

Biodiversity Duty Report

2021-2023

1. Introduction

Under the [Nature Conservation \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#), all public sector organisations have a duty to further conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. A publicly available report must be published every three years to show compliance with this biodiversity duty.

The Biodiversity Duty is broader than the protection of specific nature sites, for example connecting people with nature and supporting progress of nature-based sectors. As the national careers and skills agency, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) engages with biodiversity primarily through our partnership working and employee engagement. This report provides a highlight of related activity over the past three years (January 2021 – December 2023).

2. Strategy and Policy: mainstreaming biodiversity

2.1. Environmental Policy and Climate Change Strategy

SDS's Environmental Policy outlines the organisation's approach to minimising our environmental impact and informs colleagues of their role. In December 2020, SDS published our [Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030](#) which is structured around four workstreams: Supporting a green economy, Digital capability, Business processes and Organisational culture. The aim of this strategy is that 'SDS is a lead contributor to a low carbon, inclusive and sustainable economy in Scotland, and on track to becoming a net zero organisation'.

Moving to environmentally sustainable jobs, sectors and economies including the circular economy, will be a key element of achieving the net-zero target.

2.2. Strategic Plan

In the updated strategic plan, '[Strategic Plan 2022-27: Skills for a Changing World](#)', climate change is one of six interconnected drivers. Over the next five years we will 'Steward our resources efficiently and effectively, ensuring that SDS is a resilient and sustainable organisation'. This relates to both the recognition of our ambition to transition to become a net zero organisation and the support likely required for whole sections of the workforce to transition to new or altered roles as a result of climate change.

2.3. Procurement

The SDS Procurement team contributes to biodiversity conservation by prioritising sustainably sourced and produced goods, works and services. Using suppliers that employ environmentally friendly production methods and materials aligns with responsible procurement practices, working towards mitigating and preventing biodiversity loss.

SDS incorporates the Scottish Government's sustainable procurement self-assessment prioritisation tool in the early thinking for strategic planning. This approach ensures a comprehensive assessment, considering economic, environmental – including biodiversity - and social factors in our contracting strategies.

Examples in which the environmental aspects are considered are Furniture (timber and office design) and Facilities (cleaning

materials). When using any Scottish Government frameworks for IT goods, sustainability considerations are already included.

2.4. Climate Change Impact Assessment

Since 2021, a climate change impact assessment has been included within the business case review process. This includes a question on whether the project or its outcome involves the use of large quantities of material resources, for example marketing materials. Responses to the assessment are reviewed by the Carbon Management Executive with clarification requested where required.

3. Nature Based Solutions

Addressing the biodiversity challenge will require nature-based jobs and skills. This will range from more obviously environmental related roles such as peatland ecologists and hydrologists to engineers and architects. SDS works with key partners from employers, education and industry, providing support and funding where demand requires. The transition to net zero will see increased demands for new jobs and skillsets, with many existing occupations needing to evolve to meet changing regulations and incorporate new technical skills.

3.1. Partnership Working

Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan

Co-ordinated by SDS, the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan ([CESAP](#)) is a multi-stakeholder plan launched in December 2020 in response to a 2019 Programme for Government commitment.

Transformation to a net zero economy will provide opportunities for the development of new, quality green jobs, embedding green and circular skills. Partners included Scottish Government, SFC,

NatureScot, Lantra and Zero Waste Scotland. Agriculture/Land-based is one of the six CESAP sectors, with an anticipated increase in demand for deployment of nature-based solutions e.g. flood risk and coastal management.

Nature-based Partnership Examples

- NatureScot: Scotland's nature agency working to improve our natural environment. SDS supported the development of the '[Nature-based jobs and skills Action Plan 2023-2024](#)' and are a member of the Peatland Skills and Capacity Group. NatureScot secured funding through the National Transition Training Fund (NTTF), partly administered by SDS, for the Working with Rivers training placement scheme which offered funding to relevant employers to provide paid placements of 12 weeks in duration. This focussed on developing skills and on-the-job experience in river restoration, natural flood management, control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and riparian woodland creation- all of which are skills required within the nature-based sector.
- Lantra: SDS supported the development of a [Rural Employers Toolkit](#), led by Lantra. It offers practical guidance on training, apprenticeships and placement support for rural businesses. Although there are many sectors in rural Scotland, nature-based careers are predominantly based in these areas.

3.2. Service Delivery

Careers Information Advice and Guidance

Our professionally qualified careers staff provide guidance to customers face-to-face in schools, colleges and public centres, as well as online. A Green Hub was launched on the intranet in

September 2021, providing a valuable resource for Careers Advisers to access reliable Labour Market Information and important resources about green jobs and skills to share with teachers, pupils and parents. Spotlights are provided for various sectors, with Nature-Based Careers covered in November 2023. This resource included bitesize videos about careers in the sector and useful links for further information. SDS Careers Advisers can also use tools such as My World of Work and the [Lantra careers](#) website to help customers understand nature-based opportunities as an option.

My World of Work Green Careers

In October 2021, a [Green Careers](#) area was launched on My World of Work. Pupils can learn about the positive impact of a green career and what types of roles are out there. They can also find out what subjects they could take and all the different routes that can lead to a green career. The page is aimed at secondary pupils and has lots of information on what it means to have a job that protects the environment. The content and design were developed through extensive insight from school pupils across Scotland. Specific job profiles are available on the site, for example an [Ecologist](#).

