

WORKFORCE AND SKILLS

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1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

- 1.1 This paper provides an update from the previous COSS meeting which considered the labour market challenges facing the South of Scotland and key actions to address these, and:
- Highlights the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to have on the South of Scotland economy, with a particular focus on implications for the labour market and skills
 - Highlights the extensive collaborative activities that are underway to develop a regionally coherent education and skills led response to the economic and labour market challenges from COVID-19.
 - Sets out future actions which will be progressed in 2021 to respond to the crisis.
- 1.2 It invites the Convention on the South of Scotland (COSS) to:
- Recognise the enhanced partnership working and progress since the last COSS meeting to mitigate the impacts of the labour market crisis across the South of Scotland
 - Ask partners to agree how they can best support delivery against the actions outlined in the paper, which will be driven forward by the new Education and Skills Strategic Coordination Group.

1. THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND ECONOMY

- 2.1 **Although there were some early signs of economic recovery in Quarter 3 with a 16% increase in Scotland's GDP¹, this is likely to slow in Quarter 4 due to the new lockdown measures introduced by the Scottish and UK Governments.** Between September-December 2020 all industries experienced a growth in GDP, with the largest contribution in change driven by Distribution, Hotels and Catering. However, in comparison to the previous year, Scotland's GDP was still 9.5% smaller than the same period in 2019.
- 2.2 Across the South of Scotland, **key sectors such as Tourism, Hospitality and the Creative Industries continue to be severely impacted by the pandemic**, and this will have been exacerbated by the move of the region into Tier 4 restrictions from December 26th 2020. The Scottish Tourism Alliance estimates that around 30,000 jobs in the sector are currently at risk across Scotland with a considerable rise in business closures.² 49% of the workforce remained on furlough between 2nd November and 29th November 2020, compared to 13% across all other industries³. There are currently 8,500 people employed in the Tourism sector and 2,700 in Creative Industries in the region.

¹ Scottish Government (December, 2020) Scotland's GDP 2020, Quarter 3: First Estimate, available online at:

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2020/12/first-estimate-of-gdp-2020-q3/documents/first-estimate-of-gdp-2020-q3-full-publication/first-estimate-of-gdp-2020-q3-full-publication/govscot%3Adocument/GDP%2B2020%2BQ3%2B-%2Bpublication.pdf>

² Scottish Tourism Alliance (December 2020) News: STA Destination Forum meeting with the Cabinet Secretary, available online at:

<https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/destination-forum-meeting-with-the-cabinet-secretary/>

³ Scottish Government (December 2020) Business Impact of Coronavirus Survey (BICS) - weighted Scotland estimates: data to wave 18, available online at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/bics-weighted-scotland-estimates-data-to-wave-18/>

2.3 Alongside the challenges facing certain sectors, Team South of Scotland partners have identified short and medium-term employment opportunities, which were outlined in the previous COSS Workforce and Skills Paper. The opportunities, identified in Table 1, were validated with academic partners and stakeholders across the South of Scotland, as part of several workshops convened by SDS and SFC.

Table 1: Emerging Opportunities in the South of Scotland

Short term employment opportunities	Medium term employment opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and social care • Early years learning and childcare • Customer service • Forestry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital technology roles • Green jobs (incl. renewable energy) • Agriculture/Forestry

2.4 **There are immediate employment opportunities in the Health and Social Care Sector.** Opportunities are driven by a demand for occupations such as Nursing, Consultants, Allied Health Professionals and Healthcare Scientists. There is also a need to develop and enhance pathways into Health and Social Care opportunities, and to improve the digital skills across the sector.

2.5 Mid-term employment opportunities across the South of Scotland in **will be driven and supported by initiatives to support a transition to net-zero emission by 2020**, such as the Borderlands Growth Deal, and the recently published Climate Change Plan Update and the Climate Emergency Action Skills Plan.

2.6 **Occupations experiencing growth in demand across Green Energy include solar panel fabrication, marine turbine designers, carbon storage technicians, and biomass process operatives.** The significant rise in demand for green jobs, heat pump installation, EV infrastructure, up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities are recognised in the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan

2.7 **Initiatives such as the Digital Start Fund will help support a pipeline of new entrants into digital and data jobs by supporting those who are disadvantaged within the labour market to access training and employment.** The increased demand for digital skills will cut across all sectors and emerging occupations with current opportunities including data analysts, data engineers, cyber security analysts and software engineers.

