**Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland**

**Implementation Steering Group Meeting**

**Friday, 11 September 2020, 10.00 – 12.00pm, Skype**

#### AGENDA

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| **Item** | **Topic** | **Action Owner** |
| 1. | **Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**Andrew Docherty (AD), Katie Fox (KF), Elaine Ellis (EE), Rob Orr (RO), Andrea Glass (AG) – all SDS. Mili Shukla (MS) also joined for **Point 3** of the agenda.Henry Graham – ChairAndy Leitch (AL) – ConforAngela Cox (AC), Jayne Gracie (JG) – Borders CollegeBryan McGrath (BMcG) – South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)Claudia Rowse (CR) – Scottish Natural HeritageDavid Reid (DR) – Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)Derek McDonald (DMcD) – Aberdeenshire CouncilAmanda Fox (AF), Jane McCormack (JMcC), Muriel Mackenzie (MM) - Scottish Government (SG)Jackie Brierton (JB) - GrowbizJamie Smart (JS) – NFU ScotlandLiz Barron-Majerik (LBM) – Lantra ScotlandStuart McKenna (SMcK) – Scottish Training FederationTom Hall (TH) – Colleges ScotlandKlaus Mayer (KM) – Education ScotlandDonna Fordyce (DF) – Seafood ScotlandGraeme Ligertwood (GL) - SRUCSeamus Spencer (SS) – Scottish Funding Council (SFC)**Apologies:** Riddell Graham (Visit Scotland), Marc Crothall (Scottish Tourism Alliance) Eddie Abbott-Halpin (Orkney College), Stephen Sheridan (SDS), and Julia Latto (SE)The Chair introduced the meeting, outlining the wealth of sub-group activity which has taken place, much of which has been around communication, research and priority identification as we discussed last time round.One clear priority over the period – the skills required around Climate Emergency; discussed in greater detail in **Point 5** of the minute.The Chair welcomed AL and CR as first time attendees to the ISG, as well as Amanda Fox, who is head of rural economy at the Scottish Government and replaces Karen MacNee on the ISG.There remains a need to fill a gap left by Iain’s Steele departure (from an energy/ Developing the Young Workforce perspective), and SDS will work with the Chair and partners to fill this.**Action: Replacement for Iain Steele to be identified and approached to join the group.** | **SDS/ Chair** |
| 2.  | **Minute of Last Meeting and Terms of Reference** No amendments to the minute of the previous meeting were noted.The TOR was discussed, with two suggested changes – revise the membership list in light of recent changes, and remove the term ‘draft’ from throughout.**ACTION – SDS to revise the TOR.** | **SDS** |
| 3.  | **Social Care with the right staff and the right digital tools**JG then presented on some work which Borders College have been undertaking in the Health and Social Care sector, setting out how they have worked with employers to meet their future needs of recruitment and retention.JG acknowledged the challenges facing the sector - demographics, sector and role attractiveness & perceptions, aging workforce, physically demanding job, salaries and perceptions relative to other sectors and roles (e.g. retail – same salaries for much more effort), and health inequalities which exist across the region.In response, Borders College has developed a Borders College Care Career Academy – which introduce elements of picking and choosing delivery and provision to help increase flexibility offered. Run bespoke courses, some using Modern Apprenticeships (MAs). This approach has brought together Council and NHS employers to share issues and collaborate, share similarities and differences. For the forthcoming academic year, they foresee a combination of MAs, FT learning, those already working who want to upskill. Borders college has developed their BTECH area which are linked to contextualised learning with SMART Technology. JG ran an online walkthrough of the facility. This provides students interested in social care a practical setting in which to practice and develop. Greater ability to care for people at home would prevent hospital admissions, make people more secure and safe in their own homes, and ensure a pipeline of people with the skills and confidence to treat them.They are also working with the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal to look at data analysis to inform service provision, linked back to training requirementsThe sector in Scotland is a big part of SG’s agenda…BREXIT also an issue. 10% of Scottish workforce are from Europe; so there will be a significant impact on the sector – which is over and above the pressures being placed on the sector by COVID-19.There then followed some questions from others on the call:Q - JB: Is there a network of self-employed carers in the area who can be contracted by clients? And given the current situation, is this promoted as an economic opportunity - and is there business support for the micro-enterprises and self-employed providing care and wellbeing services through Self Directed Support?JG – Yes, locally they have an org called Encompass who act as a broker for self-directed support in the community, with individuals allocated a package of care and funding, who employ people on behalf of the clients to deliver on the needs of their support plan. This helps provide workers with greater control/ flex over their own environment, and empowers individuals to best