

Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland

Implementation Steering Group Meeting

Friday, 12 June 2020, 10.00 – 12.00pm, Skype

AGENDA

Item	Topic	Lead
	<p>Attendees:</p> <p>Andrea Glass, Katie Fox, Stephen Sheridan, Gerry McBride, Andrew Docherty - Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Henry Graham - Chair Catriona MacLean, Muriel Mackenzie, Janice Alexander – Scottish Government (SG) Derek McDonald – Aberdeenshire Council Jackie Brierton – GrowBiz Karen Jackson – South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) Graeme Ligertwood – SRUC Morven Cameron – Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) David Richardson – Federation of Small Businesses Liz Barron-Majerik – Lantra Scotland Seamus Spencer – Scottish Funding Council (SFC) George Jamieson – NFU Scotland Mark McCahill – Colleges Scotland Klaus Mayer (Education Scotland) Julia Latta (SE) Neil Freckingham and Peter Cook (Opportunity North East – ONE)</p> <p>Apologies – Riddell Graham (Visit Scotland), Marc Crothall (Scottish Tourism Alliance) Eddie Abbott-Halpin (Orkney College) Karen MacNee, Jane McCormack (SG) Angela Cox (Borders College)</p>	

<p>1.</p>	<p>Welcome, Introductions and Apologies</p> <p>The Chair (HG) welcomed everyone and thanked guests for attending. He spoke of the continued importance of a personal regard for Coronavirus safety, and looking after family and friends. and wished everyone well.</p> <p>HG then spoke of the attractiveness and quality of rural areas – that they are wonderful places to live, work and invest in, and he hopes we will be able to capitalise on the great opportunities for recovery in the coming months. Going into lockdown was easy, but coming out will be tricky – HG called on partners to use both imagination and caution to ensure a soft and prosperous route out of lockdown.</p> <p>HG then ran through the etiquette of the call, and reminded the group that the format worked well last time, and we have a tremendous group of experienced partners so important we make these calls work.</p> <p>Katie Fox (KF) then went through the running order and read through a list of attendees.</p>	<p>Chair</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Minute of Last Meeting</p> <p>No issues raised – if any omissions or changes required, please inform Andrew (AD).</p> <p>ESSB agreed to provide strategic overview at their meeting in December 2019. Muriel McKenzie to keep in touch to provide detail to provide this oversight. As soon as she knows detail this will be shared with the group.</p>	<p>Chair</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Rural and Islands Economic Recovery</p> <p>CMacL started her presentation by setting the scene, letting people know what SG are doing around recovery and the work that is taking place.</p> <p>Quite a crowded landscape, every area of SG is thinking about response and increasingly the reset and recovery phases. Everyone beginning to look at their own area of operations, what is required and what can SG and partners do to help recovery?</p>	<p>Catriona MacLean (CMacL), SG</p>

There were broadly specific Recovery Plans identified early on – e.g. Green Recovery Plan, Economic Recovery Plan – and SG recognised the need to make a specific Rural and Islands Economy Recovery Plan given their bespoke needs – can often be missed out by policy-makers

There has been a recognition of the opportunity which rural Scotland brings and there are exciting opportunities and prospects in these areas.

The First Minister established an independent advisory group on economic recovery, chaired by Benny Higgins, with academia and business leaders on it, to think at a rapid pace about how we should respond to economic recovery – and partners likely to have contributed to its call for evidence. CMacL’s division also responded to this call, through 2 workshops and a video with content from local people and island communities, ensuring their voices are heard.

This group has set out four pillars of recovery: physical capital (infrastructure), human capital (skills, training) natural capital (land), social capital (people and place). The Group will report by the end of June to the FM with a series of recommendations.

Rural areas face their own set of issues – isolation, dominance of particular sectors, and different support mechanisms; we need to think about recovery in a different way, be creative and innovative.

Brexit also coming down the tracks which has potentially significant implications – especially for some of our rural communities. This must be taken into consideration in the recovery planning.

Rural uniquely placed to take advantage of the opportunities associated with recovery – e.g. green technologies, land-based industries, environmental benefits etc. And making sure people have the appropriate skills to capitalise on these benefits.

This is not a short-term piece of work with designated deadline – more about how we can work with partners to develop the projects and initiatives which will deliver recovery for Rural Scotland.

The Rural and Islands Economy Recovery work has four themes – business; people and place; infrastructure and connectivity; and

the environment (biodiversity and low carbon). Working internally to develop this, then will look to work with others to determine what are the skills required to achieve across the various themes.

