**Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland**

**Implementation Steering Group Meeting**

**Friday, 4 December 2020, 10.00 – 12.00pm, Teams**

#### Minute of Meeting

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| **Item** | **Topic** | **Lead** | **Timing** |
| 1. | **Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**Attendees:Alana McGuire (SDS)Angela Cox (Borders College)Claudia Rowse (Scottish Natural Heritage)David Reid (Highlands and Islands Enterprise)Derek McDonald (Aberdeenshire Council)Graeme Ligertwood (SRUC)Henry Graham (Chair)Jane McCormack (Scottish Government)Julia Latto (Scottish Enterprise)Katie Fox (SDS)Liz Barron-Majerik (Lantra Scotland)Merle Palmer (Growbiz)Muriel MacKenzie (Scottish Government)Rob Orr (SDS)Stephen Sheridan (SDS)Seamus Spenser (Scottish Funding Council)Stuart McKenna (Scottish Training Federation)Tom Hall (Colleges Scotland)Apologies:Andrea Glass (SDS)Andrew Docherty (SDS)Amanda Fox (SG)Brian McGrath (South of Scotland Enterprise)David Richardson (Federation of Small Businesses)Jackie Brierton (Growbiz)Klaus Mayer (Education Scotland)The chair introduced the agenda and explained that it is important to keep in mind SMEs and micro-businesses in the current context in Rural Scotland, highlighting that many micro-businesses have never taken on apprentices before, and that there are real challenges around this. Katie Fox then read out a list of those who attended the meeting. | Chair | 5 mins |
| 2.  | **Minute of Last Meeting** Katie Fox discussed the actions from last meeting including:**Action:** Finding a replacement for Iain Steel who has stepped down from the group. Katie has been in contact with Kenneth MacDermid to try and understand who the right person will be to fill Iain’s place. The aim would be to have the person who will replace Iain invited soon and have them here at the next meeting.**Action**: To revise the Terms of Reference to ensure an up-to-date membership and remove ‘draft’ from the document. This has been done and can be found on the [web page for the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland](https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/skills-planning-alignment/skills-action-plan-for-rural-scotland/#:~:text=The%20Skills%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Rural%20Scotland%20seeks%20to%20ensure,five%20priority%20areas%20for%20action%3A&text=To%20provide%20individuals%20with%20accessible,their%20careers%20in%20rural%20areas) **Action**: To work with digital colleagues at SDS. Claire Gillespie (ICT and Digital Technologies Sector Manager) from SDS came to the last skills and recovery group meeting and did a presentation on digital initiatives. We are hoping to follow this up with a lunch and learn session for members in 2021.**Action**: To take forward a skills mapping exercise looking at links between green energy and rural – Andrew Docherty (Skills Planning Executive) from SDS has been working on this and it has been informing the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan that Andrea Glass and Rob Orr (both SDS) are working on.The big focus for Katie Fox has been to update draft report, with a big push on the development of blogs. There are now blogs on Skills for Growth and CivTech up on the webpage and Donna Fordyce has also kindly offered to working on a seafood blog for the page. **Action**: Partners to provide photographs for the web page. These have been provided and a list of members can now be found on the [web page for the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland](https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/skills-planning-alignment/skills-action-plan-for-rural-scotland/#:~:text=The%20Skills%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Rural%20Scotland%20seeks%20to%20ensure,five%20priority%20areas%20for%20action%3A&text=To%20provide%20individuals%20with%20accessible,their%20careers%20in%20rural%20areas).**Action**: For partners to provide case studies to help fill gaps in the case study work that is currently being undertaken. Some case studies have been received from partners. Katie expressed thanks to those who have provided case studies so far and asked for partners to continue to provide any relevant case studies to Andrew Docherty. **Action**: Volunteers to provide blogs - some partners have already volunteered for blogs. Katie highlighted that she views this as good progress and will follow up with any offers of blogs. To note, Claudia highlighted that the [NatureScot report](https://skillsdevelopmentshttps:/www.nature.scot/naturescot-research-report-1257-supporting-green-recovery-initial-assessment-nature-based-jobs-andcotland-my.sharepoint.com/personal/alana_mcguire_sds_co_uk/Documents/Enabling%20sectors%20fair%20work) has just been published around nature-based jobs and skills required for net zero and Claudia volunteered to contribute a blog on this. **Action**: For partners to share materials and content on social media – This is underway, with relevant material being shared via social media channels.Katie noted that the meeting dates for the next two meetings are March 19th and June 18th and that these have been sent out as calendar invitations. The chair then asked for members to indicate whether they were happy with the minutes from the last meeting. All present indicated they were happy.  | Chair | 5 mins |
| 3.  | **Update Report**Katie presented a powerpoint and talked through the following areas:* Strengths of the ISG
* The impact of Covid-19 on the way we are viewing the plan
* Progress made against the five priority areas, with the acknowledgement that this will be a snapshot, **if there is something you would like incorporated here, drop Katie a note and she will make sure that this is incorporated.**
* Questions after the presentation

