprises, Build It creates a minimum of 20 new, sustainable roles at Real Living Wage, and Step Up provides an innovative and supportive repayable finance option for social enterprises looking to build their trading income. SEF works closely with business support at all levels, including Just Enterprise early-stage support, the LaunchMe investment readiness programmes, and a wide range of external stakeholders in the social enterprise start-up space.

Across SEF, Firstport have a strong record of supporting diverse applicants and are especially proud that, from the earliest days of the fund, the majority of awardees have been female. Most of these awardees progress into long-term leadership and board roles within their enterprises; this is a direct contrast to trends in other sectors.

We are intentional in the design of, and access to, our support for individuals with other protected characteristics and/or additional support requirements, as well as ensuring that funds are distributed across the whole of Scotland by working closely with relevant stakeholders and support organisations – which now include some of our awardees – to improve our reach.



Overview 2024-25

The 2024-25 programme year saw a significant increase in demand, specifically a 34% increase in applications from the previous year, and the highest number of applications received since SEF began.

Pre-start funding through the Pipeline Fund pilot and Pounds for Purpose saw considerable interest, and targets of 10 awards at £1,000 (Pipeline / Ready to RISE) and 12 awards of £500 (Pounds for Purpose) were made, meeting and exceeding the awards targets respectively.

Start It saw the biggest increase in applications (32%), and we exceeded the target number of awards at this level. SEF continues to encourage pre-application engagement with Business Advisors. Of the 70 awards made at this level, 37 had one-to-one business support from Business Advisors, and most went on to engage with business support post-award. We typically expect at least 50% of awardees to have engaged with business support pre-application, and while engagement with business support is not a mandatory requirement at Start It level, we strongly encourage establishing this relationship, especially if the awardee plans to apply for Build It later in their social enterprise journey. Business support has proven to be extremely valuable across all SEF streams, particularly for those applicants new to business or with additional support requirements.

Build It criteria changed in 2024-25 to encourage more established social enterprises to apply, particularly those with strong governance and financial oversight at board level. This change was reflected in the higher amount awarded at Build It (up to £40k from £25k), and while the team expected a lower number of applications, the fund saw a 22% increase in applications on the previous year. As with Start It, the target number of awards at this level was exceeded, and XX new roles at Real Living Wage were created.

Step Up also continued to see growing interest, with 2 more loans approved and 3 further applications to be assessed at the beginning of the 25-26 programme year.

The 2024-25 programme also saw the pilot of the Community Enterprise funding stream, targeted at community enterprises looking to develop new trading through social enterprise. This pilot was enormously successful and will be a core part of SEF in the 2025-26 programme year.

Key Stats (24/25)

497

Applications received

126

Awards made

£1,141,831

Awarded

92

Social entrepreneurs
started their journey

36

New RLW roles
created

£447,579

Awards made to
applicants from SIMD
Areas 1-5

£368,126

Awards made to
applicants from rural
areas

First Minister Priorities

On 22 May 2024, the First Minister outlined the following [“Priorities for Scotland”](#):

1. Eradicating child poverty
2. Growing the economy
3. Tackling the climate emergency
4. Improving public services

The SEF programme targeted funding to social enterprises that directly address at least one of the priorities outlined above.

1. Eradicating Child Poverty

Many of the social enterprises supported by SEF are committed to eradicating child poverty through family support, particularly through early learning/childcare and employability services, designed to help family members either return to the labour market or enter it for the first time.

2. Growing the Economy

Job creation and financial sustainability are at the heart of SEF’s work with new and established social entrepreneurs., with particular attention paid in the early stages to financial viability and the potential for growth. All Build It awards made contributed directly to this priority by establishing XX new permanent roles within the sector at Real Living Wage.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency

All assessments undertaken for SEF take into account Net Zero targets, and all awardees are encouraged to consider their environmental impact.

4. Improving Public Services

Many SEF awardees seek to deliver social impact through improving, reducing pressure on, or filling gaps in public service provision. This includes a wide range of approaches, including but not limited to providing physical and mental health support through fitness and counselling services (thus reducing the burden on the NHS), educational support services, flexible childcare, or community transport solutions in underserved areas.