CMacL sees the ISG as a means of shaping what is required, bringing the thinking to reality, shaping priorities, and to help SG deliver; this will not be a one-off, but will require ongoing cooperation. Their recovery will build on the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland, and implementation of the Action Plan is such a powerful thing for rural areas.

HG – there is welcome work being taken on by the recovery group, and it is important that the various plans all work together.

CMacL – important that rural is no longer in the wilderness and is seen as a key driver - cooperation is key here. There is a sense that everyone has the chance to make positive and long-lasting changes here – this happened in the wake of the foot-and-mouth outbreak, which brought in new behaviours and innovation – but they did not last; the challenge is for partners to make sure that these positive changes are permanent this time round.

There then followed some questions and comments from other ISG members.

Klaus Mayer (KM) - To what extent is education part of the discussions with regard to recovery planning in a rural context?

CMacL - Yes, fundamental, and we need to respond to that in a new way. Set of structural issues we might need to look at in a new way? Education for young people in rural areas potentially at a disadvantage – connectivity issues, access to physical schools etc, can't do as much online.

Jackie Brierton (JB) - A wide range of small rural businesses are looking for flexible financial support for skills and development needs – perhaps a version of the previously Flexible Learning grants provided by SDS?

Andrea Glass (AG) – There will be a bit more clarity around this coming out down the line, information around the PACE offer, protecting young people's employment and training will follow in coming weeks and months.

	<p>HG – Would it be useful to create a sub-group for Catriona’s Qs? KF – Yes – hugely important set of questions – KF to take forward this important piece of work with a sub-group comprising members of the ISG.</p> <p>A number of partners then raised various discussion points, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of interdependent factors (e.g. accommodation, transport, connectivity, access to services.); • We are beginning to see the impacts of the pandemic in rural areas through redundancies and business struggles; reskilling and upskilling in new opportunities will be crucial; • Funding for training must be led by strategic priorities and in a structured manner. Further, flexible training delivery is critical; and • The prevalence of SMEs in rural areas and will need a flexible approach to help them recover. <p>ACTION: KF to create a skills and recovery sub-group to support CMacL’s piece of work and the questions which she proposed in her presentation. The first meeting of this Group took place in early July 2020.</p> <p>ACTION: KF also to set up a research and consultation sub-group. This group also held its first meeting in July 2020.</p>	
4.	<p>Sector Spotlight Session: SeedPod / Food, Drink and Agriculture</p> <p>PC opened with a summary of ONE, what they do, and how the pandemic has impacted on Food, Drink and Agriculture so far. Those supplying retail outlets have done well, those supplying food services and outlets have done poorly (e.g. whitefish who supply wholesalers). Whereas those supplying retail and big companies have seen great growth.</p> <p>The effects have been felt throughout the primary industries – e.g. fish landings stopped for a while, agriculture – top quality cuts have not been selling to high end restaurants, so for instance, mince has been selling but steaks have not. It is a complex landscape they are operating in.</p>	<p>Peter Cook (PC) and Neil Freckingham (NF), Opportunity North East (ONE)</p>

ONE – private sector economic development body, aiming to grow NE economy beyond O&G and remove dependence. Funded by Wood Foundation, moving towards five key sectors: renewables and energy, tourism (via Visit Aberdeenshire); digital and entrepreneurship; life science; and food, drink and agriculture.

They provide economic development support and try to leverage in resources, partnership working organisations. They match fund everything that the Wood Foundation invests into them.

Since 2015, there have been considerable challenges for the sector – low growth since 2015; reliance on selling to big retailers which has affected margins; productivity is stagnant – and indeed a huge issue for whole of NE; premises costs are high due to O&G sector.

The region is home to only a few new big brands and star attractions, which make it tricky to attract significant investment.

Weaknesses in primary production driven by retailer centralised production.

They are rolling out a number of innovative projects, including an agri-food tech programme to find digital technology development and looking to grow this in future.

NF then delivered a short presentation on SeedPod. SeedPod is a £21 million investment in the industry (the single largest in Scotland) to create a centre of excellence for food and drink in north east Scotland that will deliver regional and national growth ambitions.

Great connectivity and linkages – stage 2 concept design sign-off and likely to kick off in earnest once post-pandemic recovery begins. It is planned that construction will start early next year, and finish by Mach 2022.

SeedPod will include incubation units for those ready to make the step to an industrial unit and who cannot afford prohibitory cost of existing facilities. They will also support people from concepts to working with chefs to develop.

