

**Convention of the South of Scotland
28 September 2020**

(Paper 3)

WORKFORCE AND SKILLS - RESPONDING TO THE EMERGING LABOUR MARKET CRISIS

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1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

1.1. This paper:

- Highlights the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the South of Scotland economy, with a particular focus on implications for the labour market and skills;
- Highlights the extensive collaboration that is underway to develop a regionally coherent response to the economic and labour market challenges from COVID-19; and
- Sets out a series of actions that are underway and will need to be progressed to respond to the crisis.

1.2. It invites the Convention of the South of Scotland (COSS) to:

- Recognise the extensive collaborative partnership working, that has been undertaken by Team South of Scotland partners to date in respect of the emerging unemployment crisis;
- Endorse the underlying principles in para 7.2 that have informed the development of the labour market and skills response to the crisis;
- Ask partners to continue to contribute to developing and implementing an effective and co-ordinated labour market response to COVID challenges in the South of Scotland, which will be driven forward through a new Education and Skills Programme Board. This Programme Board will function as a sub-group of the REP;
- Seek views on how the emerging national labour market interventions can best be deployed in a regional context in the South of Scotland, and how COSS members can influence the future shape of the national 'offer';
- Ask the Education and Skills Programme Board to raise key issues around the labour market challenges and response to COSS, and report on progress.

2. COVID-19: THE IMPACT ON THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND ECONOMY

2.1 Although COVID-19 is primarily a health crisis, it has also precipitated an unprecedented economic crisis. **Scotland's GDP contracted by 18.9% in April compared to 20.4% for the UK overall.** This is the deepest recession on record. While the economy has begun to recover as lockdown restrictions have been eased, GDP was still 22% lower in July than it was prior to the pandemic. Looking to the medium term OCEA, Oxford Economics and the Fraser of Allander Institute all predict that pre-crisis levels of growth are unlikely to return until 2022.

2.2 **The South of Scotland economy was significantly exposed to the immediate economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.** The previous COSS 'Demographics and Skills' paper highlighted that the South of Scotland faces challenges such as fewer people of working age to fill the available jobs; an increasingly dependent population; a ten-year decline in the numbers of young people in the region and the need to attract new talent. COVID is exacerbating these challenges. The Scottish Government's Rural, Environmental Science

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and Analytical Services (RESAS) Unit produced a paper on the Rural Economy in the region, indicating that in April 2020, 44% of jobs in the Scottish Borders and 40% in Dumfries and Galloway were in sectors that are most exposed to the economic impact of COVID-19. These include manufacturing and construction; retail and wholesale; accommodation and food services and arts, entertainment and recreation.

- 2.3 According to the Oxford Economics Vulnerability Index the **Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway are the 3rd and 5th most vulnerable local authorities in Scotland respectively** (based on economic diversity, business environment and digital connectivity).
- 2.4 Almost all sectors have felt the adverse economic effects of the pandemic. **Since March every industry sector in the South of Scotland, except for food retail, has seen a decrease in turnover from the same point last year.** However, the scale and depth of the challenge has not been felt evenly. The largest falls in GDP have been in sectors that ceased or paused trading such as tourism; arts, culture and entertainment; administration and business services.
- 2.5 **As a rural area the South of Scotland faces a disproportionately negative impact from COVID because of high levels of small businesses, self-employment and seasonal work.** Small and micro businesses are very vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19. In 2019, there were over 12,000 private businesses registered in the South of Scotland. The majority of these were SMEs or micro-businesses employing fewer than 50 people and 89% of businesses in the region have 10 employees or less.
- 2.6 In **some parts of the region there is also a high dependence on a small number of larger employers**, which creates challenges if these businesses face challenges due to COVID. There is often limited labour mobility in rural areas, which means subsequently fewer opportunities (or less access) to training, education and employment.
- 2.7 As highlighted in Paper 2, 'Regional Economic Impacts and Supporting Recovery - Annex' **the level of support provided to businesses in the South of Scotland has been unprecedented.** In total the South of Scotland had received £87m in COVID-19 business support grants as of 4th August 2020. This includes 7,172 applications for the Small Business Grant Scheme and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grant Scheme (£75m), and £1 million for Creative, Tourism, Hospitality and Bed and Breakfast industries. In addition, as of end June 2020, the total value of claims to support self-employed businesses is over £33m.