Key Stats (Priorities) (Q3 & Q4)

67
Awards Made
(Q3 & Q4)

7

Eradicating Child
Poverty

15

Growing the
Economy

10

Tackling the Climate
Emergency

35

Improving Public
Services

Equalities and Diversity

The Social Entrepreneurs Fund is committed to distributing awards as widely and as fairly as possible, with particular attention paid to budding social entrepreneurs who face additional barriers, remaining responsive to diversity, equality, and inclusion at all funding levels. All Equality and Diversity data provided is compared directly with 2022 Census data where applicable and highlights the SEF programme's commitment to diversity across all main data points. Some key points to note for the 24/25 programme year:

68% of SEF awardees were women. The Social Entrepreneurs Fund has always received a higher number of applications from women, and we have found that our combination of funding and support for social entrepreneurs has helped a significant number to establish and continue leadership roles within their organisations and the sector as a whole (per the last Social Enterprise Census 2021, 71% of social enterprises are women-led).

11% of SEF awardees reported as LGBTQi+. This is significantly higher than the 2022 Census data (around 3-4%), which highlights the SEF programme's inclusivity. Many LGBTQi+ applicants and awardees have stated that they felt their sexuality or gender identity prevented them from accessing other services, while SEF's programme of support and funding continues to be visibly open to and supportive of applications from marginalised communities.

24% of SEF awardees were from an ethnic minority group. This is again significantly higher than the 2022 Census data (12.9%), and this highlights the SEF programme's focus on one-to-one assessment rather than application forms (which can be a barrier for those with English as a second language), as well as ongoing partnership work with CEMVO.

12% identified as living with a disability. This compares against the 2022 Census that estimates around 23% of individuals aged 16+ reported a health problem that limits their day-to-day activity a little or a lot. Anecdotally, we have found that many applicants living with a disability are reluctant to report it, but SEF's commitment to accessibility and meeting additional requirements has meant a growing number of disabled applicants or applicants requiring additional support are comfortable telling us.

25% of SEF awardees were 50+. The 2022 Census estimates around 41% of the population is 50+, with around 27% between the ages of 50-69. With an aging population, SEF remains committed to supporting older social entrepreneurs, particularly those who may feel excluded from the labour market.



Geographical Diversity

The SEF programme received applications from 31 out of 32 local authority areas, with only Orkney outstanding. Awards were made to 26 out of 32 local authority areas, the same as the previous year, and represents a solid geographical spread.

Traditional ‘cold spots’ remain warmer. In 24/25, we saw a significant increase in the number of applications from traditionally ‘cold spot’ areas including Aberdeen City, Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee, Falkirk, Fife, Highland, Inverclyde, Midlothian, Moray, and Shetland. There was also a significant rise in the number of awards made to applicants in Aberdeenshire, Angus, East Ayrshire, Falkirk, Highland, Inverclyde, Midlothian, Moray, and North Lanarkshire local authority areas. This has been a direct result of the online Start It and Build It surgeries, which can reach a wider geographical demographic than traditional in-person outreach events.

29% of SEF awardees were from remote and/or rural areas. The [Rural Scotland Key Facts 2021](#) states 17% of the Scottish population live in rural or remote areas with their own challenges. Many applicants have stated they have found it difficult to access funding for localised enterprises that aren’t in the central belt. The team have been mindful of maintaining an equitable spread of funding across the whole of Scotland, with a focus on those that would otherwise struggle to access it. In the 24/25 programme year, 32% of the awards (£368,126) went to remote/rural areas, and 7 of the 19 Build It awards were made to remote/rural social enterprises to establish new RLW posts and boost the local economy. Q4 also saw the first Step Up loan made to an enterprise in a Very Remote Rural Area.

44% of SEF awardees were from SIMD areas 1-5. [SIMD 2020 data](#) estimated 48% of the population lived in SIMD areas 1-5, and around 47% of SEF applications have come from these areas. While we expect to see a higher level of social issues in areas of multiple deprivation, we are committed to supporting individuals within those communities to address them. Over half of the early-stage awards (Pounds for Purpose and Pipeline Fund) went to applicants from SIMD 1-5 areas to help them test their social enterprise ideas, as well as offer encouragement and support. In 24/25, 39% of awards (£447,579) went to SIMD 1-5 areas.

In 24/25, around 71% of total funding was committed to either rural or SIMD areas. This highlights the SEF programme’s commitment to supporting communities most in need of our funds.



