



Workforce North: A shared mission to grow and expand our workforce

April 2025



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Workforce North:

A shared mission to grow and expand our workforce

Executive Summary

Projections show that over the next 10-15 years, the Highlands and Islands region stands to benefit from a generational investment of over £100bn, driven by the generation, transmission and distribution of renewable energy.

The scale of investment has the potential to transform the regional economy. To deliver lasting benefit for local communities and businesses, this investment is dependent on a major growth in workers in the region, which currently has a shrinking workforce due to depopulation and an aging population.

In response, a unique partnership between Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), University of the Highlands (UHI) and regional partners, including the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and Highland Council has been established under the banner of a 'Workforce North Mission'.

This formative work aims to develop a more radical approach to regional workforce development, decisively framed by economic ambition. Through intensive collaboration with indigenous businesses and inward investors, it will empower employers to co-invest with the public sector to build new legacy initiatives.

The work was established in response to a Convention of Highlands and Islands (CoHI) action agreed in Autumn 2024.

This paper provides an update on work undertaken so far and builds on the Regional Transformational Opportunities research undertaken by HIE and the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (HIREP).

Work to date has included:

- initial consultation with over 50 employers, inward investors and other regional stakeholders
- based on this consultation, the development of initial propositions for co-investment and collaborations
- a Workforce Summit which brought together 70 representatives from business and the public sector to discuss and refine these propositions.

This paper provides:

- an update on the key findings
- an overview of the discussions from the Workforce Summit
- a draft plan, which captures actions arising from these discussions with stakeholders.

This draft plan has been developed as an initial framework for action. We are actively seeking further input from stakeholders in the region to further refine these actions.

We recognise that further engagement with east coast, west coast and island communities is required and we look forward to building this engagement in the weeks ahead.

1. Initial research and industry engagement

Drawing on a wide range of data, including the HIE and HIREP study into the scale of regional investment over the next 10-15 years, and the evidence of work undertaken by SDS as part of the Workforce North Mission, it has been possible to establish key economic area investment opportunities.

Further analysis was undertaken using a range of data sources to determine workforce demand, including critical gaps¹.

Following this initial analysis, SDS delivered a programme of structured engagement with 52 employers, investors, providers and stakeholders to capture a deeper understanding of skills requirements and develop co-investment propositions as part of the Workforce North Mission.

This included deep engagement across key sectors such as offshore and onshore wind, hydrogen and supporting infrastructure, and energy transmission and distribution.

The consultations and research confirmed:

- that workforce gaps exist today
- there is a requirement to grow the workforce to respond to investment opportunities
- further requirements are likely to emerge as larger projects move into delivery.

These workforce issues and detailed feedback from consultees are highlighted in the paper [“The Highlands and Islands Workforce Summit: Strengthening the Regional Workforce, April 2025”](#).

This paper outlines:

- the aim and approach to the project (known as Workforce North)
- economic opportunities and workforce demand
- regional demographics and labour supply considerations
- workforce challenges
- key issues that co-investment propositions should consider
- emerging co-investment propositions.

The emerging propositions focused on:

- investing in our communities and schools
- investing to develop our workforce
- attracting working age families to the region.

¹ SQW: Analysis undertaken as part of the Workforce North Mission, unpublished (2025).

2. The Workforce Summit

Delivered in partnership between SDS, HIE, UHI, Highland Council and Prosper, a Workforce Summit was held in Inverness on Friday 4th April 2025.

It brought together over 70 representatives from indigenous businesses, inward investors and learning providers to determine practical, collaborative actions that would enable the region to grow and expand its workforce.

The summit explored urgent co-investment opportunities for the public and private sector, focused on articulating:

- the scale of current and future economic investments
- the scale of the current and future workforce challenges and dependencies and the need for urgent action to address these challenges
- opportunities for public and private sector collaboration and co-investment.

Through a mix of panel discussions, presentations and workshop sessions, a wide range of views were shared and captured.

The overarching message from the Summit was that no one business or organisation can address the regional workforce challenges on its own.

We need a shared mission between the public sector, investors and indigenous business.

This mission needs to be underpinned by strong, strategic collaborative working to ensure opportunities are realised and maximised.