**Strengths of the ISG**In terms of the key messages about strengths, the report is drawing out that the work of the ISG members will be key in delivering the priorities in the plan. It is important to highlight some key observations in relation to the strength of the partnership: * The ISG brings together more than 25 partners with a broad range of experience & remits.
* Partners are very engaged and show a lot of support and genuine interest about how the work of partners’ supports the implementation of plan.
* Members have strong links with (and are represented on) other relevant skills groups including Skills for Farming, Aquaculture Skills Group, Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies (SFTT) skills group as well as regional groups. This gives us a broad coverage across the rural skills landscape.
* The partnership is dynamic and provides a link to people who have in-depth knowledge.
* The group is an important forum to share best practice and create opportunities to replicate projects over sectoral and regional boundaries.
* It also creates opportunities for partners to influence and contribute to project development, embedding rural skills.
* Finally, it’s a great platform for wider communication and discussion around skills across rural Scotland.

Katie noted that we want to be communicating these messages about the strength of the partnership and how the partners work well together.**The impact of Covid-19 on the way we are viewing the plan**Katie highlighted that the five priority areas remain the right ones but emphasised that there may be gaps and there is a need to consider new activities going forward and prioritise certain aspects, for example, digital skills activity which supports young people and those made redundant. It is also important in the current climate to highlight the importance of flexible models of skills delivery and activity that supports business resilience as well as growth. We must ensure that we have a coherent response.Katie advised that there is a gap around opportunities presented by the green recovery and that this is being addressed by a report being pulled together by Andrew Doherty which examines the green recovery through a rural lens, pulling in sources such as the recent [Nature Scot report](https://www.nature.scot/naturescot-research-report-1257-supporting-green-recovery-initial-assessment-nature-based-jobs-and).Katie also advised that there is a wide range of new work including the National Transition Training Fund (NTTF), enhanced Adopt an Apprentice offer, Kick Start, enhanced PACE offer and the Young Person’s Guarantee. It will be important for partners to consider how this new work can support the implementation of the plan.Also, it is important to note that activities that rely on face-to-face contact have been paused and refocussed. **Action: Where you have additional comments around this, please feed these back to Katie. This slide is included in the update report.** **Progress made against the five priority areas** Katie explained that there seems to be agreement that the current five priorities remain the right ones. However, it is important to keep the plan current and relevant in today’s climate, ensuring the plan stays flexible and responsive.**Priority area A – Better understand the skills rural employers need and align skills provision to support this:*** There has been a great level of effort around RSA products, and the data matrix button that allows analysis of data across Rural Scotland and the Rural infographic is being reviewed and includes data around employment, resilience, and demand for skills. An RSA for the rural local authority areas has been produced and will be shared with partners shortly.
* Lantra – publication of [skills summit report](https://www.scotland.lantra.co.uk/news/skills-summit-report-published) and report on provider experience of delivering rural MAs.
* Phil Ford, who is a Regional Skills Planning Lead at SDS, was involved in research in the South of Scotland examining older workers and leavers in the region. There is also research starting soon in the South of Scotland around different apprenticeship delivery models.
* Gerry McBride of SDS has been working with Scotland Food and Drink on research which has been exploring the barriers that prevent employers in the sector from engaging with the skills system.
* A research and consultation group has been established and this has been meeting in between the ILG meetings to discuss current and emerging research and to address any gaps in research. **Katie noted that the offer is always open for those from the ILG to join the research and consultation group.**
* Aligning education and skills provision is important and Liz recently wrote a blog on the CivTech Challenge, exploring how technology can help develop a skill sharing system that will encourage the sharing of skills across rural Scotland.
* The update report will discuss initiatives such as the Centre of Excellence in Textiles, which was delivered in response to employers concerns around textiles skills.
* Examples will also be given of where the college sector is responding to sectoral need, for example, Borders College working to secure equipment for students to support boatbuilding.
* Seonag Campbell (SDS) is giving a lunch and learn session on the Western Isles Charter approach on 28th January and an invitation will follow to members.
* New or refocussed work in response to COVID-19 under priority A includes SDS working with Confor, Lantra, Scottish Forestry and Forest and Land Scotland to develop a Forestry Job Summit which will help employers understand current funding mechanisms to bring young people into the sector. This will be taking place online on the 15th of December.
* It’s also important to note that HIE commissioned research into the impact of COVID-19 in H&I.