2.8 There are also distinct opportunities in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing industries. Land-based pre-apprenticeship programmes are expected to continue to support pathways into the sector for young people across the region and LANTRA, Scottish Forestry and Forestry Land Scotland have been creating opportunities and pathways for school pupils into forestry.

2.9 **Up to the 8th of December 2020, across the South of Scotland there were a total of 7,299 COVID business support fund grants awarded, valued at over £76.5 million.** The Federation of Small Business identified that the pandemic's impact on cash flow across businesses in the South of Scotland (86%) was higher than the rest of Scotland as a whole (77%), and that many are struggling to make rent and mortgage payments⁴. The introduction of a second lockdown may have long lasting scarring effects on the local economy. Despite

⁴ Federation of Small Businesses (July, 2020) Finding our Feet; Scottish Small Businesses and the Coronavirus Crisis, available online at: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/finding-our-feet.html>

the furlough scheme, many businesses have seen reduced profits over months and the impact of such a loss in income may render many businesses economically unviable.

- 2.10 In addition to the challenges which the South of Scotland is already facing, Brexit is likely to bring additional short to medium term challenges to businesses with concerns around new bureaucracy for exports/imports and potential shortages of supplies. The new Irish Sea border has the potential to cause delays at Cairnryan. The fishing sector has encountered challenges, and in January 2021 a Berwickshire-based seafood business DR Colin encountered delays when exporting a consignment to the EU. Reduced exports could have a devastating impact on those employed on local fishing boats.

3. UPDATE ON THE SCALE OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE

- 3.1 **Recent job postings data demonstrates a slight recovery in recruitment in the South of Scotland with the number of vacancies increasing between April and November 2020 by 45%.** The return of recruitment mirrors the relaxing of COVID measures across some sectors throughout the summer of 2020, and the increased demand for workers across customer service and health and social care roles. However, a new lockdown and the end of the Job Retention Scheme in April 2021, both have the potential to contribute to a significant increase in unemployment.
- 3.2 **Despite this increase though in November 2020, there were only 9,100 job postings available** and job postings were 8% lower compared to November 2019, indicating some caution on the part of employers and lower business confidence levels.
- 3.3 **The jobs with the greatest number of vacancies have been Nurses, Care workers and Home carers, Customer Service occupations, and primary/nursery education teaching professionals.**
- 3.4 **The locations with the most advertised jobs were Dumfries, Galashiels, and Melrose with 3,300, 900, and 500 job postings respectively.** The top specialised skills associated with the job postings were customer service, teaching and teamwork/collaboration, indicating that the demand for softer 'human' and digital skills is increasing.
- 3.5 The most recent **unemployment figures from October 2019- September 2020 show that show that unemployment has risen substantially to 3,000 people aged 16-64 (2.6%)⁵.** This includes 800 unemployed young people, with a higher unemployment rate of 4.5%. National statistics **suggest that has unemployment has risen in Scotland to 4.4% between September and November 2020⁶.**
- 3.6 Data such as the universal credit claimant count shows that COVID-19 continues to have a financial impact on individuals in the South of Scotland, **as the number of individuals seeking universal credit increased from 11,600 in March 2020 to 20,100 in November 2020; an increase of 73%.**

⁵ Annual Population Survey accessed via NOMIS October 2020. Data is for October 2019 – September 2020

⁶ Scottish Government (2020) Labour market trends: January 2021, available online at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/labour-market-trends-january-2021/>

