**Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland**

**Implementation Steering Group Meeting**

**Friday, 3rd September 2021, 10.00 – 12.00pm, Teams**

#### AGENDA

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| **Item** | **Topic** | **Lead** |
| 1. | **Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**  **In attendance:**  Amanda Fox (AF)  Andrew Docherty (AD)  Chelsey Clay (CC)  Claire Gillespie (CG)  Claudia Rowse (CR)  Colleen Maclean (CM)  David Richardson (DR)  Derek McDonald (DMcD)  Gregor Auld (GA)  Heather Wilson (HW)  Henry Graham (Chair)  Jackie Brierton (JB)  Jane McCormack (JMcC)  Katie Fox (KF)  Liz Barron-Majerik (LB-M)  Lynne Gilchrist (LG)  Maria Roushias (MR)  Marie Donnelly (MD)  Mollie McGoran (MMcG)  Muriel McKenzie (MMcK)  Rob Orr (RO)  Seamus Spencer (SS)  Stuart McKenna (SMcK)  **Apologies** received from:  Andrea Glass, Riddell Graham, Marc Crothall, Donna Fordyce, George Jamieson, Graeme Ligertwood, Tom Hall, Stephen Sheridan; Eddie Abbott-Halpin; Julia Latto; Klaus Mayer; Jonathan Rees; Joanne Wallace; Bryan McGrath; Bill McMillan.  The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the meeting, specifically Mollie McGoran and Chelsey Clay, who are representatives from the Scottish Youth Parliament.  The Chair thanked partners who have written blog materials over past weeks and months which have been welcome and show the depth of engagement of ISG members.  Case study of the month campaign has been similarly well received, some wonderful material and engagement has been pleasing  The Lunch and Learn sessions well attended – and really great information covered off. The most recent session was on tourism and this will be followed this up with forthcoming newsletter | Chair |
| 2. | **Minute of Last Meeting**  Agreed.  KF ran through actions from the previous meeting and will update and pick up with individuals on an individual basis as need be.  KF made another call for any more contributors to blogs or case studies etc. – likely Claudia will be asked to contribute to tie in around COP26 in November  KF made a final call for ISG members to complete the ISG Survey which SDS are currently running around the survey – closes Weds 8th September | Chair |
| 3. | **MA Assessment Approaches**  LB-M looked at the variations in practice which impacted Apprentices during COVID, demonstrating some great examples of supporting both employers and apprentices from a distance.  Highlighted issues around transport, colleges which operate across local authority boundaries posed especially problematic as people could not move readily from one LA to another, whilst issues with transport, ability to open and run sessions, and usage of e-portfolios and online delivery were also highlighted.  Their work was looking at a move to an e-portfolio which could be done remotely, and this is set out in detail in the paper circulated among the group prior to the call.  LB-M also pointed out that a lack of employees means that apprentices are working flat out currently, and so it is difficult to get to them and engage them for assessments etc.  LB-M brought a recommendation that CDN would set up regular engagement to take forward engagement with colleges, and sought support from the group to endorse this continued engagement.  No objections with this were raised.  SS – Are there any particular frameworks where this approach worked better than others?  LB-M – More established frameworks were able to handle this a bit better than some of the newer frameworks which did not necessarily have the infrastructure in place.  SMcK – the feedback he has received has been mixed re colleges v private providers. Clearly difficulties for both sets of providers, so hopefully they will be able to work together to deliver  LB-M – some institutions opened sooner than others, and a lot of the frameworks were considered critical, or delivered outdoors which could return to ‘normal’ delivery quicker than others. There has been a move away from a top-down approach pursued by different partners – would now hope to see great collaboration. | Liz Barron-Majerik |
| 4. | **Just Transition**  Gregor Auld from the Scottish Government joined us to deliver a session on the Just Transition, which is becoming increasingly important and receiving coverage.  Scotland has done a good job compared to many international comparators: e.g. a 50% reduction in emissions since 1992 – the majority from energy sector, renewable energy has taken off etc. We are, however, now at a critical point. The energy sector has soaked up most of the impact it can, and so increasingly attention is now focused on housing, transport, construction etc.  Ambitious legislation in Scotland to address the Climate Emergency, underpinned by a set of Just Transition principles.  Scottish Government needs to be cognisant of Climate Emergency policies on employment, communities etc and the impacts on those interrelated factors  Just Transition does not solely concern itself with emission reduction policies in isolation; rather what are the wider socio-economic impacts and how can these be made fairer for everyone?  In the rural dimension, there are likely to be Just Transition impacts on our workers and regions, a move away from gas central heating without increasing fuel poverty, and managing land use change  Scotland appointed a Just Transition Commission between 2019-21 – set up to give Scottish Government some advice on how to use the Climate Emergency to maximise economic and social opportunity, but also to identify and minimise risk. The Commission concluded its work and reported earlier this year, setting out some of the key opportunities for Scotland.  The publication is set out around four key themes:   * pursue an orderly, managed transition to net-zero that creates benefits and opportunities for people across Scotland * equip people with the skills and education they need to benefit from the transition * as we take climate action we need to empower and invigorate our communities and strengthen local economies * share the benefits of climate action widely, while ensuring that the costs are distributed on the basis of ability to pay   Gregor indicated that he is happy to pick up individually with anyone from the group, and act as a first point of contact for any Just Transition queries.  