meet their own needs. They also utilise the DigiSkills platform across the region, which offers courses over a broad sectoral spectrum – the remit is broader than just in the Scottish Borders. Q - LBM: Do you plan to record the video evidence for portfolios and assessment? AC: Yes, practical activity can be recorded for evidence but also accessed at a later date for training. Q - KM: Do you also use the VTech model for the  Foundation Apprenticeship delivery?JG: Yes – they were some of the first cohort they had in the room. Blended approach has been really useful for them, and have a separate platform for FAs to access materials and resources.Q – MS: There is a growing focus on mental health and wellbeing of health and social care staff - I was wondering how the College is incorporating mental health and wellbeing for care students in the curriculum. JG: Student advice service where health and wellbeing staff are available. Also embed mental health teaching and assessment, using SQA awards, exploring health and wellbeing – resilience, coping mechanisms etc. These are embedded within their full-time Health and Social Care programmes.Q - HG: Landscape can be confusing and crowded; how have you illustrated the variety of provision available?JG: Have outlined the various different routes which people can go onto…difficulty is in demonstrating how pathways can vary and lead on etc. Have tried to strip back the info and provide case examples for people for career changers and the sorts of quals they would need for HSC, what the job roles could be etc.Q - HG: How have you managed to recruit people to teach?JG: HSC staff recruitment is usually good, they provide training to people working in local orgs, with vast experience and they come back and want to get involved in training and delivery themselves.AC: Realise that they operate in a rural setting, so need to be creative as possible to get the staff – not straightforward, may involve recruiting existing sector staff as assessors in the first instance, train them to be assessors on the job. This model has worked well for them, and they have disproportionately large HSC offer the for the college size. HG thanked AC and JG for their presentation.MS and JG left the call at this point. |  |
| 4. | **Update Report**KF then presented a progress update on the Plan, and highlighted developments since the last meeting, providing an update on some of the actions outstanding from the previous ISG call.KF is currently developing an update report, looking at where we are to date with the Plan. Will look at the continued relevance of the five priority areas, as well as focusing on the COVID landscape. Will also need to set out the role of the ISG, the use of subgroups in taking forward various strands of work.The report will combine narrative, data and context to set out how we are progressing against the Plan, and will reflect the broad ways in which we work as partners to address the skills issues set out in the Action Plan. Looking to get to a point demonstrating how and why things have changed, but also what we have achieved in our sectors and regions.Currently, KF is seeking to fill some gaps, and will furnish partners with as full a draft as possible to ensure everyone is comfortable with our progress to date.KF then provided an update on the sub-group meetings which have taken place across a number of fronts. The recovery sub-group established following the last ISG meeting has now met a couple of times, focused on supporting young people in rural areas and aligns with work around recovery. The group is keen that the activities in the plan support those coming out of the labour market – e.g. digital skills are a focus; pivoting of business models to digital platforms means this will remain a significant area of focus. Key gap was around climate emergency. Many publications increasingly make the link between rural areas and green recovery, and keen that the ISG and subgroup meet this.There is a subsequent need to identify and articulate the relevant skill set to support rural economy and build on existing strengths, and need to ensure alignment with Climate Emergency work. There will be a report on this recovery sub-group, and this will be shared with partners in due course.Research sub-group has put together a log of existing research, looking to identify and fill gaps, collate and pool resources among members to work effectively.Lunch and Learn sessions – the first session took place during the summer, on Skills for Growth (SfG), delivered by SDS. SfG is a skills diagnostic tool for small businesses. KF has written a blog with key points from the session, and has included a case study example case study example within this. Hoping to use the blogs to link back to the work we are doing as a partnership. Session was well received, interest in holding future sessions – likely to be around digital skills on the next one. Bringing in SDS colleagues to discuss digital initiatives.KF to work with partners and SDS colleagues to finalise draft update report, set up next lunch and learn session, big push on blogs, looking to take forward skills mapping exercise looking at links between green energy and rural.Both AC and CR indicated that they would be happy to contribute to the continued work of these groups, and share some information and work which they have been developing. |  |