- 3.7 **As of 31st October 2020, 7,000 people were furloughed, comprising 3,000 males and 4,000 females. This accounted for 3.6% of Scotland's total furloughed workforce⁷.** By local authority, both the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway had a substantially higher number of females furloughed in comparison to males.
- 3.8 **Skills Development Scotland has seen an increase PACE redundancy support for employers and individuals across the South of Scotland.** Between April and October 2020, 690 individuals and 35 employers received PACE support. Manufacturing, Wholesale and Retail Trade, Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air conditioning supply, and Accommodation and Food Services sectors have experienced the greatest number of redundancies.
- 3.9 **The labour market impacts of the pandemic will not solely be restricted to those who are in work.** Modelling work undertaken by SDS and validated by team South of Scotland partners suggests that **a broad range of customer groups are likely to see their labour market choices impacted by economic and labour market crisis.** This includes:
- **2,700 estimated secondary school leavers** between winter 2020/21 and winter 2021/22, due to make the transition to education, training, or employment
 - **3,000 school pupils at risk of transition into negative destinations**
 - **1,600 apprentices currently in training** who may be at greater risk of redundancy
 - **1,600 College and University leavers**
 - **Up to 12,000 additional people who face redundancy or unemployment,**
 - Of whom up between 2,000-3,000 could be aged under 25; 20 redundant MAs to date
- 3.10 **Ensuring that young people transition into emerging opportunities across the region will be heightened in the post-BREXIT landscape,** with further skills shortages anticipated across the health and social care sector, agriculture, and land-based sectors. A slower rate of post-Brexit inward migration combined with an ageing population will make it harder for companies to recruit.

4. RESPONDING TO THE LABOUR MARKET CRISIS

- 4.1 Team South of Scotland partners are taking a range of actions to respond to the labour market crisis, which link to and support recent developments such as the [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan](#) and the [Future Skills Action Plan](#). These actions are designed to both stimulate future regional skills demand (4.2-4.4) and effectively address labour market challenges and opportunities (4.5-4.26). In addition, the development of the Regional Economic Strategy will play a crucial role in setting the future direction for the South of Scotland, and this will have positive implications for generating future skills demand.
- 4.2 **Inward Investment** - The previous Workforce and Skills paper recognised that additional regional investment could create more education, training, and employment opportunities. Examples included Alpha Solway, the Neart na Gaoithe Offshore Wind Farm (NnG), with Eyemouth Harbour named as the preferred location for the operations and maintenance

⁷ UK Government (December 2020) Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics: December 2020, available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-december-2020>

base. Team South of Scotland partners are working with these employers to maximise the number of high quality, highly skilled jobs, and training opportunities.

- 4.3 **Borderlands** - Since 28th September 2020 further work has been undertaken to refine the Borderlands South of Scotland Learning Network proposition. The current proposal identifies investment of up to £7m to further develop the South of Scotland Skills and Learning Network, using advanced technology to deliver high quality teaching across the region. The Network will support further and higher education collaboration that allows students and businesses to access flexible training and upskilling that supports businesses and wider economic growth. The intention is to narrow the productivity gap; increase the working age population and deliver on inclusive growth ambitions. Discussions between South of Scotland partners and Scottish Government are ongoing to refine the business case.
- 4.4 **Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal** - projects will better enable the Scottish Borders to address skills and training challenges. For example, the Workforce Mobility project, which is being led by Scottish Borders Council, will unlock challenges around transport beyond the perceived barrier of cost, by seeking to address public transport complexity, network penetration in rural areas, operational models and partnership working. This will provide ideas/interventions that could be replicated across the South of Scotland and potentially the whole of rural Scotland. Work is underway between Borders College and the University of Edinburgh to support the embedding of data skills in education provision through the Data Driven Innovation programme. Further employment and training opportunities will be created through a new strategic housing site at Tweedbank.
- 4.5 **Local Employment Partnerships** – Scottish Borders Council is working with Borders College to co-ordinate a response to the employability and training challenge through the Borders Learning and Skills Partnership. A range of employability measures are now available in the Scottish Borders, including an all age Employment Support Service, ‘No One Left Behind’ employability programmes relating to assisting young people and parental employment, and European Social Fund supported initiatives. In Dumfries and Galloway, following the partnership agreement between Scottish and Local Government, work has been accelerated to implement the collective No One left Behind approach to deliver a flexible, joined up and responsive employability support in the region. The new No One Left Behind delivery plan has been published and there is a nationally agreed partnership framework to support this. This references the labour market response at local, regional and national levels. At a local level this will be aligned via strengthened local employability partnerships which will enable collective leadership and shared commitment across partners. Dumfries & Galloway’s Local Employability and Skills Partnership is working to agree a shared strategy and action plan for 2021-2024. As part of the current response to COVID-19 the partnership has commissioned a Young Person’s Guarantee partnership to align and maximise local delivery and a short-life group to collaborate on a quality-led regional approach to the delivery of Kickstart. In addition, the Employer Engagement Partnership, which reports to the LEP is collaborating on streamlining and collating information and raising awareness events to present joined up approach, enabling us to match local employer opportunities with people who need support looking for employment utilising the most appropriate funding streams.
- 4.6 **Energy Transition** - the SOSE Energy Transition Group is providing support to businesses, and seeking to understand demand, create pathways for new recruits and provide investment

confidence. It is extending support for SMEs in heat pump installations, EV installation, repair and maintenance.