Beyond this core message, a number of 'takeaways' were captured. These are summarised below, with considered further detail set out in the draft action plan in section 4:

2.1 Investing in our schools and communities:

- Set out a compelling and dynamic 'vision' for the region that can be used to engage young people and promote area attractiveness.
- Develop a collaborative, joined up family and school campaign to promote economic opportunities, replacement job demand and help secure a future talent pipeline.
- Rapidly expand Foundation Apprenticeship provision in sectors of labour market need across the Highlands and Islands.
- Understand young peoples' career aspirations in school (S1-S6) and triangulate with labour market insights and employer demand.
- Utilise the Highlands and Islands STEM Partnership (HISP) to prioritise in-demand labour market opportunity areas on the curriculum.
- Agree and implement an Employer Charter, led by Highland Council.

2.2 Investing to develop our workforce:

- Agree and implement an Employer Charter, led by Highland Council and reflecting approaches being taken by other local authorities.
- Expand Modern Apprenticeship programmes in line with evidenced market requirements.
- Expand Graduate Apprenticeships through the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).
- Increase industry co-investment to expand the flow of potential new talent through work-based learning routes, including through Graduate Placement Programmes.
- Expand upskilling and retraining.
- Maximise Community Benefit opportunities.
- Invest in technology to improve apprenticeship delivery across the region.
- Design and deliver new skills provision at pace to respond quickly to workforce needs on critical projects.
- Support individuals who are furthest from the labour market into opportunities as they arise.

2.3 Attracting working-age families to the region²:

- Attract working age families through UK and international campaigns.
- Promote specialist degree, MSc and PhD programmes in the region and seek to retain talent on degree completion.
- Promote and co-ordinate the visa application process and develop an advanced programme to attract critical skills.
- Promote and signpost wider activity and support targeted initiatives to grow the working age population (e.g. housing initiatives and settlement officers).

The draft priority actions, opportunities, potential blockages and timelines for delivery have been collated and are detailed in section 4 of this paper.

² Interdependencies with actions set out in the Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan and HIREP Housing sub-group.

3. Asks of Scottish Government to accelerate progress and remove barriers

Recognising that the Workforce North Mission originated through the CoHI, there are specific asks of the Scottish Government in relation to progressing the shared Mission:

- Endorsement of the 'Workforce North' mission to expand the workforce and maximise the once in a generation opportunity in the region
- Commitment to a co-ordinated approach to college, apprenticeship and industry co-investment
- Commitment to expand industry intensive technical and vocational provision, including apprenticeships, providing opportunities to access additional, or flex existing, funding
- Commitment to agile, fast paced, upskilling for existing workers and businesses, economically inactive and those faced with redundancy
- Continued engagement with Home Office to address visa challenges to ensure access to skilled workers from around the world
- Support a cross-government prioritisation of the need for more housing in the region to address current needs and future growth, especially in more rural areas.

4. Draft implementation plan

Governance

It is important to state from the outset that all partners recognise the need to ensure that the shared Workforce North Mission connects to existing regional infrastructure, projects and programmes.

The intent is not to duplicate or displace existing arrangements but create a more ambitious and focused response to workforce demand.

On that basis, we propose the following governance arrangements:

- **Formal governance** is proposed to be through the HIREP.
- **Leadership, oversight and accountability of the Workforce North Mission** will be managed through a new leadership group incorporating senior leaders (i.e. Chair-level) from SDS, HIE, UHI, local authorities and senior industry representatives.
- **Operational delivery** is proposed to be managed through the HIREP Skills and Labour sub-group. Programme Management Office resource will be identified to take forward detailed planning and implementation. This will ensure alignment is retained with the skills elements of the HIREP Regional Economic Strategy, currently in development.

About this implementation plan

The actions captured in this implementation plan build on the stakeholder engagement work undertaken to date as described earlier in this paper.

These should be considered as an early draft. Further engagement is required to confirm actions, delivery partners, timelines and success measures.

In most instances, the organisations listed as 'potential delivery partners' have been engaged – either through the Summit or the broader stakeholder engagement in the lead up to it.