3. IMMEDIATE IMPACTS ON THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND LABOUR MARKET

- 3.1 These economic challenges have already had immediate impacts on the labour market in the south of Scotland. **The number of job vacancies in the South of Scotland was 22% lower at the beginning of July 2020 compared to the same point a year ago.** This was due to lockdown restrictions impacting on business confidence, viability, and financial security.
- 3.2 Since the easing of lockdown, there has been an increase in new job postings across the region suggesting a return of some recruitment particularly in Dumfries, Galashiels and Hawick. **Although the number of job postings has increased many of these jobs are lower-skilled, lower-paid or offer low job security.** Between June and August 2020 permanent job postings increased by 14 per cent from 426 to 484, compared to a 41 per cent

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increased across Scotland. Temporary job postings across the region increased by 40 per cent from 121 to 170, this compares to a 60 per cent increase across Scotland.

- 3.3. **The pandemic has also presented some opportunities for businesses in the region.** Alpha Solway has secured a £53m order from NHS Scotland to make over 230 million surgical masks and 2 million visors to meet demand for Scotland's health and social care sectors until summer 2021. It is anticipated that this order will create approximately 200 new jobs, in addition to the 50 already created since the start of the pandemic.
- 3.4 The ILO Unemployment data available for Scotland shows an increase of 0.3 percentage points between March - May 2020 to May - July 2020, to 4.6%, c.128,000 people. This also represents an increase of 0.6 percentage points on the same period last year (18,000 people). (N.B. ILO data is not available at the regional/LA level).
- 3.5 **The claimant count for the South of Scotland in August 2020 was 8,960, representing an increase of 4,100 people since February (an increase of 84%).** This was lower than the 97% increase across Scotland over the same period. Young people have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, with the 16-24 claimant count increasing by 945 people in the South of Scotland over the same period (93%); however, this is lower than the 115% increase at the national level (c. 25,000 people).
- 3.6 **Between March and July 2020, the number of people on Universal Credit in the South of Scotland increased by 8,400 people (72%), to 20,043.** This was slightly lower than the Scottish increase experienced over the same period – 78%.
- 3.7 **The number of 16-24-year olds unemployed between May - July 2020 was 51,200 (across Scotland);** this represents an increase of c.8,600 people (20%) from March - May 2020. **This puts the Scottish unemployment rate for 16-24-year olds at 14.5%** (an increase of 1.8 percentage points since March-May).
- 3.8 According to PACE data between April and July 2020, 421 individuals were made redundant across 18 employer sites. This is higher in comparison to the same period in 2019, where 164 individuals were made redundant across 10 employer sites. However, the scale of the challenge based on intelligence from team South of Scotland partners suggests that actual and potential redundancies could be two or three times greater than official HR1 notifications
- 3.9 At the end of July there were 28,200 individuals on furlough in the South of Scotland - an increase of 3% from the end of June. This equates to around one quarter of the regional workforce (24%).

4. AN EMERGING LABOUR MARKET CRISIS

- 4.1 While it is clear that the economic impacts of the pandemic on the South of Scotland have been severe, this has not as yet played through in the labour market data on unemployment. This is for a number of reasons:
- **Unemployment is typically a lagging indicator** and the latest data available (at the time of writing) only covers up to July 2020;
 - The **high uptake of business support grants in the region will have had an important role in protecting business viability** through the period of lockdown;
 - The **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) will have had a significant effect in maintaining jobs** since the onset of the pandemic.