**Priority Area B – Provide individuals with accessible education and skills provision to secure, sustain and progress in their careers in rural areas:*** One of the key points to note around this is the launch of the South of Scotland Skills and Learning Network in February 2020.
* The Growing Rural Talent programme in the South of Scotland and how this is creating pathways for young people in Agriculture and Forestry.
* The college sector has moved quickly to reach out to employers and industry partners to find out how they can support, e.g. by creating virtual training.
* The report also refers to the college Regional Outcome Agreements for relevant colleges & universities in setting out how they have addressed the priorities form the plan. We will continue to work with SFC on this.
* Katie has been working with SDS colleagues to understand more about uptake of the rural supplement.
* Partners have identified 250+ case studies and SDS have been working with the Rural network to extend this further, for example, Borders College and Growbiz.
* We’re looking at how we can use the website to share case studies and the team are also looking at how we can link to partners websites to promote the work that all the partners are doing.

**Action: There is an ongoing ask around the comms group and Andrew that we continue to fill gaps in the case studies.** **Priority area C – Develop the current workforce in rural areas through upskilling and reskilling:*** There are a number of actions around this area where partners are working together to help employers understand how they can invest in their workforce, for example, development of the Rural Employers’ Toolkit along with a number of other tools, for example, the Forestry Induction Toolkit and the Aquaculture Toolkit.
* The Seafood Upskilling Project aims to upskill employers – Katie mentioned that we are looking to have this as a blog so people can get more information about how this has been delivered.
* Finally, it is important to highlight the work of the colleges in delivering the Flexible Workforce Development Fund. Katie pointed out that it is important to spread the word about this in a rural context as SMEs can now get involved.

**Priority Area D – Build a secure pipeline for the future:*** Katie will work with CIAG staff and the new DYW rep to understand initiatives that go on to get people involved in different careers in rural Scotland, for example, Lantra’s online careers fair. Katie explained that we want to demonstrate the work the has been done and is underway.

**Action: We are looking to capture activity from college sector including from the recent SRUC event and rural taster day at Borders College as these are great examples of how colleges are promoting careers in rural areas. If you are aware of any relevant events, please feedback to Katie directly.*** In addition, Action TD3.1 was around producing a paper around occupational segregation. A draft paper has been produced and will be shared with partners soon for comment. Katie has also found it useful to hear from partners who have been involved in work which supports greater diversity in rural careers, and she mentioned the Borders College “Agriculture isn’t just for boys” video.

**Priority Area E – Take a coordinated, strategic approach to tackling skills in rural areas:*** In Priority area E, Katie highlighted that it is important to talk about the high level of engagement demonstrated by this group and use of the sub-groups to take forward different pieces of work.
* Katie is keen that the lunch and learn session continue as these are a valuable way of sharing knowledge and providing opportunity to continue the conversation beyond just the quarterly ISG meetings.
* A governance route has been identified for the plan through the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board (ESS), this will go through SDS internal governance and following that, the ESSB.

**Action: In the new year, Katie is keen to get a pilot bulletin together to have focussed pieces around certain areas, for example, digital and land-based provision.*** The next steps are to work with internal colleagues at SDS and get the report out to partners, the report will have an executive summary but report it is lengthy due to the level of detail required.