In a small number of cases, new actions have emerged which are likely to require engagement with potential delivery partners who have not yet been approached. As with the rest of this plan, these delivery partners should therefore be considered as draft and subject to agreement.

The plan will have flexibility to account for local priorities across the Highlands and Islands region. Highland Council, for example, has clearly set out a draft of its collaborative delivery priorities. See the Appendix for the detail..

Importantly, this implementation plan will be further enhanced through planned engagement with businesses and communities in the east coast, west coast and island communities which fall within the Highlands and Islands region.

This engagement will take place in the second quarter of 2025. Feedback on this draft plan is warmly welcomed from all stakeholders. Please submit any comments to Allison.Carrington@sds.co.uk by 2 May 2025.

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|---|--|---|----------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Proposition 1: Investing in our Communities and Schools | | | | | |
| A new dynamic vision shaped and designed by employers, apprentice ambassadors and regional partners, which promotes the emerging job opportunities and career pathways, encouraging more young people to make an informed choice to stay in the region | 1.1 Set out a compelling and dynamic ‘vision’ for the region that can be used to engage young people and promote area attractiveness | | | | |
| | 1.1.1 Identify partners to agree and sustain a compelling marketing and multimedia communications plan which outlines the scale of the opportunities in the region | Employers, REP partners, Visit Scotland | June-September 2025 | <p>Agreed marketing strategy through partner workshops</p> <p>Feedback on events</p> <p>Leveraging partners’ existing resources/ assets</p> <p>Approved plan covering all stakeholders with tailored communications</p> | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Proposition 1: Investing in our Communities and Schools | | | | | |
| A new dynamic vision shaped and designed by employers, apprentice ambassadors and regional partners, which promotes the emerging job opportunities and career pathways, encouraging more young people to make an informed choice to stay in the region | 1.2 Develop a collaborative, joined up family and school campaign to promote economic opportunities, replacement job demand and help secure future talent pipeline | | | | |
| | 1.2.1 Create and deliver a campaign (including face-to-face engagement and targeting pupils, parents, carers and teachers (using in-service days to ensure availability) where employers co-invest to outline current and future opportunities in school, with clear information on project timescales and skills/labour requirements (to include upskilling CIAG, DYW and teaching staff and teachers shadowing apprentices to increase their understanding of apprenticeships) | DYW, SDS Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), schools, employers, Apprentice Ambassadors | June 2025 – September 2026 | <p>Assessment showing improved post-campaign awareness in each target group compared to pre-campaign awareness</p> <p>Co-investment from employers</p> <p>Increased opportunities for teachers to shadow apprentices supported by 'apprentice ambassador' companies</p> | Lack of clarity around timelines for new work |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
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| Proposition 1: Investing in our Communities and Schools | | | | | |
| A new dynamic vision shaped and designed by employers, apprentice ambassadors and regional partners, which promotes the emerging job opportunities and career pathways, encouraging more young people to make an informed choice to stay in the region | 1.2 Develop a collaborative, joined up family and school campaign to promote economic opportunities, replacement job demand and help secure future talent pipeline | | | | |
| | 1.2.2 Clearly define and communicate post-school career pathways into work | DYW, SDS CIAG, schools, UHI | June 2025 | Surveys showing improved awareness of DYW offer amongst young people | Annual funding for DYW could restrict momentum |
| | 1.2.3 Deliver specific programme of support to drive female engagement in male-dominated sectors (e.g. Shell – Girls into Energy) | Employers, local authorities, schools, DYW, SDS | TBC | Improved gender-balance across sectors | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| Proposition 1: Investing in our Communities and Schools | | | | | |
| Better use of available funding to meet labour market and skills requirements | 1.3 Rapidly expand apprenticeship provision in sectors of labour market need across the Highland and Islands | | | | |
| | 1.3.1 Enhance numbers of Foundation Apprenticeships in schools (e.g. using a bank of best practice case studies from Aberdeenshire Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar offers) | DYW, SDS CIAG, schools | Aug 2025-Sept 2028 | Increase in number of Foundation Apprenticeships in schools | Current levels of apprenticeship funding insufficient to meet the future demands of the workforce |
| Creation of a local labour market which can quickly respond to workforce needs around major infrastructure projects | 1.3.2 Promote benefits of work-based learning pathways (apprenticeships) to parents, carers, teachers and young people | DYW, SDS CIAG, schools | June 2025 | Surveys demonstrating improved awareness of benefits in each target group | Societal bias towards traditional university education. Lack of buy in from parents, teachers, carers, young people |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|---|---|--|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| Proposition 1: Investing in our Communities and Schools | | | | | |
| Opportunity to address gender disparities in key sectors through positive action initiatives | 1.4 Understand young peoples' career aspirations in school (S1-S6) and triangulate with labour market insights and employer demand | | | | |
| | 1.4.1 Engage with young people to understand their career aspirations and amplify pupil voice | DYW, SDS CIAG, schools | August-December 2025 | Report on the key findings from the engagement Agree how the findings should be used | |
| | 1.4.2 Continue to deliver accurate Labour Market Insights, articulate and communicate information on employer demand to young people and ensure their career aspirations and evidence-based skills demand are aligned and reflected in regional and sectoral skills plans | SDS Evidence and Impact, SDS CIAG, DYW | June 2025 – TBC | Survey showing increased awareness of local opportunities | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