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- 4.2. Looking across the range of economic and labour market data collated by Team South of Scotland partners we believe, that we are on the cusp of a significant labour market crisis:
- **Of the more than 28,200 people currently on furlough in the region – it is unlikely all of them will return to employment.** Evidence from the RBS Jobs survey highlights that 3% of all firms using the CJRS do not expect to bring any staff back from furlough, while 47% anticipate bringing back at least 50% of staff from furlough;
 - As the CJRS scheme tapers off through late summer and **in the absence of any extension from the UK government, it is highly likely that unemployment will increase rapidly from the end of October;**
 - **There is strong evidence that, in spite of the easing of lockdown restrictions, many businesses are still operating at less than optimal capacity.** A recent Scottish Chambers survey suggested that 32% of firms operating at or less than 25% of capacity; 22% are operating at 51 to 75% capacity and only 25% are operating at 76 to 100%;
 - **Businesses are reporting continuing levels of uncertainty and there are a number of other potential economic shocks on the horizon** including end of the Brexit transition period in December 2020; the end of VAT and Business Rate deferrals in Spring 2021; and the prospect of Business recovery loans needing to be repaid in the summer of 2021;
- 4.3 **On their own, in concert, each of these factors is highly likely to both contribute to a significant rise in unemployment and to dampen any planned employer recruitment activity.** This is reflected in the labour market modelling undertaken by the SG's Office of the Chief Economic Adviser, Fraser of Allander and Oxford Economics who all forecast that **unemployment across Scotland could rise to between 10-15% by the end of 2022.**
- 4.4 In terms of the South of Scotland **an increase in the unemployment rate to 10% would equate to there being 12,000 people unemployed (+9,000 from pre-pandemic levels), while an increase to 15% would equate to 18,000 people being unemployed (+12,000 from pre-pandemic levels)**
- 4.5 **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:
- **1,800 secondary school leavers** 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** who are due to complete their studies in 2020;
 - **Up to 12,000 additional people who face redundancy or unemployment,**
 - Of whom up between 2,000 – 3,000 could be aged under 25

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5. DEVELOPING A COHERENT RESPONSE TO THE EMERGING CRISIS

5.1 Team South of Scotland partners have been working to mobilise a coherent response to this emerging crisis since July 2020. This approach has involved:

- **Developing and communicating a shared evidence base** – Monthly COVID-19 Labour Market Insights data from SDS highlighting the impact on COVID-19 on the economy, and implications for sectors and people in the South of Scotland.
- **Tracking potential redundancies through official data and local intelligence** from Team South of Scotland partners. A weekly tracker has been developed to closely monitor both formal notifications of redundancies and to identify companies which may be facing difficulty.
- **Developing products and services to respond to the immediate challenges** – including a dedicated SDS helpline for anyone whose employment, learning or training has been impacted by COVID-19; a new My World of Work jobs hub; an online learning portal; employment and redundancy support; and a COVID relief grant for training providers.
- **Providing business grant support and advice** - around £73m in grants has been distributed across the South of Scotland. SOSE is working to support businesses affected by COVID-19.
- **Delivering a series of workshops involving national agencies, SOSE, the two local authorities, colleges and third sector** to identify the scale of the challenge, immediate and mid-term opportunities and the capacity of partners to respond.

5.2 At the stakeholder workshop sessions partners identified a number of short- and medium-term employment opportunity areas.

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 (including renewable energy) • Agriculture • Forestry

6. THE NATIONAL RESPONSE

6.1 The recent Scottish Government (SG) response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery endorses a move towards a ‘robust, resilient, wellbeing economy’. Key actions include enhanced regional collaboration, the importance of community wealth building, increased support for digitalisation and maximising the value of natural capital.

6.2 The SG’s [Programme for Government](#) (PfG) sets out the Government’s focus on dealing with the economic, health and social crises which COVID has brought to the country and its regions, but also how this brings an opportunity to deliver activity differently, and build a fairer

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and stronger economy to address the deep seated challenges which the country faces. In helping drive this response, the PfG sets out a number of commitments, including:

- **A £60m Youth Guarantee**, guaranteeing every 16-24-year-old an opportunity at a university, college, apprenticeship, employment, or volunteering programme;
- An **initial £25m National Training Transition Fund** to support retraining opportunities;
- **A focus on low carbon recovery, including a £100m Green Jobs fund**, investment in decarbonisation of properties, and investment for decarbonising the industrial and manufacturing sectors;
- Increased funding to **£20m for the Flexible Workforce Development Fund**;
- **Additional investment of £23m to help more digitally excluded people get online**;
- **Investment of £150m in the forestry sector** over the next five years;
- **Additional £10m support for redundant apprentices through ‘Adopt an Apprentice’**;
- **£3.7m for Individual Training Accounts.**

6.3 In the response to the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board report, **SG identified the potential for the Youth Guarantee to act as an anchor for rural areas, and notes the importance of the transition training fund for those facing redundancy and unemployment**, as well as upskilling those in areas hardest hit by COVID.

6.4 The SG has also published an [Economic Recovery Implementation Plan](#), with a focus on recovery and economic growth post-COVID. The paper outlines SG actions to support recovery, actions at a national and regional level, the key principles of recovery, and the key opportunities for the region in future (e.g. digitalisation and improved regional attraction for new citizens through remote working, and green jobs).

6.5 The UK Government has launched the ‘[Kickstart](#)’ scheme, which provides funding to employers to create new 6-month job placements for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. Funding will cover 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week, the National Insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions.

6.6 This is part of the UK Government’s ‘[Plan for Jobs](#)’, and aims to create hundreds of thousands of new, fully funded jobs across the UK. The first placements are likely to be available in November 2020.

6.7 Other [measures](#) include the ability for employers with under 250 staff to reclaim Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) for employees unable to work due to coronavirus; support for self-employed; SSP from day 1 for those who cannot work due to COVID and the [Job Retention Scheme](#).

7. THE EMERGING RESPONSE AND NEXT STEPS

7.1 The South of Scotland is on the cusp of an unprecedented unemployment crisis and this paper has set out some of the early work that has been undertaken by Team South of Scotland partners to begin to address this crisis. The challenge now is to urgently 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

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Planning Partnerships and local employability partnerships will be crucial in terms of providing a coherent and effective response.

7.2 Through the collaborative work undertaken by team South of Scotland partners we have identified a number of underlying principles that should inform our collective response. Our response should be based on:

- **Team South of Scotland Partners working collaboratively and with purpose** to address these challenges;
- A clear focus on **supporting, maintaining and creating employment opportunities in the South of Scotland** to creating the best opportunities for people to move into work in the short and medium term;
- **Exhausting every effort to create and maintain employment opportunities for the regions young people;**
- A clear focus on **delivering education, skill and training provision that supports people into work in the short term – and develops the skills the region will require post-COVID;**
- **A scale up of support for those facing redundancy and connecting them to appropriate labour market interventions;**
- **Meeting the distinctive needs of all of the customer groups who are likely to be impacted by the economic and labour market impacts of COVID** (school leavers, those at risk of a negative destination, college / university leavers, apprentices at risk of redundancy; young people facing unemployment and older unemployed workers)

Team South of Scotland partners working collaboratively and with purpose

7.3 To drive forward the labour market response in the South of Scotland, and address these challenges, the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership has endorsed the creation of a new Education and Skills Programme Board. This will function as a sub-group of the REP and will as a strategic forum for planning and delivery of education and skills interventions, drawing in additional resource as required. It will oversee delivery of the Regional Skills Investment Plan and maximise collective resources to respond to education and skills challenges. An early action of the Programme Board will be to help to shape the £7m Borderlands Deal skills proposition to meet the needs of regional growth sectors.

7.4 The Regional Skills Investment Plan will continue to address skills and labour market challenges in the South of Scotland and will focus on the skills and training needs of employers in growth areas (see 7.7 below). Although the RSIP was developed pre-COVID the challenges identified remain relevant. A sharper focus is now required as the crisis has exacerbated some of the regional challenges as noted above. The Programme Board will agree key priority actions for the remainder of 2020-21 and begin engagement with key employers in areas of growth to identify and meet their skills needs.