They also intend to create a vibrant networking and social scene in the region for start-up and larger companies, the Hub must become a focal point for connectivity and innovation.

The marketing of food has become increasingly important – the facility will have a highly invested area here where people can make and showcase their food and products, with the aim that the facility will become the ‘go to place’ for the sector for both the region and Scotland.

Challenges for the industry – Food manufacturing skills, innovation / Industry 4.0, and skills and labour availability

There is a need to ensure sectoral jobs are high value and highly skilled – this is at the heart of what SeedPod aims to do. They are looking to inspire the next generation and can provide a range of support (market information, skills development, legal and technical advice. Etc.) to help them start up and grow.

They have signed a collaboration agreement with the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS) – looking to get them up to NE to help move the region (and sectors e.g. seafood) forward.

Business growth and food technologies are such big growth areas for them - and companies of all sizes have a part to play.

Questions and discussion then followed from the group:

JB: Are you planning any digital learning/training sessions for food producers outwith the hub?

PC– yes, working with a small number of businesses outside the Hub prior to COVID-19...but not something that works for everybody. Huge pivot towards food manufacturing businesses – going to do targeted sessions on this. There is a lot of general digital training / digital marketing – but the issue is how do you make that pay? That is the part they want to help their businesses with. Big challenge is how do you get in touch with your partners via digital means. Especially marketing – digital marketing is critical.

ONE has its own overall digital tech hub which is a digital accelerator, but there is no specific digital F&D element at the minute.

JB – Agree re digital marketing. More about how can the technical expertise and experience which will be developed by Neil can be

	<p>shared across Scotland. Early days yet, but would like to see in future.</p> <p>PC – yes, and looking to do more webinars to help people think more about their market.</p> <p>NF – NMIS important here as a collaborator. Make use of what else is out there, signpost to other things going on and who else can support.</p> <p>HG – how do we make it an exciting career for young people? NF – Very difficult – apprenticeships have been key here, but how will these fare post-COVID?. Are young people applying their skills here in the sector? Do they even have the correct skills in the first place? Sector attractiveness is one part of it, but also need to ensure that the sector is getting the most out of people already in the sector.</p> <p>GMcB - Great to see the approach for higher level skills. We face a challenge to engage with young people and promote the opportunities within the sector. There's been some good work with SDS/ONE/DYW... The Food & Drink COVID Sector Recovery Plan has a Workstream focussed on looking at Productivity & Skills. SDS is also working with SE and HIE, looking at how we support businesses on the journey as we recover from Covid19 - an opportunity for government investment and involvement here.</p> <p>AG - Interesting point that previous investment in digital/automation has had such a key role in business resilience. A message that we need to underline going forward when seeking to make the case for investment in skills.</p> <p>A number of partners expressed their willingness to support the ISG and members in any activity in this area.</p>	
5.	<p>Comms Update</p> <p>KF then presented on the work of the Communications sub-group which has been established, including ISG members and their respective Marketing and Communications colleagues.</p> <p>KF's Communications update in December 2019 agreed to establish a comms sub-group, whose first meeting was held in February 2020, and the group has some great representation from across partners.</p>	SDS

KF will look to create a landing page on the SDS site – showing who sits on the ISG, materials (blogs, minutes of meetings etc.), and made an ask of partners to share a blurb on who the members are and the areas of work they're involved in.

Part of the Comms work has been the case study work which AD has led on (See Point 6 of this minute) – this is a good area of work for the group to progress with – on a sub-group basis.

Comms Group will pull together the materials which people have been sharing, web and social media channels etc. and ensure consistency of messaging across members.

SDS has pulled together a Comms Support Pack – a practical guide to communicate the work which the ISG is doing. Primarily for ISG members and other orgs with whom we work and who want to talk about the work of the Plan – help get across key messages of the Plan on web and social media channels. Ensures consistency of message about the Plan – accessible education and skills provision, upskilling and reskilling etc. It is a package for all members to ensure they are not going back to the drawing board every time they are asked about the Action Plan or the ISG.

KF will share this with ISG members.

Will issue short Rural Skills video which has been created, alongside using the designated hashtag #RuralSkillsScotland. Agreed that any time the Plan or related activity is mentioned, then the hashtag could be used to increase visibility of the Plan and the ISG.

All of these materials have been designed to help people understand the diversity of rural areas, and the range of opportunities which exist, which people may not recognise. KF made an ask of members to feed in any imagery, videos, dynamic footage which can be shared.