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|--|--|--|-------------------|---|---|
| Proposition 1: Investing in our Communities and Schools | | | | | |
| | 1.5 Utilise Highlands and Islands STEM Partnership (HISP) to prioritise in-demand labour market opportunity areas on the curriculum | | | | |
| | 1.5.1 Explore how employers in sectors of economic opportunity can influence national curriculum | UHI, SDS, HIE, and wider HISP membership, DYW, employers, schools, Prosper, SQA | June 2025 – TBC | National curriculum changes address sectors of economic opportunity Employer feedback | National curriculum doesn't adapt quickly enough to capitalise on opportunities |
| | 1.5.2 Co-ordinate, align and facilitate STEM employer engagement events in schools, building on collective capability and knowledge | HISP, UHI, SDS, HIE, SSA, Education Scotland, Aberdeen Science Centre, DYW, employers, schools | August 2025 – TBC | Increase in STEM events UHI coordinators in each Local Authority Area Partner commitment to Workforce North actions | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|--|---|--|--------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| Creation of a local labour market which can respond quickly to workforce needs around major investment projects | 2.1 Agree and implement Employer Charter, led by Highland Council and reflecting approaches being taken by other local authorities | | | | |
| | 2.1.1. Provide work experience and guaranteed job interviews, to support apprenticeship programmes and routes to fair work | Highland Council, employers, SDS, UHI | TBC | Work experience places provided Guaranteed job interviews provided Skills funds available to support routes to work | |
| Promotion of best practice in flexible recruitment and employment practices to meet labour market demand | 2.2 Expand Modern Apprenticeship programmes in line with evidenced labour market requirements | | | | |
| | 2.2.1 Clearly define and communicate to all ages, post-school pathways into work in priority sectors | SDS CIAG, SFC, UHI, Employers, DWP, Employability Partnerships | June – August 2025 | Career pathways clearly identified and agreed with wider partners Career pathways clearly articulated to potential workforce | |
| Opportunity to address gender disparities in key sectors through positive action initiatives | 2.2.2 SDS to fund more MA starts, with SFC providing FE credits, to support more apprenticeships in the college and public sector training academies, in line with evidenced need and recruitment. Flexible delivery models to be explored and expanded to support uptake | SDS, SFC, Employers, UHI, Training Providers | August 2025 - TBC | Additional Modern Apprenticeship starts to meet employer demand | Lack of Scottish Government funding |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|------------------|---|-------------------|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| | 2.2 Expand Modern Apprenticeship programmes in line with evidenced labour market requirements | | | | |
| | 2.2.3 Ensure all apprenticeship opportunities are widely advertised on Apprenticeships.scot | SDS, apprenticeships.scot, employers | Ongoing | Raised awareness of opportunities amongst local workforce All available apprenticeships on Apprenticeships.scot. reducing the risk of young people missing local opportunities | |
| | 2.2.4 Introduce SDS' 'Shadow an Apprentice for a day' to support progression into apprenticeships | SDS | TBC | Raised awareness of apprenticeship offer | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