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Creating and maintaining employment opportunities in the region in the short and medium term

- 7.5 The newly formed REP and SOSE will commission and develop a **new economic strategy** for the region, addressing support that will be required to respond to COVID challenges. SDS, SFC and wider partners will support this work. This economic strategy will consider how the South of Scotland can capitalise on the likely opportunities arising in primary industries, including natural assets, capital, business and physical infrastructure already in place, as well as management skills in this sector. The South of Scotland will seek to build on its existing strengths and opportunities across sectors such as forestry and land-based industries and supporting sectors (e.g. road haulage, warehousing and storage, etc), as well as opportunities for businesses to innovate or diversify (e.g. moves towards rural or agri-tourism; adventure tourism). The region is also well equipped to capitalise on green recovery and climate emergency opportunities.
- 7.6 In tandem with the development of the new economic strategy, partners will seek to maximise new training, employment and skills opportunities arising from upcoming regional investment. This paper has already noted the opportunities arising from the investment at Alpha Solway in Annan. Other opportunities include the investment by EDF Renewables in the creation of their Neart na Gaoithe Offshore Wind Farm (NnG), with Eyemouth Harbour named as the preferred location for the operations and maintenance base. These investments both have the potential to create high quality, highly skilled and well-paid jobs.
- 7.7 SDS, Team South of Scotland partners and the NHS are exploring the role that the public sector might play as 'anchor employers', in the region, and the potential to provide employment opportunities, particularly for young people. There would involve identifying common competencies and roles in demand across these employers and how we can direct support to expand their employment & training programmes to offer additional opportunities during this critical period.
- 7.8 It is also important to note that despite the scale and complexity of the challenges that the South of Scotland faces, COVID-19 will also create opportunities to implement creative interventions build on the region's existing strengths and create more jobs and training opportunities. For example:
- There have been signs of recovery, business diversification and innovative business models in response to the pandemic;
 - Digitalisation and remote working strengthen the opportunities for employment, education and training in rural areas;
 - New sectors such as renewables and carbon reduction will allow the South of Scotland to support a transition to net zero and play a role in green recovery;
 - The region has a vibrant history and cultural heritage which will attract people to the region;
 - COVID-19 has perhaps had the potential to heighten the attractiveness of rural regions and their remoteness, as places to live, and this may generate new labour supply; and
 - There is a strong entrepreneurial spirit across sectors in the South of Scotland.

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Creating and maintaining employment opportunities for young people

- 7.9 Continuing to support young people to progress into apprenticeships in areas of opportunity across the region will continue to be a key focus. Modern Apprenticeship numbers have risen 16% over the last seven years, and further expansion areas for apprenticeships have been identified. Feedback from Forestry Scotland demonstrates that MAs are working extremely well for land-based sectors, and with further growth there will be more opportunities available.
- 7.10 It is critically important to continue to promote the uptake of Foundation Apprenticeships in the South of Scotland, to help young people to avoid negative destinations. Foundation Apprenticeship numbers have been growing steadily in the South of Scotland, with expected growth in the latest cohort for 2020. Seven of the twelve FA Frameworks are now available in the South of Scotland.
- 7.11 Every young person aged between 16 and 24 in the South of Scotland, will be guaranteed an opportunity at university/college, on an apprenticeship programme, or in employment including work experience or participating in a formal volunteering programme. This will be supported by the **Job Start Grant** and **apprenticeship funding**. Nationally there is:
- £30 million through local authorities to help local partnerships to deliver employability support for young people
 - £10 million to create additional opportunities in Colleges
 - £10 million additional funding for Developing the Young Workforce, the Scottish Government's internationally recognised Youth Employment Strategy
 - £10 million to support Pathways to Apprenticeships

Delivering education, training and skills provision that supports people to capitalise on short-term and medium-term employment opportunities

