



Caithness Business Fund Publication 2023

Investing in local apprenticeships through employer grants

Since 2013 the Caithness Business Fund has helped to support ten apprentice opportunities for local businesses in Caithness and North Sutherland. Reflecting the diverse employment landscape of the region, these have included apprenticeship opportunities in agriculture, hospitality, renewables, trades, and business administration.

Assistance from the Fund is helping to “level up” access to apprenticeships for small-to-medium enterprises, ensuring businesses and organisations of all sizes are equipped with skills needed both now and in the future. SMEs can access grants of up to £5,000 from the Fund to help with employment and associated training costs for accredited apprenticeship opportunities within their business.

With over a decade working within the renewable energy sector, Fund

recipient RDI Renewables are well versed in the importance of apprenticeships. Founded in 2012 by the company’s MD Ryan Pollard, the family-run business based in Thurso employs a team of plumbing, heating and electrical engineers. Their work across the North Highlands, designing, installing and servicing high-efficiency energy systems in both domestic and commercial settings means that RDI Renewables need a dynamic team with a highly specialised skill set.

The Caithness Business Fund gladly supported RDI Renewables with a contribution towards apprenticeship training for Dillan MacLeod, Apprentice Plumber and Heating Engineer, who is currently studying BPEC Engineering Services Modern Apprenticeship.

Ryan commented, “As Dillan is a



Ryan Pollard, Managing Director, RDI Renewables and Dillan MacLeod, Apprentice Plumber and Heating Engineer, studying BPEC Engineering Services Modern Apprenticeship. Images by Colin Campbell Photography and Design

slightly older apprentice, we are not able to access the same level of funding contribution as we would for a 17/18-year-old. Along with bearing some of these costs the support from the Caithness Business Fund has allowed us to access further training for Dillan."

"Apprentices are so important to our business, as they are trained in-house not only do they grow and develop with our business, but they become integral to our team. It's a privilege for us to see our apprentices learn and develop into fully qualified engineers, and it's fantastic to know you are an important part of their career journey.

Through access to both on-the-job training and block release at college, the apprentices get a unique opportunity to study and train whilst they earn. From an employer's perspective, we are very proud to be part of developing a skilled workforce here

in Caithness and providing excellent career opportunities in a rewarding and rapidly advancing sector."

With similar ambitions to create rewarding career opportunities within his business, hotelier Andrew Mackay from The Caithness Collection supports a full range of apprenticeship opportunities within his group of three-star premier hotels. From cheffing and professional cookery to hotel management and leadership, Andrew and his team understand the significance of nurturing talent and skills in the success of his company's ambitions.

Andrew commented "One of our initial priorities when setting up The Caithness Collection was to facilitate worthwhile careers in the hospitality sector and to provide a learning platform showcasing hospitality as a career of choice in Caithness. Apprenticeships provide the opportunity for

meaningful on-the-job training alongside personal growth and success. It's wonderful to see our apprentices go from strength to strength in achieving their ambitions and flourishing into indispensable members of our team."

The Caithness Collection applied to the Caithness Business Fund for support towards a position for Riley Miller, Apprentice Trainee Manager, currently studying an SVQ certification in Modern Apprentice Hotel Leadership.

Enthusiastic to further their hospitality aspirations and validating the Hotel's vision Riley said "I appreciate this exciting opportunity to further my love for hospitality and gain new skills with an experienced company."

Andrew added, "Support from the Caithness Business Fund has been a great boost for our own business, and I would certainly encourage others to



Images (Above) Riley Miller Apprentice Trainee Manager, studying an SVQ certification in Modern Apprentice Hotel Leadership with Sharon Barclay, Assistant Manager The Caithness Collection (Below) Michael Doull, Farming Apprentice with Thomas Sinclair (Messrs Sinclair, Reaster Farm, Lyth)
Photography by Colin Campbell Photography and Design





apply.”

Thomas Sinclair of Messrs Sinclair, Reaster Farm, Lyth was delighted to receive support from the Fund, which he sees as an investment into the future of farming. The Farm’s apprentice Michael Doull is completing an Agriculture SQV 2 through UHI Orkney whilst working full-time on the Farm. The funding has helped contribute towards further onsite training for Michael who has already passed his teleporter training test and will go on to receive accredited training in essential farming skills including, sheep shearing, transporting livestock, ATV biking and drystone walling amongst other skills.

Thomas said “I was taken by Michael’s initiative and enthusiasm for farming and he is already an incredible asset to the Farm. When he initially got in touch, he was approaching the end of his schooling and looking for an

apprenticeship opportunity. It has been fantastic to be able to access support from the Caithness Business Fund, the administration team were so helpful and went out of their way to help us.”

“Of course, farming life is busy, and a spare pair of hands are always appreciated but the support to take on an apprentice means far more than that. This apprenticeship is truly an investment in Michael’s future farming aspirations and should certainly set him up to achieve his goals.”

In a rapidly shifting business landscape, apprenticeships help businesses to develop resilient and agile workforces, whilst offering opportunities for individual growth and development. The Fund recognises the significant social and economic impact apprenticeships have on the North Highland region. This support represents a sustained investment

in the future of local businesses and communities through upskilling and development of the young workforce.

The Caithness Business Fund is open for applications on a bi-monthly basis and encourages enquires from SMEs interested in apprenticeship opportunities to get in touch with the fund administration team. The Fund’s mission is to promote the economic growth of Caithness and North Sutherland by supporting new and existing businesses and developing the skill base to meet new challenges.

The Fund is available to both established businesses and start-ups, based in the Caithness and North Sutherland area.

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