Breakdown of Awards 24-25

	Pounds for Purpose			Pipeline Fund			Community Enterprise			Start It			Build It			Step Up			Totals		
Local Authority Area	Apps	Awards	Amount	Apps	Award	Amount	Apps	Awards	Amount	Apps	Awards	Amount	Apps	Awards	Amount	Apps	Awards	Amount	Apps	Awards	Amount
Aberdeen City	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	9	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	9	0	£0
Aberdeenshire	1	0	£0	1	1	£1,000	0	0	£0	15	6	£29,500	3	2	£54,000	0	0	£0	20	9	£84,500
Angus	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	1	1	£5,000	6	2	£10,000	1	1	£40,000	0	0	£0	8	4	£55,000
Argyll & Bute	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	9	4	£20,000	2	1	£40,000	0	0	£0	11	5	£60,000
Clackmannanshire	0	0	£0	1	0	£0	0	0	£0	9	1	£5,000	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	10	1	£5,000
Dumfries & Galloway	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	12	2	£10,000	1	1	£36,168	1	0	£0	14	3	£46,168
Dundee	1	0	£0	2	1	£1,000	0	0	£0	10	2	£10,000	2	1	£40,000	0	0	£0	15	4	£51,000
East Ayrshire	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	12	2	£10,000	2	0	£0	0	0	£0	14	2	£10,000
East Dunbartonshire	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	4	1	£5,000	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	4	1	£5,000
East Lothian	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	11	3	£15,000	2	1	£27,000	0	0	£0	13	4	£42,000
East Renfrewshire	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	3	1	£5,000	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	3	1	£5,000
Edinburgh	2	0	£0	4	1	£1,000	0	0	£0	47	6	£30,000	11	3	£112,336	1	1	£10,000	65	11	£153,336
Falkirk	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	1	1	£5,000	9	2	£10,000	2	0	£0	0	0	£0	12	3	£15,000
Fife	0	1	£500	1	0	£0	0	0	£0	19	3	£15,000	3	0	£0	0	0	£0	23	4	£15,500
Glasgow	5	6	£3,000	7	5	£5,000	1	1	£5,000	77	10	£49,000	11	1	£40,000	0	0	£0	101	23	£102,000
Highland	2	1	£210	0	0	£0	3	3	£15,000	18	3	£14,500	12	5	£153,700	3	3	£50,040	38	15	£233,450
Inverclyde	0	1	£500	0	0	£0	1	0	£0	5	1	£5,000	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	6	2	£5,500
Midlothian	0	0	£0	1	0	£0	0	0	£0	10	4	£20,000	1	0	£0	0	0	£0	12	4	£20,000
Moray	0	1	£500	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	6	2	£8,700	2	1	£18,177	0	0	£0	8	4	£27,377
North Ayrshire	1	1	£500	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	8	1	£5,000	2	0	£0	0	0	£0	11	2	£5,500
North Lanarkshire	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	18	5	£25,000	1	0	£0	0	0	£0	19	5	£25,000
Orkney	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0
Perth & Kinross	0	0	£0	1	0	£0	1	0	£0	4	1	£5,000	6	1	£40,000	0	0	£0	12	2	£45,000
Renfrewshire	0	0	£0	2	2	£2,000	2	1	£5,000	6	1	£5,000	3	0	£0	0	0	£0	13	4	£12,000
Scottish Borders	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	12	2	£9,500	0	0	£0	1	1	£28,500	13	3	£38,000
Shetland	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	1	0	£0	1	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	2	0	£0
South Ayrshire	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	1	0	£0	4	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	5	0	£0
South Lanarkshire	1	1	£500	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	13	1	£5,000	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	14	2	£5,500
Stirling	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	1	0	£0	7	3	£15,000	2	0	£0	1	0	£0	11	3	£15,000
West Dunbartonshire	1	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	1	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	2	0	£0
West Lothian	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	2	2	£10,000	5	1	£5,000	2	1	£40,000	0	0	£0	9	4	£55,000
Western Isles	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	1	1	£5,000	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	0	0	£0	1	1	£5,000
TOTALS	14	12	£5,710	20	10	£10,000	16	10	£50,000	370	70	£346,200	71	19	£641,381	7	5	£88,540	498	126	£1,141,831



Thank you



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