- 7.12 A potential 'Pathways to Apprenticeships' initiative could also see those leaving school with fewer options, through no fault of their own, supported through challenging and uncertain times. This would help to meet the needs of employers and young people in the South of Scotland, to support the recruitment and retention of apprentices in key employment opportunity areas.
- 7.13 Two workshop sessions, involving SDS, SFC, SOSE, the two local authorities, colleges and the third sector have been run to re-align education, skills and training provision to areas of labour market opportunity for young people in the South of Scotland. The outcome of this work will be a revised curriculum offer with a sharper focus on attracting, retaining and progressing young people towards job opportunities in the regional labour market.
- 7.14 The SG has increased its investment in the FE sector to support apprenticeship levy paying employers from £10m to £13m in 20-21, as part of a wider expansion of the Fund to £20m this year. SG will shortly provide details on how the remaining £7m will be deployed to respond directly to the upskilling requirements within the current labour market.
- 7.15 Individuals in the South of Scotland who have lost their jobs, or whose jobs are at risk will be able to access a National Transition Training Fund (£25m) to help provide re-training in areas of opportunity. This will launch in autumn 2020 and support up to 10,000 people.

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- 7.16 Dumfries and Galloway College and Borders College have developed proposals to expand the Learning and Skills Network to focus additionally on digital skills and green energy opportunities

Scaling up support for those facing redundancy

- 7.17 PACE partners have held regular meetings to design and develop new service delivery that aims to compliment the work of the DWP. The service will remain a national offering but with a local focus to allow for a more formal relationship between partners. The new delivery model will offer a help line which triages callers and refers them to further Careers Information, Advice and Guidance support. It also includes a series of webinars, co-delivered online by SDS and partners.
- 7.18 The proposed 'future' model for PACE has been submitted to SG and the Ministerial PACE partnership and will continue to progress discussions with DWP and Local Authorities to finalise the service model, review the customer journey and identify gaps in provision.
- 7.19 Borders College, Dumfries and Galloway College and SDS are developing a digital literacy pathfinder intervention which aims to provide entry level digital skills training to older workers affected by redundancies.

Meeting the needs of the different customer groups impacted by the economic impacts of COVID-19

- 7.20 In addition to the actions underway that have been highlighted above, there have been a range of other activities undertaken to meet the needs of other customer groups. In terms of those young people in school at risk of transition to negative destinations, SDS has undertaken targeted engagement with over 40% (3,000) of S4-S6 pupils the South of Scotland. Online support has been put in place where direct access to schools has not been possible.
- 7.21 Apprentices at risk of redundancy will continue to be supported by the 'Adopt an Apprentice' scheme. An extra £10m is being allocated to this fund by the Scottish Government. This initiative provides a financial incentive of £2,000 for employers to take on a redundant apprentice (or £5,000 in the Oil and Gas industry) This also includes Graduate Apprenticeships. Although there have only been 10 redundant apprentices to date in the South of Scotland, this could increase rapidly from the end of October.
- 7.22 One customer group that appears currently underserved by existing opportunities in the South of Scotland are College and University leavers, and as a result young people are leaving the region. This is causing the working age population to shrink further. It is critical therefore to increase the number of opportunities for college leavers and graduates. The effective deployment of Youth Guarantee will be important, in addition to the potential deployment of new initiatives such as graduate into business models.

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Key Discussion questions:

- 1) Do COSS members agree with the scale of the labour market challenge outlined in this paper?***
- 2) What more can be done to create and identify immediate and mid-term employment opportunities in the South of Scotland?***
- 3) How can partners work most effectively together and lever sufficient resources to meet the scale of the challenge?***
- 4) How do we ensure that education, skills and training provision meets the needs of all customer groups impacted by the labour market effects of COVID-19?***

8. CALL TO ACTION

8.1 COSS members are invited to:

- Recognise the extensive collaborative partnership working, that has been undertaken by Team South of Scotland partners to date in respect of the emerging unemployment crisis;
- Endorse the underlying principles in para 7.2 that have informed the development of the labour market and skills response to the crisis;
- Ask partners to continue to contribute to developing and implementing an effective and co-ordinated labour market response to COVID challenges in the South of Scotland, which will be driven forward through a new Education and Skills Programme Board. This Programme Board will function as a sub-group of the REP;
- Seek views on how the emerging national labour market interventions can best be deployed in a regional context in the South of Scotland, and how COSS members can influence the future shape of the national 'offer';
- Ask the Education and Skills Programme Board to raise key issues around the labour market challenges and response to COSS, and report on progress.