| 5. | **Climate Emergency**RO and EE then delivered a slot, looking at SDS’ position on the Climate Emergency and the ongoing work on the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan.RO’s focus is the energy sector, but increasingly decarbonisation and energy transition. He outlined the ambitious targets in Scotland – net zero by 2045; which requires significant investment and innovation, as well as update of our transport, land use, and economic systems. Importantly, we need a skills transition, skills adaption and teaching and learning practices.Both SG and SDS are working on Low carbon/climate emergency Action Plans, both of which are anticipated by the end of 2020 - low carbon is a central tenet to recovery and will of course feature heavily in both. Key emerging findings are that adaptive skills will be required, upskilling existing workers etc, looking at developing and enhancing new skills or skills into new areas. There won’t be a large demand for new skills, but more in the way of reskilling and upskilling. Huge numbers of workers in construction, agriculture etc. will need upskilling, as well as wider numbers of day-to-day practices across the economy and population generally (waste management, heating supply etc.).Important, but it is just one of many key challenges which the rural economy faces – COVID-19, Aging population, BREXIT, increased use of automation and data are all significant challenges, but will also create new opportunities and ways of working and doing business.SG and partners can do a lot…built consumer behaviour must also change – they need to buy hybrid cars, ensure their homes are energy efficient etc. So, skills transition is a must, but behaviour must also change.SDS moving to more focused work around the CESAP, four key packages: employment and skills implications of the main challenges; role of meta skills; how can data contribute to this, and the overall move to net zero. There are particularly sectors - such as construction and manufacturing – which require a focus and a need to map skills supply and demand in these areas. Looking to identify immediate actions currently underway to support the change needed. Important that SDS and partners take the initiative – we cannot wait until the economic landscape is clear…that will take some time. There will be immediate work which can be done – heat, transport and O&G transition to new roles.Looking to work with the ISG via KF to ensure this is communicated to the Group and consideration given to how this might impact thee rural economy.EE introduced herself, as SDS’ lead on the forestry and construction sectors, indicating that there is a huge number of people in the construction sector whose jobs will be impacted, many of whom in rural areas. EE also outlined that rural areas have specific energy related challenges – such as lower energy efficiency, different home types, not all on the gas network etc. Further, the pipeline of people from rural areas into the construction sector is quite narrow, and this needs increased.Forestry and agriculture are progressing well on their targets in the Climate Emergency, and they have been working on this area for some years (e.g. the Forestry Action Plan had a central focus around this).AF: SG looking to commit extra £100m funding into this area over the coming months. Clearly a big focus on this for them, which is moving apace, and they will keep everyone updated around what this will involve.Again, some discussion and questions from partners followed:Q - CR: Could you provide more detail about requirement or not for new skills compared to reskilling? We anticipate that there will be new skills around nature based sector including green finance, natural capital, ecological engineering, use of earth observations and remote sensing techniques for examples.RO: There will be a new requirement for specialist skills, such as the examples CR mentions. The majority of skill requirements will be in upskilling and reskilling, quantity wise. But there will be a need for new skills and the work CR is doing will be valuable in identifying what these specialist skills will be, and we need to give thought to how the college, school, and Apprenticeship systems meet this need.Q - SMcK: Where can we get more information about the Transition Training Fund - I don't see anything on SDS or SG websites yet.AF: This was a commitment in the Programme for Government [published earlier in September]. This will be launched in the autumn, so nothing publicly available until then. But AF will share with the group if anything emerges before then.Q - DMcD: Demand for trained foresters already exceeds supply; great news about PFG support for forestry; how will future skills demands be met?LBM: Significant demand for foresters, lots of pilot activity and colleges doing well to attract new entrants. Still work to do, but the Forestry Skills Group is very proactive.AL: Agree with Liz, the word foresters is too narrow…looking at the whole supply chain, many of whom have an aging workforce and they are actively looking to strengthen the pipeline to help meet this demandJB: Many rural micro-businesses want to develop climate-friendly products and services, and to be more knowledgeable about what they can do to be more 