SMcK - Will the response have anything specific about skills and training? How should he be working with employers and providers to get them thinking about this?  GA - the Commission’s report has a number of recommendations around this which will be taken forward under SDS’ CESAP and that ISG.  The CESAP set out the need to build a more flexible and resilient skills system – we have made progress quickly, at the stage where we have a reasonable amount of detail  Chair – SAAB has set up a SLWG on working competencies across all frameworks.  DMcD - restoring/re-wetting Scotland’s peat bogs is a relatively quick and major win with minimal adverse displacement – but there’s a lack of technical advisers and specialist contractors. So perhaps one for this group to solve?  CR - Naturescot are working on a plan to scale up peatland restoration contractors, capacity and skills. More on this to come and Claudia will update the group as necessary.  RO – SDS fully engaged with Gregor and colleagues and the Just Transition Commission to develop the CESAP. Recognise the need to align the skills system with the net zero jobs through various means and channels, and Rob happy to pick up offline with any colleagues around this.  Gregor indicated that he would be happy to write a blog on the Just Transition and what it means for rural areas.  **ACTION:** KF to follow up with Gregor in coming weeks around this. | Gregor Auld, SG |
| 5. | **Update on National Transition Training Fund (NTTF)**  Over 6,300 places on NTTF delivered in Year One to support upskilling to enable job retention or enable transition to new sectors.  NTTF was created and implemented to mitigate projected rise in unemployment from the pandemic to help support people aged 25+ who were unemployed or whose jobs are/were under threat. The fund will also support development of sustainable green jobs  Year 1 NTTF was a success, but with the proposed end of furlough September 2021, we are not over the worst of the pandemic impacts.  As such, Year 2 delivery will soon commence, building on both previous delivery and labour market evidence and will provide flexible support for key sectors which were hardest hit by COVID or the EU Exit – or where there remains clear forecast growth in jobs – (e.g. digital, health and social care).  MMcK then talked about specific Year 2 rural NTTF projects:   * **Redesigning Rural-** work placement programme in sectors experiencing skills gaps or shortages; * **Springboard for Rural skills** –sustainable training linked to the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland through professional development, networking opportunities and diversifying workforce; * **Crofting Skills for Local Food** – supporting crofters to diversify and increase sustainability to help make more robust food supply chains across Highlands & Islands. This will support other projects with a strong rural footprint – including some within the creative industries, forestry/timber, and seafood sector.   The presenters were thanked for their input and a short discussion followed. This centred on the role of automation in addressing some of the workforce and demographic challenges in rural areas; looking at how to attract people and career changers to rural areas, and how Funds like the NTTF or Green Jobs Fund can benefit rural areas. | Jane McCormack, SG |
| 6. | **Spotlight Session: Digital**  **Claire Gillespie from SDS then joined the call to discuss SDS’ activity around digital technologies.**  CG ran through:   * The challenges facing the digital sector (demographics, connectivity, perceptions of the sector, diversity of workforce) and the opportunities arising (particularly in underpinning growth across a number of other sectors); * Key findings from recently published research in the sector (The Digital Economy Business Survey 2021, and Scotland’s Digital Economy Maturity Index 2021); * Skills challenges and issues in the sector; * Key strands of digital support for businesses (Digital Boost, Digital Development Loan, Amazon Bootcamps); * Reskilling opportunities in the digital sector (e.g. Digital Start Fund, CodeClan, Apprenticeships); * SDS’ activity in upskilling and inspiring young people; * Regional activity around digital (e.g. the South of Scotland Digital Skills Hub, North East Economic Recovery Forum); and * The forthcoming development of a Digital Economy Skills Action Plan (DESAP).   CG also outlined that in overcoming particular rural challenges, there is a need for support or skills development activity to be delivered flexibly, and that providers and funders should be flexible around this as much as possible – which they have been. Some education institutions are moving to online delivery and have been great in being reactive. COVID is still an issue, and many do not yet want to offer wide scale in-person courses at the minute.  CG also indicated she would be happy to share the research and data which she presented.  JB set out that she is happy to work with Claire where there is a degree of overlap with GrowBiz activity in the digital sector.  DMcD asked about the barriers to greater technology / digital adoption in both rural areas and nationally.  CG - a lot of people may not understand some terms or are put off by them (e.g. Internet of Things). Small businesses especially put off, and may not have the capacity to get involved or understand them. Slowly getting there, but we see this with data analytics as well. Slowly but surely getting there, but we all need to think how we engage with businesses from an education and skills perspective, we must make it accessible for all. | Claire Gillespie, SDS |
| 7. | **AOB** – none raised | Chair |
| 8. | **Meeting close**  The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution and brought the meeting to a close.  The next meeting is scheduled for December 3rd, 2021. | Chair |