- 4.7 The previous COSS paper also highlighted the range of labour market interventions and enhancements that are available to support businesses and people in the South of Scotland. Team South of Scotland partners are working with individuals and businesses to increase rollout and uptake.
- 4.8 In order to build on these opportunities and to address the labour market challenges Team South of Scotland partners have been continuing work to mobilise a coherent response to this emerging crisis since the last COSS meeting. These activities include:
- Establishing a new regional Education and Skills Strategic Co-ordination Group
 - Developing and communicating a shared evidence base
 - Engaging with colleges and universities to agree a revised regional provision offer
 - Developing innovative Work Based Learning and apprenticeship models
 - Delivering the Digital Skills Hub and Green Energy Skills Academy in the South of Scotland
 - Supporting sectors negatively impacted by COVID-19

Establishing a new Education and Skills Strategic Co-ordination Group in the South of Scotland

- 4.9 At the last COSS meeting members recognised the need to establish a new education and skills group which would focus on delivering key actions to address the skills challenges facing the South of Scotland. Since early October 2020 Team South of Scotland partners and REP members have agreed the role and purpose of this group, and how it fits into the South of Scotland landscape. The REP agreed that an Education and Skills Strategic Co-ordination Group (ESSCG) be created, with Professor Russel Griggs OBE acting as Chair. The new ESSCG will act as a sub-group of the REP and the inaugural meeting took place on 4th February 2021.
- 4.10 It was agreed that the new group would focus on four key areas:
- **Overseeing the implementation of the South of Scotland Regional Skills Investment Plan**
 - **Ensuring a robust, comprehensive, and regionally sensitive evidence base of labour market intelligence** – to influence the shape of future education and skills provision.
 - **Developing innovative approaches to work-based learning delivery in the South of Scotland** – to ensure that real or perceived barriers to participation from employers and individuals are overcome
 - **Co-ordinating a coherent South of Scotland response to labour market challenges** – including COVID-19 impacts, Brexit etc to ensure that the skills system effectively supports economic recovery

Developing and communicating a shared evidence base

- 4.11 Team South of Scotland partners are working closely to ensure that there is a shared evidence base against which actions can be agreed and targeted. This includes reference to

SDS' monthly [Regional Skills Assessments for the South of Scotland](#) and [COVID-19 Insights](#) reports which outline labour market forecasts; furlough and unemployment data; the economic impact of COVID; recovery scenarios; and impacts on businesses, sectors and people. The COVID Insights report also highlights how the South of Scotland compares to other regions across Scotland and provides an overview of support measures for businesses and individuals.

- 4.12 Team South of Scotland partners are now developing a deeper understanding of the challenges facing businesses, by continuing to track potential redundancies through official data and local intelligence. This weekly tracker has been developed to closely monitor both formal notifications of redundancies and to identify companies which may be facing difficulty.
- 4.13 This labour market intelligence will feed into the new Regional Economic Strategy (RES) for the South of Scotland, which will establish an agreed economic baseline and evidence base. The RES will consider a wide range of economic and labour market information. The newly established Education and Skills Strategic Co-ordination Group will support this work by focusing on education and skills related actions to address labour market skills challenges.

Engaging with colleges and universities to agree a revised regional provision offer

- 4.14 A series of workshops have been held with colleges, universities, and wider partners across the South of Scotland to develop a revised offer of provision, which would support vulnerable groups to progress towards areas of labour market opportunity.
- 4.15 As noted in the previous COSS paper, and above in Table 1, stakeholder workshop sessions were held when partners validated several short- and medium-term employment opportunity areas. Colleges and universities have demonstrated incredible flexibility and responsiveness in shifting their focus to economic recovery.
- 4.16 Discussions revealed that provision is now broadly aligned to the areas of labour market opportunity. Borders College and Dumfries and Galloway Colleges have launched a new [website](#) which outlines the range of re-directed provision. Partners recognised the potential for further employment opportunities in Green Energy and Digital because of inward investment, and the policy focus on the Climate Emergency and Net Zero. Academic partners are also supporting delivery of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund, which is now available to SMEs. The Flexible Workforce Development Fund provides an opportunity for colleges, the Open University in Scotland and independent training providers to engage with local employers, including SMEs, to meet their skills needs in their regional economies and playing an important role in supporting economic recovery and growth. The recently enhanced 'up-skilling' funding allocated to universities means that they can tailor short course provision and micro-credentials to those who are unemployed or at threat of redundancy, and where the learning of new skills will help them to return to employment.