**Action: All input is welcome this report needs to tell a story about what you are doing to support the plan.****Comments and questions:****HG**: The second slide in Katie’s presentation which showed priority areas and how we have adjusted to this is really interesting and informative.There was agreement that providing the cab sec with a short summary of this project would be useful.**Action: Muriel and Katie to take forward producing a short summary (2 pages) around what has been done.****HG:** There is an exciting story on the aquaculture side and corporate businesses have developed their own pathways with approximately 21 on the technical apprenticeship and this only started 4 or 5 years ago. This demonstrates how these businesses have developed a career path from school onwards.**Action: Katie to pick up with Julia around the NTTF redesigning rural project to get more detail on this and establish how it can support with the implementation of the SAPRS.****Seamus Spencer:** Can I ask about timeline and intentions around publication about report? **Katie**: The timescales around this are not being driven by a date for the ESSB so we want to make sure that we, as a partnership, are content that the report is right before we start going through the governance route. We are currently looking at a couple of weeks to work with colleagues in SDS and will be getting it out to ISG members after that. Katie also advised that, in the new year, she would like to set up times with each of the ISG members to discuss any amendments needed to the report to truly reflect what has done to support implementation of the plan. | Katie Fox, SDS  | 35 mins |
| 4. | **Spotlight Session: Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan (CESAP)**Rob firstly gave an update on the progress of the CESAP, highlighting that the CESAP was a commitment in the 2019 Programme for Government and that it is due to be published the week of 14th of December 2020.Rob advised that due to the impact of COVID, timescales with the CESAP have been particularly challenging, but the process of writing the CESAP has involved extensive stakeholder engagement, focusing on the following sectors: oil & gas / energy transition, energy efficiency / heat / construction, transport, manufacturing and agriculture / land use management.There has been a small expert group to advise on CESAP which included NatureScot, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish cities Alliance, enterprise agencies, and academic experts in the field from Strathclyde and Edinburgh.Rob stressed that the regional aspect is important in CESAP and that it has been important to recognise the differences between rural and urban contexts.The CESAP will be relatively high level, but this is necessary given the nature of the impact of climate change.Rob advised that there are plans to establish an implementation Steering group, the core of which will be the expert group, but SDS are looking to widen this and **Rob invited representation from this ILG on the implementation group for CESAP.** Rob talked through the 5 main skills challenges that have been identified in the context of CESAP, mainly via stakeholder consultations:1. Further development of the evidence base – there was real concern around the availability and sustainability of jobs in the green sector, for example, with loft insulations, what do the insulators do when lofts have been insulated?2. Transferability of skills – a lot is being done around this in several sectors, but we need to look at the timing issues around this. There is a need for some sectors to widen their view and look at opportunities around skills transferability outside their sector. When considering transferability of skills, short, flexible course provision will be important, as will embedding carbon literacy in occupational standards.3. Communication and education around the energy transition - There is a need to demonstrate the critical role that sectors and regions play in the energy transition, one way of doing this is embedding it in the curriculum.4. Short-term opportunities – to develop transferable skills 5. Apprenticeship frameworks – This area of skills challenges came out of every stakeholder engagement, with an emphasis on the need to ‘greenify’ apprenticeship frameworks and align these to net-zero. It is important to acknowledge that this will require a joint approach with SDS and partners and cannot be done in isolation.Rob explained that CESAP will be based around six areas for action:1. Supporting a green labour market from Covid;
2. Better understanding the evidence of future skills needs to support Scotland’s transition to net zero;
3. Developing the future workforce for the transition to net zero – developing FA, GA, and direct these towards areas around net zero;
4. Driving awareness and action to support reskilling, upskilling, and training for the transition to net-zero – coming through some of the rural partners has been the need to support SMEs and micro-businesses to identify the skills they need;
5. Ensuring fairness and inclusion in the skills system as part of a just transition to net zero – making access to carbon literacy available to all;
6. Taking a collaborative approach to drive behaviour change in employers and individuals and ensuring a responsive skills system. Employers and individuals will have to change their behaviours.