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|--|--|--|-------------------|--|--|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| | 2.2 Expand Modern Apprenticeship programmes in line with evidenced labour market requirements | | | | |
| | 2.2.5 Establish a pre-approved talent scheme and/or clearing house for apprentice applicants so that major contractors can funnel 'over-supply' through the supply chain, to secure potential talent | Housed and owned locally: NMIS, CITB, SDS, major contractors, supply chains, | TBC | <p>Scheme host identified</p> <p>Apprentices successfully placed through the established scheme</p> <p>Employers participating in the scheme</p> <p>Majority positive feedback from apprentices/employers involved in the scheme</p> | <p>Commercial sensitivities and competitiveness can inhibit transparency around training opportunities</p> <p>Risk of potential apprentices being 'lost' due to lack of places</p> <p>Some recruitment practices may be restricted</p> <p>Limited duration of contracts may not allow apprentices to complete their training</p> |
| | 2.2.6 Ensure UHI and college infrastructure capacity is supported to deliver required levels of training in priority sectoral areas | UHI, SFC, SDS | August 2025 – TBC | | <p>Lack of capacity could impede progress</p> |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

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|--|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| | 2.2 Expand Modern Apprenticeship programmes in line with evidenced labour market requirements | | | | |
| | 2.2.7 Utilise existing Construction and Engineering training and other existing private sector provision and explore regional partnership opportunities to expand as necessary | CITB, Training Providers | August 2025 – TBC | CITB Construction Skills Academy, engineering training and private-sector training provision available for use | |
| | 2.3 Expand Graduate Apprenticeships through the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) | | | | |
| | 2.3.1 Expand Graduate Apprenticeships through UHI | UHI, SFC | August 2025 – TBC | New types of Graduate Apprenticeships offered Additional Graduate Apprentices | |
| | 2.3.2 Include UHI in pilot GA Social Work to support training in Health and Social Care roles | UHI, SFC | TBC | Increased uptake of roles in Health and Social Care | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|--|--|--|--------------------|---|--|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| | 2.4 Increase industry co-investment to expand flow of potential new talent through work-based learning routes, including through Graduate Placement Programmes | | | | |
| | 2.4.1 Secure and deliver co-investment from the private sector in essential learning infrastructure | Employers, UHI, SFC, local authorities | June – August 2025 | Funding provided by private sector | Requires funding to implement |
| | 2.4.2 Expand existing training and pre-employment schemes between industry and HE/FE sector (e.g. CECA and UHI, BAE model in Dunbartonshire) to increase flow of talent, with guaranteed interviews for participants | UHI, CECA, employers | Ongoing | Volume of guaranteed interviews Positive feedback from employers involved in the scheme | Some recruitment practices may be restricted |
| | 2.4.4 Encourage more private sector training facilities (Aurora type training) and review of best practice elsewhere (e.g. East Kilbride Training Group etc) and establish Centres of Excellence for specific training | Private training providers, CECA | August 2025 - TBC | Additional training facilities and Centres of Excellence available to deliver a skilled workforce | |