KF to share the comms pack and video with partners after the meeting – she asks that any time the Plan is talked about (after meetings, project launches, key announcements etc.) the content and hashtag be used to promote the Plan.

	<p>Blogs also very important and SDS have started the ball rolling. Ask of partners to contribute ideas and writing – KF to put forward a schedule and looking for partners to get involved and contribute.</p> <p>KF to work on landing page – looking for photo and info on job role etc – she will send round a spec after the meeting.</p> <p>ACTIONS: Landing page to be developed on SDS site</p> <p>All partners to provide photograph and blurb of their role for use on SDS ISG landing page (KF to develop a format in the first instance)</p> <p>KF to distribute video and packs discussed</p> <p>Interested partners to volunteer ideas for blog posts and content</p> <p>All partners to share any videos or imagery which they have which would help showcase the diversity of rural areas.</p>	<p>KF</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>KF</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>ALL</p>
6.	<p>Case Studies</p> <p>AD then ran through the findings from a case study exercise undertaken earlier in the year. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of case studies, mentioned throughout the Action Plan, in demonstrating the range of opportunities, benefits and pathways for all, and improving the understanding of what the rural economy is, and what is included; • He found a wealth of SDS and partner materials which exist, in various formats and across a broad range of themes • He also identified a number of gaps in case study materials – around diversity, target groups (i.e. school leavers, 	SDS

	<p>graduates and returners, older workers looking to reskill and upskill, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And he provided some case study examples, developed by partners in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. <p>Whilst time ran short to have a full discussion, it was agreed that in looking to fill the gaps identified, there should be a focus on the innovative and creative response to the pandemic. The gaps identified will remain post-COVID, so there is an opportunity to fill them with a COVID-19 recovery focus.</p> <p>It was discussed earlier in the meeting that this exercise may benefit from a sub-group being established, or to be taken forward under the Comms sub-group. SDS to take a view on this.</p> <p>It was also briefly discussed where the repository of case studies should sit in future. Currently, they exist in isolation, on different partner websites. Whilst SDS is looking at solutions to this challenge, ideas from partners are welcomed.</p> <p>ACTIONS: SDS to share presentation and examples of case studies presented on the day.</p> <p>SDS to consider how best to take forward case studies exercise.</p>	<p>AD</p> <p>KF/AD</p>
7.	<p>Progress Update</p> <p>KF then took partners through an update of the Action Plan progress which has been made across a number of fronts, and the various themes and priority areas of the Action Plan, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further embed and widen use of evidence based education and skills planning; • Increase choice and accessibility of high quality education and skills development opportunities in rural areas and positively impact on transition from school to FE and HE; • Respond to the needs of employers' workforce in line with local demand; and • Enhanced work based learning pathways in rural areas. <p>KF will provide the slides in full which provide a more comprehensive update.</p>	<p>SDS</p>

	<p>Katie then outlined the proposed next steps - to finalise an Implementation and Monitoring Framework (IMF); to issue a reporting schedule to partners alongside this Framework, and to produce a draft report of the activity undertaken to date, in conjunction with ISG members and to circulate amongst the group for comment. It was agreed that this report should adequately reflect the wealth of work which has been undertaken, and should also demonstrate a response to the OCIVD-19 pandemic.</p> <p>A number of partners indicated that they are happy to support in drafting reports and contributing details of their own progress. KF to follow up as necessary</p> <p>ACTIONS: KF to finalise and circulate IMF, reporting schedule and draft report when ready</p> <p>KF to follow up with partners to establish how best to create report, and implement IMF, as well as to discuss priority activities.</p> <p>SDS to circulate rural infographic which has been created.</p> <p>All partners to keep abreast of evidence base publication schedules, and share any relevant content with the group</p>	<p>KF</p> <p>KF</p> <p>AD/KF</p> <p>All</p>
8.	<p>Next meeting, AOB and Close</p> <p>The Chair identified that the dates for the next two ISG meetings will be Friday 11th September and Friday 4th Dec.</p> <p>AD will issue calendar holds for these. Format TBC, but likely to be Skype for September meeting.</p> <p>It was decided that the spotlight session for the September meeting will be on Health and Social Care.</p> <p>HG had a final ask of partners – that they identify the three key messages they had taken from the meeting, and then take these out to others and follow up on them; this will encourage networking and communication which he felt is missing slightly in the current climate, where many people are working from home or in isolation.</p>	<p>AD</p>

	No other business was raised. The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.	
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