'climate friendly' - are there any courses or qualifications available for this demographic?RO: yes, circular economy aspect is important here. Nothing formal as yet, but more ‘general’ learning materials for the consumers.KF: SDS looking at developing a forestry induction pack which will help with perceptions. EE: Yes, this pack is at draft stage, currently LBM collating partner feedback. EE: Also looking at increased mentoring support for attracting young people into the sector, changing existing perceptions of what the sector is and what it entails etc.AC: Borders College have launched a school Forestry programme. Senior phase programme, in the hope many of those individuals will progress into the sector.HG: Would like to see this as a topic for the next meeting. Early days but it’s clearly high priority and we need to give it proper attention – perhaps an agenda item at the next meeting?DR: Notes that we are now in a very different economic situation than when the Action Plan was first published. Businesses are in a different place in terms of their viability and vulnerability, which was not the case before. How do we build bigger, better, smarter, and need to include the economic context within this? There has been / will be a cross-sectoral shift, occupations and job titles will change – multi-skilling and meta-skills, digital literacy are all important. As such, businesses are unsure what they want and need, and so it is difficult for the education and skills system to respond to this. We need to ensure this is in our thoughts.GL: Provided an update from the SRUC perspective. The Growing Rural Talent project in the south is building new pathways into the forestry and agricultural sectors for young people. Looking less positive than they would like because of COVID-19 and restrictions on the practical experiences they can offer, but schools taking different approaches to getting young people into workplaces, as such, he is cautiously optimistic as the school year progresses. Will build the pipeline for the future. JS: Much of this depends on good digital connections, something that is not always available in rural areas. Areas that are often overlooked are those that are close to towns but not classed as rural. Possibly not something that this group can sort directly but it is an issue. **Action: Low Carbon and Climate Emergency to be included as an agenda item for the next ISG meeting in December. SDS and Chair to consider what this might entail.** |   |
| 6. | **Comms group update – Web page walk through and blog schedule** KF then talked through the work of the comms sub-group, with a number of different areas of focus: website, development of blogs, and third around case studies.Comms group identified a need for a web presence and ensuring we have a dedicated space. KF ran through the website which SDS has created (currently at the beta stage) Acknowledged that it is hosted on the SDS site but really keen it includes everybody and we welcome insight and content from partners.KF made an ask of partners that they submit photos to get the website up and runningKF then ran through a suggested schedule of blogs over the coming months, proposing various topics and asking that partners volunteer to write on those topics proposed (or any others they deem relevant or interesting). KF made an ask of partners to volunteer on any areas they want to write on and is happy for suggestions and people to come forward.AD and KF provided a more detailed update on the case study work at the last ISG meeting, and KF outlined that, as a group, we must take a targeted approach to filling the gaps in case studies which have been identified. SDS will make an ask of members to determine what they have in the way of interesting leads, or where partners have expertise.KF made a number of asks of partners: * Provide photograph for use on the rural website
* Partners to identify case study “leads” around the areas of gaps
* Blog contributors or ideas for blogs
* Share blogs with wider networks through existing channels
* Continued use of the #ruralskillsscotland on social media and use of the comms partner packs (previously provided) to support this

A number of partners expressed their interest in supporting the blog and case study exercises, and the Chair offered his thanks for this.**Actions: Partners to provide photographs for the website****SDS to draft case study text, outlining gaps and asking for suggestions or examples to use.****Partners to consider if they would volunteer to write a blog post or ideas for content they would like to see.****Continued sharing of materials and content on social media channels and with other networks and partners as appropriate.** | **All****SDS****All****All** |
| 7. | **Next meeting and AOB**One point raised under AOB, buy MMcK – SG has agreed to provide a note on implementation of the Skills Action Plan to the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board, and the importance of their work was again highlighted to the group. SG will continue to feed back any relevant findings from the ESSB quarterly meetings.The Chair then thanked everyone for their attendance, and indicated we will look to get dates organised for the first two ISG meetings of 2021; March and June.**Action: SDS to agree dates and issue calendar invites.** |  |