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|---|--|---|------------------|--|--|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| | 2.4 Increase industry co-investment to expand flow of potential new talent through work-based learning routes, including through Graduate Placement Programmes | | | | |
| Creation and development of new partnerships between industry and training providers that allow for rapid up-skilling and re-skilling in areas of labour market need | 2.4.5 Explore potential for small employers' levy to put money from the industry levies (e.g. CITB) into new apprenticeship places in the region | Employers | TBC | Volume of increase in number of funded apprenticeship places from the levy | Lack of flexibility around levy funding |
| | 2.5 Expand upskilling and retraining | | | | |
| | 2.5.1 Agree and deliver bespoke training with guaranteed jobs on completion (e.g. FDM Model with IT employers, although commercial. Public sector option – local labour market programmes) | UHI, private training providers, employers, local authorities | TBC | Volume of people with guaranteed jobs | |
| | 2.5.2 Explore options for individuals to access low interest loans to upskill and reskill that leads to jobs in demand areas | TBC | TBC | TBC | Lack of finance options reduces available labour pool. |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|--|--|---|-------------------|---|---|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| | 2.5 Expand upskilling and retraining | | | | |
| | 2.5.3 Private sector upstream investment in up skilling and re skilling (e.g. SSEN) to support provision not easily satisfied by FE/HE alone | SSEN and other private sector employers | TBC | Level of investment | |
| | 2.6 Maximise Community Benefit opportunities | | | | |
| | 2.6.1 Ensure that community benefits in procurement contracts maximise fair work and apprenticeship opportunities (initial community benefit consultation and link to Highland Renewables model, SSEN, ICFGP Freeport etc) | Highland Renewables, local authorities, SSEN, ICFGP | June 2025 – TBC | Fair work principles built into community benefits Increase in 1 apprentice for every £1m of private and public sector procurement | Lack of clarity around timelines for projects |
| | 2.6.2 Agree local authority role as employer for apprentices who are displaced by employers | Local authorities | August 2025 – TBC | Reduction in displaced apprentices not able to complete training | Without this model the limited duration of contracts may not allow apprentices to complete their training |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|---|---|---|----------------------|--|--|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| Opportunity to capitalise on technology to expand learning programmes at pace across the region | 2.7 Invest in technology to improve apprenticeship delivery across the region | | | | |
| | 2.7.1 Provide wider access across the region to WBL/FE curriculum through digital delivery | UHI, SFC | July 2025 – TBC | Increase in digital provision across critical skills areas | Without investment in technology, it will be harder to deliver across the region at pace to meet required demand |
| | 2.7.2 Secure industry co-investment to develop and deliver modular offers such as augmented and virtual reality training in emerging sectors/technologies | UHI, SFC, Employers | September 2025 – TBC | Increase in digital provision across critical skills areas | |
| | 2.8 Design and deliver new skills provision at pace to respond quickly to workforce needs on critical projects | | | | |
| | 2.8.1 Consider options to increase the number of internships (NMIS model with employer contributions) | NMIS, employers, local authorities, UHI | June-September 2025 | Increase in internship places | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|------------------|---|--|
| Proposition 2: Investing to Develop our Workforce | | | | | |
| | 2.9 Support individuals who are furthest from the labour market into opportunities as they arise | | | | |
| | 2.9.1 Optimise DWP training schemes to meet immediate needs | DWP, SDS, Employability Partnerships | June 2025 – TBC | Improved awareness of DWP offer from baseline (e.g., surveys) Increase in uptake of DWP training schemes from baseline | Individuals with disabilities miss out on local employment opportunities |
| | 2.9.2 Expand understanding of DWP 'Disability Confident Scheme' which provides free guidance and resources to encourage employers to think about how they can employ people with disabilities | DWP | June 2025 – TBC | Survey to check employer uptake of free DWP guidance and action thereafter | |
| | 2.9.2 Work with Local Employability Partnerships to ensure awareness of new roles and routes into them | Employers, Employability Partnerships | TBC | Increased awareness of available opportunities | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|---|---|---|-----------------------|---|--|
| Proposition 3: Attracting Working Age Families to the Region | | | | | |
| | 3.1 Attract working age families through UK and international campaigns | | | | |
| Opportunity to better promote the regional offer to families to move to the area and encourage returners | 3.1.1 Develop a campaign that highlights the wider area offer (lifestyle, education and job opportunities) and corrects myths/builds on success stories and case studies. Messaging would need to be tailored to different groups | Employers, REP partners, Visit Scotland | June – September 2025 | Agreed campaign and feedback on events | Lack of affordable housing and access to childcare provision |
| | 3.1.2 Ensure input from businesses around core messaging and link to timeline for skills required around major projects in the region | Employers | June – September 2025 | Engagement events with businesses to identify skills and labour requirements on upcoming projects | |
| | 3.1.3 Target individuals from the Highlands and Islands who have left, to encourage them to return | TBC | TBC | Number of individuals returning to the region per annum | Lack of affordable housing and access to childcare provision |
| | 3.1.4 Promote wider range of job opportunities beyond new investment, for partners/wider family members | TBC | TBC | Increase in people moving to the region for work | Lack of affordable housing and access to childcare provision |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