Developing innovative Work Based Learning and apprenticeship models

- 4.17 At the previous COSS meeting it was agreed that SOSE would lead on work with SDS and other partners, to clearly articulate the scale and scope of opportunities within sectors,

specifically Food and Drink, Engineering and Textiles. In addition, working closely with specific businesses and employer groups, partners would identify the flexible support needed to drive these actions forward, and explore how they can best be delivered.

- 4.18 In January 2021 Cambridge Policy Consultants were appointed to lead on this work, which will focus on developing a robust evidence base that outlines the current and future demand for work-based learning in the region. This project will be informed by engagement with key employers to explore current challenges and potential innovative approaches. In addition, it will identify best practice and areas for improvement, considering new approaches to delivery of work-based learning. These new approaches would include consideration of the recommendations in the recent [OECD report](#) on apprenticeships within the rural context of the South of Scotland, and recent work undertaken around national and international models by SDS. This OECD report reviewed the German ‘meister’ or master craftsperson model which makes it easier for self-employed individuals and micro businesses to provide work-based learning and opportunities for apprentices. The intention would be to agree workable models which are informed by deep engagement with employers and employer groups. This will consider the most appropriate delivery models that could best overcome real or perceived challenges to taking on apprentices.
- 4.19 This project will run from mid-January to 31st March 2021 and will develop a research report containing key recommendations and actions to be taken forward by partners.

Delivering a Digital Skills Hub and Green Energy Skills Academy in the South of Scotland

- 4.20 The **Digital Skills Hub** (DSH) will redefine college education in the South of Scotland by providing a new model for the delivery of digital skills. It will provide a digital offer, which builds on the SOSEP investment in the Learning and Skills Network and Borderlands investment and which meets the needs of the region’s dispersed geographical population. It will support digital in its widest sense, providing upskilling and retraining for people within the key sectors of the South of Scotland’s economy. The Hub will offer local digital learning, training and development opportunities which are accessible to individuals and employers across the region. Borders College and Dumfries & Galloway College are working in partnership with their local universities, councils, innovation centres, Skills Development Scotland, and industry to establish the DSH. The Hub will not only help the region overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it will also help the South of Scotland to become more competitive by facilitating the development of higher-level digital skills
- 4.21 Borders College and Dumfries & Galloway College are committed to delivering learning, skills, and opportunities to respond to the climate emergency challenges that we all face. Through the development of a **Green Energy Skills Academy**, colleges will help protect employment and promote productivity, in rebuilding the South of Scotland economy and supporting a green recovery.
- 4.22 The two colleges have developed a range of learning and skills opportunities to develop a workforce who are primed to help the local and national strategic objective of a net zero society to support recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although in the early stages, building on existing areas of expertise the colleges are:

- creating clear academic pathways and qualification routes for students who wish to advance their careers in green skills environments.
- delivering a 'green skills' offering which utilise the most modern technology and facilities to provide all learners with a high-class learning experience within the green skills academy.
- developing in areas of expertise around the themes of energy transmission and transitions, decarbonisation of heat, transport, and sustainable construction.
- developing a workforce which is suitably trained and equipped to meet the targets of a net zero society.