Green Jobs Workforce Academy

The GJWA was identified as a key deliverable in the CESAP. Its aim is to expand the number of people in Scotland able to transition into green jobs. It formed part of the SNP's 100-day commitment in 2021. [Nature](#) is one of the six key industries on the platform, providing information on the opportunities available, the skills needed to transition to them and links to the required training and funding sources to enable this. This includes apprenticeships, volunteering and training opportunities.

Scottish Careers Week Nature Seminar

During Scottish Careers Week 2023, an annual event led by SDS and supported by schools, colleges, universities and employers, a Nature-based Jobs Showcase seminar hosted by NatureScot introduced a range of nature-based roles and tips on where to look to secure a related job.

Apprenticeships

SDS administers Apprenticeships in Scotland on behalf of Scottish Government. SDS works with the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board to ensure a demand-led, responsive and adaptive work-based learning system for employers and the Scottish economy. Biodiversity related apprenticeships include Rural and Land Use Management, Game and Wildlife Management, and Trees and Timber.

4. Public and Workforce Engagement

4.1. Blogs and case studies

The blogs and case studies published on the SDS corporate website, provide a platform for real-world examples to highlight the practical application of skills and careers in biodiversity. SDS joined up with Scottish Forestry on four new [case studies](#) of women working in the industry. These four inspiring women all switched from other sectors into forestry. All of them talk passionately about the role they can play in battling climate change, and the need for diversity in the workforce. Links to more examples of case studies and blogs published on SDS's website are available in the Appendix.

During Climate Week 2023, Keep Scotland Beautiful Communities Manager Katie O'Donnell shared a blog on the intranet about the practical ways we can improve the environment around us and work to keep Scotland's rich biodiversity intact.

4.2. Staff Volunteering

Under the organisation's Special Leave Policy, SDS colleagues are entitled to 21 hours of paid volunteering leave per year.

Environmental focussed volunteering is encouraged, with links to opportunities on the Sustainability area of the intranet.

Cyrenians Farm

In May 2022, the legal team undertook a joint volunteering day with SDS's external solicitors at Cyrenians Farm near Edinburgh. This is a social enterprise, delivering a rural skills and farming education programme focussed on building skills and confidence in young people facing tough realities. The day involved moving earth, digging, weeding and planting. It also offered the team an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with a core supplier.

Falls of Clyde Wildlife Reserve

In 2023, the SDS Graduate Interns spent a day at the Falls of Clyde Wildlife Reserve, helping contribute to local conservation efforts. Throughout the day the group played their part in enhancing the reserve's biodiversity and helped create a vibrant habitat for various species. This opportunity provided the group with a blend of learning, volunteering, and connecting with nature.

Southton Smallholding

The Perth careers team spent a day volunteering at Southton Smallholding, helping to build a new polytunnel and learning about their growing methods. The organisation works with disabled adults therefore it was not only an outdoors learning experience but also linking with a partner to refer customers to.

4.3. Employee Engagement

SDS uses Viva Engage as a platform for colleagues to informally engage in online conversations on a variety of topics. Groups such as 'Life at SDS: Environment' and 'SDS Growers' promote being environmentally conscious. The platform is also used to promote events to all colleagues for example the Lantra Scotland Virtual Careers Event and Grow Careers Scotland 2023.

Each September during Scottish Government's Climate Week campaign, SDS engages with colleagues through articles, blogs and interactive sessions to raise awareness of climate issues. During the 2022 campaign, Green Champions led 'Climate Conversations' around Nature on Viva Engage, for colleagues to share tips on how to get involved in improving biodiversity in outdoor community spaces and their home gardens. Other national and international campaigns promoted include Earth Hour and Earth Day.

In July, SDS's Youth Board released their first quarterly newsletter 'Let's Talk Climate', containing useful resources about climate change, the impacts it is having on our planet, what is being done about it, as well as updates on SDS's climate activities. The August 2023 publication included a section on the impact of climate change on Scotland's natural environment such as coastal erosion and species extinction.

5. Research

A critical part of SDS's role in supporting the greening of the economy is to drive the creation of a strong and robust evidence base on the skills investment needed. The report '[Green Jobs in Scotland: An inclusive approach to definition, measurement and analysis](#)', commissioned by the CESAP Implementation Steering Group, was published in November 2022. Green jobs in Scotland can now be described as either new and emerging, subject to significant changes in work and worker requirements or increasing in demand. Forestry is provided as an example in the report as an area of increased demand.

In Summer 2023, a survey was published seeking sector feedback to develop Land use apprenticeships. The design and development of Land use apprenticeships across Scotland are being reviewed and refreshed through a new industry-led approach to ensure skills and qualifications are not only fit for purpose but fit for the future.

6. Highlights and Challenges

For SDS, we primarily support biodiversity through the strength of our relationships with our partners and customers. The volunteering opportunities available to colleagues are also a highlight which have shown to not only benefit the environment but also provide learning opportunities and improve wellbeing.

In terms of challenges, SDS has less of a direct impact on biodiversity compared to other public sector agencies. The main challenges we face are budgetary pressures and uncertainty around

the skills landscape. However, despite this we continue to deliver our service to a high standard.

7. Appendix

Case studies and blogs links:

- [Separating the wood from the seas](#)
- [Welcoming woodlands](#)
- [Insights of a Conservation Apprentice](#)
- [Girls do science](#)
- [Apprentices fashion sustainable future](#)
- [Scots women urged to branch into forestry careers](#)
- [Laying the groundwork for Scotland's net zero skills](#)