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|--|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Proposition 3: Attracting Working Age Families to the Region | | | | | |
| New employment opportunities for completing students to support local economic growth | 3.1 Attract working age families through UK and international campaigns | | | | |
| | 3.1.5 Establish a fulfilment function to help potential applicants who wish to apply to the region | TBC | TBC | Options appraisal after engagement with Home Office | Engagement with Home Office required |
| | 3.2 Promote Specialist Degree, MSc and PhD programmes in the region to seek to retain talent on degree completion | | | | |
| | 3.2.1 Explore approaches to supporting uptake of specialist and research degrees, which can help attract people to the region that may choose to remain and work after they complete their studies | UHI | August 2025 – TBC | Increase in students completing degrees choosing to stay in the region (e.g. graduate surveys, leaver data) | Loss of regional talent after individuals complete degrees |
| | 3.2.2 Establish links with schools to support transitions, including planning to leave the region, promoting Graduate Apprenticeships, Internships. Sponsorships, 1-1 relationships with employers and mentoring to retain or create a tie with the region for the future | Employers, UHI, DWY, SDS | TBC | Increase in awareness of opportunities within the region | |

Short term actions, Medium term actions, Long term actions

| New opportunities | Action | Potential delivery partners | Planned delivery | Success measures | Significant Risks |
|---|--|---|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Proposition 3: Attracting Working Age Families to the Region | | | | | |
| Encourage transient workers to stay in the region | 3.3 Promote and co-ordinate the visa application process and develop an advanced programme to attract critical skills | | | | |
| Opportunity to use community benefits to do more to create affordable housing for local people (Affordable housing not part of the scope of this work) | 3.3.1 Establish links with Scottish Migration Service to involve them in further discussions | Scottish Migration Service | TBC | TBC | |
| | 3.4 Promote and signpost wider activity and support targeted to grow the working age population (e.g. housing initiatives and settlement officers) | | | | |
| | 3.4.1 Use community benefits to help keep people in the region (e.g. to build affordable homes - link with Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan) | This work is already in train – need to review workforce implications | TBC | TBC | |
| | 3.4.2 Link to work undertaken through Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan to explore options around housing to help incentivise people to move to the region | This work is already in train – need to review workforce implications | TBC | TBC | |

Appendix: My Highland Future: A Skills Programme for the Highlands - from Highland Council

The draft model below seeks to distil the feedback from a broad range of stakeholders at the recent Workforce North Summit as it relates specifically to the Highland Council Region. The broad agreement on these elements constitutes a call to action. Pledges will be sought from various private and public sector organisations to build the programme. As with all other elements of this plan, Highland Council and partners warmly welcome feedback on the draft below.