Rob emphasised that CESAP was limited in its detail due to the comprehensive nature of climate response but reassured the group that all views and engagement will sit behind CESAP and inform the implementation.Rob also stressed that the transition to net zero will require a huge consumer change and will be dependent on behavioural change which in turn is dependent on employer bodies to help drive this change.Comments and questions: **LBM:** It is heartening to hear that one size does not fit all and there are some of the green sectors where a small number of individuals can make a significant difference.**HG**: It is important to emphasise that there is a huge educational and behavioural aspect to what you mentioned, and this is important at all levels, in schools, colleges, apprenticeships.**AC**: If we are going to deliver on this, we must do more with the small employers to get them incentives to help adopt the new technologies. For example, retrofitting is not sustainable but if this is the easiest option, some of the smaller employers are likely to go with this. **RO**: totally agree with this, working with agencies is important to support smaller employers. **MP:** Education with micro-businesses is a lot around language, some are doing a lot but not recognising it or promoting it.**RO**: this is an issue that we struggle with but we are trying to sell the case study things through, for example, MyWoW. **MP:** We potentially have a couple of case studies to share that might help with this.**HG**: There are a number of good case studies in the agricultural sector which demonstrate how a farm can become more efficient, this is a big part of a positive story to show to micro-businesses.**TH** noted that SCDI have recently published their [Clean Growth Manifesto](https://www.scdi.org.uk/news-item/scdi-publish-clean-growth-manifesto/), with some themes that are similar to those discussed by Rob. | Robert Orr, SDS  | 30 mins  |
| 5. | **Rural Employers Toolkit** Liz talked through the origins of the toolkit, with the background being that Lantra was asked to create a toolkit last year for agriculture to help those in the sector understand the different support options available and highlighting things to think about when taking on a new apprentice. The aim was to help increase the number of apprentices in the sector by pulling together the information that employers would need to take on an apprentice. You can access the agriculture employers’ toolkit [here](https://www.scotland.lantra.co.uk/employers-toolkit).After briefly talking through the agriculture employers’ toolkit, Liz explained the rural employer’s toolkit, advising that unlike the agriculture toolkit, the rural toolkit covers a relatively wide range of sectors. The rural employers’ toolkit contributes to priority C.Liz highlighted that in smaller companies, there is sometimes not an HR department as such, with employers doing everything themselves, therefore taking on an apprentice can seem like a complicated task. The Rural Employers’ Toolkit brings everything in one place to help employers understand what is involved in taking on an apprentice.Liz also made the point that Lantra are currently working on a project with SDS where apprentices undertake a challenge around energy use, waste and materials use. This is progressing and there has been a couple of meetings with assessors around what would work in the workplace with their candidates.Comments and questions:Q - **HG**: when can we get the toolkit launched? Given that Andrew has 250 case studies, there are bound to be some that we can use in this doc. **KF**: Katie will pick up with SDS comms and Sheena to have a think about what would be realistic in time scales and we can start thinking about whether there are any events to launch at. **Action: Katie to come back with a target date after speaking to comms.****LBM**: considering the new apprenticeship funding, I think we will get a lot of employers who would not have taken on an apprentice now considering it. **DD**: Mentor availability is such a constraint. Providing that service is a public good. Does anyone know if SF are factoring that into future farm support?**CR**: I think it is available as part of the Farm Advisory Service?**GL**: SRUC see mentoring support as part of MA delivery for employers.**LBM**: Ringlink are doing online mentor induction, Forestry and Land Scotland are also providing online mentoring, **HG**: Ringlink are the employers who the pre-apprenticeships go to, we need to be careful when talking about mentors as this is the actual farmer on the farm for Ringlink as opposed to a mentor as such. | Liz Barron-Majerik  | 15 mins  |
| 6. | **Rural skills and e/Sgoil** Klaus could not attend due to a diary conflict, but slides will be distributed and anyone who wants to follow-up can contact Klaus directly. | Klaus Mayer  | 20 mins |
| 7. | **Next meeting and AOB****AOB****LBM** wanted to raise the issue of inconsistencies in approaches to rural site visit for MAs and discuss if others have heard anything about this. **LBM** explained that the inconsistencies with MA assessors is that different colleges are taking different approaches in visiting candidates to check progress which, in some cases, is down to a decision by one health and safety officer. **LBM** posed to the group:* Is there benefit in sharing approaches?
* Is anyone experiencing any challenges round it?
* Would it be useful to have a meeting to share practice?

**AC**: Not aware of any issues at Borders but always good to share amongst practitioners.**GL**: Aware of some regional differences and with the introduction of different tiers, and there is a reluctance for candidates to travel if they are moving to a higher tier or not wanting to travel to the central belt.**TH**: Happy to link in with LBM and use the Business Directors’ Group to see if they have experienced any challenges around this. **LBM**: In some areas, assessors are being told they have to wait two weeks between site visits and can’t travel in college vans.**GL**: This is an issue that could be brought up at the Skills for Farming group on Monday.**Action: Tom, Graeme, and Liz to follow this up & Tom to coordinate.**- Q – **LBM**: Growing rural talent was mentioned in the slides, what will happen with this after March 2021? **GL**: Advised that current funding from SG is being transferred to SoSE, so there are conversations happening with SoSE now around how we can continue this. There is also an underspend from this year due to COVID so we are discussing how this might be repurposed. **AC:** From the college, it was always funded on the agreement that it would become self-sustainable, we do have to think about how we sustain the activity moving forward. **GL**: Due to COVID, partners feel they need more time, but agree it needs to become self-sustaining in the longer term.Klaus was unable to attend due to another meeting, but Katie will send Klaus’ presentations and Klaus is happy for members to follow up with him directly.Muriel advised that she would follow-up with Klaus later.- To note: the lunch and learn meetings with next one being the 28th of Jan around the Western Isles Charter and an invitation will follow in the new year. **Next meeting****HG** proposed that the next ILG meeting should have a focus on forestry and there was agreement that this shall be the next spotlight session.The chair thanked all for presentations and participation. | ChairAll | 10 mins |