Supporting sectors negatively impacted by COVID-19

- 4.23 **Forestry/Land Based** –Dumfries & Galloway Council will hold a contract for Kickstart and the Young Person's Guarantee to support the forestry sector. Discussions are currently underway with Scottish Forestry and Forestry & Land Scotland to expand the number of Modern Apprenticeships in the sector and a Forestry Skills Action Plan has been developed. National Transition Training Fund monies have been awarded for a forestry road haulage project from January to March 2021. SOSE, SFC and SDS are working with the SRUC to support the 'Growing Rural Talent' initiative.
- 4.24 **Creative Industries** – the Stove Network in partnership with Sleeping Giants, is aiming to deliver a young person led approach to co-design and deliver training around employability, sector and meta-skills development, routes to work and creative business start-up for the rural creative economy.
- 4.25 **Food and Drink-** SOSE and SDS are working with the Food and Drink sector to develop a new project proposal which aims to deliver components of the Modern Apprenticeship in Food & Drink manufacturing excellence, and up-skilling to businesses across the South of Scotland.
- 4.26 **Tourism** – Scottish Agri-Tourism is working with SOSE and SDS to develop a proposal that would support farmers to diversify their businesses into agri-tourism activity supporting the growth of the sector in rural areas across the South of Scotland. Investment in the right projects of scale could create a sizeable jump in employment linked to those core businesses and create cross-over opportunities for those who may find themselves unemployed from traditional hospitality roles because of COVID-19 impacts.
- 4.27 In partnership with South of Scotland Destination Alliance, South of Scotland Enterprise and both Local Authorities, Visit Scotland have created a [South of Scotland Recovery Programme](#) on [visitscotland.org](#) providing tourism businesses in the region with a one-stop-shop of cross agency business support to help address the challenges being faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and to help businesses and employees prepare for recovery by investing in industry specific digital skill sets. The programme includes a range of business support activities and resources to help businesses and their employees navigate the impacts of the pandemic.
- 4.28 A virtual **Leadership, Management and Supervisory training programme** is being administered by the Hospitality Industry Trust Scotland in collaboration and support from all sectors. It has been designed to motivate and develop top talent to support recovery from the

significant impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had across the Tourism and Hospitality sectors in Scotland. This programme will give the future leaders of the industry the skills, knowledge and networks to make an impact when the green shoots of recovery appear.

5. FUTURE ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN FORWARD IN 2021

- 5.1 Although the Job Retention Scheme has been extended the South of Scotland remains on the cusp of an unprecedented unemployment crisis when furlough ends. Recent unemployment scenarios show that an unemployment rate of 8% would equate to 9,800 people out of work, and if this rises to 15% the figure could be as high as 18,300. This paper sets out key activities which are being undertaken by Team South of Scotland partners to continue to address this crisis. Future actions need to build on these activities and focus on what else needs to be done to mitigate the worst effects of the expected rapid increase on unemployment and the impact on peoples' labour market choices. The role of Community Planning Partnerships and local employability partnerships will be crucial in terms of providing a coherent and effective response.
- 5.2 Through the collaborative work undertaken by Team South of Scotland partners we have identified several key additional priority areas for 2021. These include:
- Agreeing the optimal balance of skills investment between 1) traditional academic provision; 2) work-based learning provision; 3) re-skilling for workers facing redundancy and 4) up-skilling of the existing South of Scotland workforce, to ensure that the South of Scotland is able to respond to ongoing labour market disruption and provide a highly skilled workforce for the future
 - Reviewing the level of uptake/drawdown for various UK, Scottish and Local Government support measures for businesses and people and analysing post furlough labour market changes
 - Agreeing key actions from the Regional Skills Investment Plan to be taken forward
 - Continuing to offer scaled up PACE support for those facing redundancy
 - Supporting the development of the Regional Economic Strategy to understand where future skills and jobs will emerge and support vulnerable groups into employment
 - Maintaining and expanding education, training, and careers opportunities for young people
 - Implementing the recommendations from the innovative apprenticeships/WBL research
 - Delivering the revised education, training and skills provision offer to capitalise on short- and medium-term employment opportunities, and support up-skilling and re-skilling
 - Continuing to expand the digital skills and learning offer across the South of Scotland

Key Discussion questions:

- 1) Does the updated analysis of labour market challenge outlined here resonate with the experience of COSS partners?***
- 2) What more can be done to meet the immediate labour market and skills challenges presented by COVID***
- 3) How do we ensure that the South of Scotland is best positioned to capitalise on the medium-term growth opportunities from a workforce and skills perspective?***

6. CALL TO ACTION

6.1 COSS members are invited to:

- Recognise the enhanced partnership working and progress since the last COSS meeting to mitigate the impact of the labour market crisis and seek a shared commitment to continuing this approach.
- Ask partners to agree how they can best support delivery against the actions outlined above, which will be driven forward by the new Education and Skills Strategic Coordination Group.