| Why | How | | | What |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Vision for Delivering Our Future Workforce | Key Systems We Will Deploy to Do So | | | Outputs We Will Achieve Together |
| The vision for the future is expressed in a number of key entitlements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">All children and families learn about the benefits of the green energy revolution in the Highlands and how it is at the heart of the UK’s future securityAll children and families learn about this in relation to the world of 2050 that they will live throughAll children experience work related learning about career options in HighlandAll families have access to information and activities to help inform themAdults who require it, have opportunities to reskill themselves to seize opportunitiesHighland can demonstrate a full employment model. | There is a core lifelong offering to engage the 31,000 children in schools and their parents in understanding the vision for the future green economy of the Highlands, which relates to the Regional Workforce and DYW Plan, focusing on construction, engineering, tourism and care: | | | We will enable change by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Deploying partnership resources in a shared apprenticeshipGaining pledges from Highland employers to support & co-invest in agreed programmes and put these on our strategic map of supply side solutionsDemonstrate the performance of our programme and build the confidence of future investors to relocateAlign all sources of funding to the planBuilding a partnership team which can demonstrate its impact (business growth, GVA, job creation)Increasing the numbers of business mentors, STEM ambassadors and work experience programmes across HighlandEnsuring housing supply is available to accommodate the workforce required |
| | Universal Programme What everyone can experience | Targeted Programme Additional support for individuals and groups | Intensive Programme Those most at risk or on elite pathways | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">A major campaign to raise public awareness of the future workforce opportunities in the area and to galvanise talent attractionLearner-centred Early Years Programmes address future careers & unconscious BiasThrough the BGE, family-centred activities to learn about careers and entrepreneurship (including careers fairs, STEM inputs, entrepreneur programmes, class-based learning about the future opportunities and SDS inputs)In the senior phase, all young people have access to careers coaching and mentoring, with specific careers advice and guidance.Better connected virtual and digital offers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">All young people have the chance to experience a vocational qualification as part of their senior phaseAll young people have the chance to experience a digital programme as part of the senior phaseThere will be an expanded offering of Foundation Apprenticeships and Modern Apprenticeships across the partnership (focusing on key economic priorities)Targeted Entrepreneur Development programmes which enable people to undertake the path to creating businessesIncrease opportunities for internship – try before you buy schemes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">School-based interventions for those at greatest risk of exclusion from the labour marketEmployability support for all adults not in employment or training (Employability Pathway)Bespoke vocational path for children with ASNJob academies for Care Experienced Young PeopleOptimise DWP schemes for those with disabilities | |
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Accelerated degree pathways (including Graduate Apprenticeships) for young people incorporating HNC provision in S6, HND and Degrees through UHI (supported by Industry)Increase the numbers of research degrees available in the area as part of an integrated approach to developing Research & Development | |
| The Values Shaping our Partnership | Our Processes and Resources to Support Development | | | Outcomes We Will Deliver Through |
| Key values shape our programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none">We are global in outlook and local in action – and are focused on creating a positive personal, family and economic future for peopleWe are scientific and data intelligent in approach We are focused on ensuring Highland communities thriveWe promote diverse communities, and we are inclusive – especially as we welcome a future workforceWe promote green energy as part of a sustainable future – and look across disciplines to do soWe provide hope for the future, where there is doubt about sustainability. | There is a single team approach across all agencies to delivering the future workforce that the region needs. All partners support and align to these processes to secure our objectives. | | | We measure success by how we enable economic transformation and create a future workforce: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Growing our activity and completion rates for the apprenticeships (FA, MA, GA) and other work-based learningAttracting talent to the area (people by sectors and skills)Retaining young people in the areaDelivering key entitlements in the ‘My Highland Future Programme’ to (successful universal, talented & intensive programmes)Adding value to the economy (measured in GVA and average wage increases)Reducing vacancy rates for employment positionsIncreasing economic activity for key groupsGrowing the numbers of jobs to achieve our area targets. |
| | Strategic Mapping / Data Management Ensuring we are scientific in approach | Partnership Coordination There is a single team approach | Alignment of Resource All partnership resources are transparently shown | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">There is regional mapping of business workforce employment demand by area, sector and company typeThere is regional mapping of supply side solutions by both public and private sector partnersThere is systematic gathering of data to facilitate planning and coordination – based on labour market insights and regional skills assessmentsThe workforce demand is mapped to the related challenge of providing an appropriate future housing supply to create the conditions for success. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Across the partnership there is a single team concept (based on the rugby team structure) for matching supply to demandThere is a central, coordinating team, anchored by Highland Council, but incorporating key partners to enable planning – relating to the DYW boardsExisting, and where required new, sector skills boards enable more effective pathways for specific industry areasSecure industry pledges for aspects of the ‘My Highland Future’ programme’ – to map industry contributions, based on what employers prioritise to solve their recruitment issuesA shared apprenticeship programme to align of potential employees for future opportunities to enable ‘over-supply’ ‘over-training’. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">All partnership resource will align to the broad ‘My Highland Future’ skills planWe align the Green Freeport NICs to the Powerhouse Plan, which is embedded in this ‘My Highland Future Plan’ approachThere is local coordination of programmesThere is a live date base of offeringsMap delivery vehicles for skills (state, 3rd & private sector) & consider their functionality within current and future system deliveryEnable infrastructure investment to build capacity (state, 3rd & private sector)Supply investment from employers to fund the future systems (procurement; levy; THC – Social Value from Renewables, etc).Joint estates planning and integration of services, inc. tertiary education delivery | |
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Skills Development Scotland

1st Floor, Monteith House
11 George Square
Glasgow G2 1DY

www.sds.co.uk

