

# **Scottish Government response to the report of the Independent Commission for the Land-based Learning Review**

**April 2024**

# Scottish Government response to the report of the Independent Commission for the Land-based Learning Review

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## **Ministerial foreword**

Our ambition is to create a fairer, greener, wellbeing economy, enabling businesses to set up and grow sustainably across Scotland. It is critical that people now, and in the future, can develop skills and knowledge to fulfil their potential and to grasp the opportunities of a just transition to net zero. Ensuring our learning system equips people with the skills and knowledge they and our sectors require is vital to this.

We very much welcome the report of the independent Commission for the Review of Land-based Learning and thank the Commission members for what is a wide-ranging review of education, training and work-based learning pathways from early years to adults in land-based and aquaculture sectors.

The Scottish Government is taking forward a bold and holistic programme of Education and Skills Reform, informed by independent reviews and reports, including the Skills Delivery Landscape Review<sup>1</sup> and Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment<sup>2</sup>, guided by the views and experiences of those at the heart of education and skills in Scotland. Our response to this Review complements this future focus to deliver system-wide change that improves outcomes for those teaching, learning, or working with the education system.

Our response also shows our commitment to attracting more people – especially women and young people – into our land-based and aquaculture sectors and equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed, informed by improved evidence gathering and its use. This will be achieved by working together; public bodies, businesses, voluntary organisations and people; to contribute to Scotland becoming a wealthier, fairer, greener and more equal country.

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands  
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

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<sup>1</sup> [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation: Skills Delivery Landscape Review - Final Report](#)

<sup>2</sup> [It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: report](#)

## Executive Summary

The Commission for the Land-Based Learning Review (the Review) reported to Scottish Government in January 2023. Ministers have accepted or accepted in principle all of the recommendations.

The Commission remit was to provide Ministers with evidence-based recommendations to attract and equip more people, particularly women and young people, with the skills and knowledge needed to work in land-based and aquaculture sectors. This included how to provide opportunities and qualifications through learning pathways in early years, school, college, university and work-based learning. The Review was underpinned by cross-cutting themes:

- Equality and Inclusion;
- Fair Work; and
- Delivering a just transition to a net-zero and a climate resilient Scotland.

### Scottish Government response

The 22 recommendations cover a wide range of issues: from perception and awareness of the land-based and aquaculture sectors to the role of schools; from further and higher education to funding and policy, and from data to Just Transition. The Scottish Government response to the 22 recommendations is:

- To note one is complete (Rec 6, contribute to Skills Landscape Review).
- Accept 10.
- Accept in principle 11.

How we take recommendations forward will be considered as we develop the Implementation Plan and in the context of broader prioritisation in what are set to remain challenging economic conditions and the similarly challenging fiscal outlook for the Scottish Government.

### Reform of Education and Skills in Scotland

The response to the Review has been considered in the broader context of recent education and skills reviews. The *Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape*<sup>3</sup> and the *Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment*<sup>4</sup> reported in 2023, with recommendations on the skills and qualifications landscape and are being considered by Scottish Government. In the “Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills”<sup>5</sup> Ministers committed to reform and accepted the basis of most of the recommendations in the Skills Delivery Landscape review. The Land-Based Learning Review raised many similar matters, notably the need for a more responsive and agile education and skills system.

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<sup>3</sup> [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation: Skills Delivery Landscape Review - Final Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> [It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: report](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills Initial Priorities](#)

Any reform of education and skills will take time, so the specific Review actions related to this are likely to be over a period of years. We are considering how existing services can be maintained as we make any transition. Similarly, the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill is proposed as the way to progress recommendations for agriculture education and training and the way in which these are implemented will be dependent on the bill processes and timescales.

The overarching Recommendation (1) was to, “Work towards the reframing of the land-based sectors as nature-based”. We recognise there are differing views on reframing these sectors under “Nature-Based Sector” for certain purposes and agree there may be benefits from such a change, but research and sector engagement is required to inform a final decision on such a potentially significant move.

### **Next Steps**

We will produce an Implementation Plan with relevant stakeholders to monitor progress and contribute to meeting Recommendation 15 for an annual review of progress.

## **Introduction**

This is the Scottish Government response to the Commission for the Land-Based Learning Review (the Review). It sets out our response to the Review recommendations and how they are or will be taken forward.

## **Commission for the Land-based Learning Review – Purpose and Scope**

The Commission for the Land-Based Learning Review was established in August 2021 and reported to Scottish Ministers in January 2023. Its remit was to provide Ministers with evidence-based recommendations to attract and equip people, particularly women and young people, with the skills and knowledge needed to work in Scotland's land-based and aquaculture sectors.

The review covered a wide range of sectors: Agriculture; Aquaculture; Biodiversity; Environmental Conservation; Equine; Fisheries Management; Food and Drink Processing; Forestry, Trees and Timber; Game and Wildlife; Horticulture; Land-based Engineering and Peatland Restoration.

It covered learning pathways in early years, school, senior phase, colleges and universities, work-based, career changers, apprenticeships, careers advice and information, employability support and continuing professional development. The work of the Review was underpinned by the cross-cutting themes of:

- Equality and Inclusion;
- Fair Work; and
- Delivering a just transition to a net-zero and a climate resilient Scotland.

The Scottish Government committed to publish our response to the Review of Land-based Learning in the Policy Prospectus 'Equality, opportunity, community: New Leadership'. The 2023/24 Programme for Government sets out that the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands will work closely with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to continue to support rural skills, acting on recommendations from the Land-Based Learning Review and taking account of the wider reforms of the education and skills system that the Scottish Government will be implementing.

## **Background – Attracting and Equipping More People for the Sector**

Land-based and aquaculture sectors (the sector) operate across Scotland in rural and urban spaces. A key priority is for there to be sufficient people with the skills and knowledge to meet both short and long term need in these sectors and there are many issues that impact on the size and composition of the workforce.

A large proportion of these sectors are in islands and rural areas where there is a lower proportion of population of working age compared to the rest of Scotland. There is also a higher proportion of people aged 45 and over and this is particularly true for the age range of 65 and over in remote rural areas.<sup>6</sup> It is projected that population growth will be at a lower rate than urban areas, and there will be a decrease in population in some rural areas. This is a result in part from projected outward migration of young people. Many businesses currently report shortages in numbers and appropriately skilled workforce. In the sector, as across the rural economy, many employers are micro and small enterprises in which there can be less capacity and knowledge to support staff training and education. Amongst the potential workforce, there can be lack of knowledge of these sectors, including unfair negative perceptions and consequently they are often not considered as employment and career options.

## **Context : Post School Education and Skills**

Since the Commission was asked to undertake their Review in 2021/22, there have been a number of other reports published that will have implications for the future of education and skills in Scotland. In particular, the Skills Delivery Landscape Review<sup>7</sup> made recommendations for significant reform of the post-school system including the public body landscape, skills planning processes, funding of post-school provision and employer and industry engagement. The Commission also raised similar matters, including on adapting the education and skills system to be more responsive and agile so it is able to better support our economic needs and ambition.

The basis of many recommendations in the Skills Delivery Landscape Review have been accepted by Ministers in the Initial Priorities Paper<sup>8</sup> that accompanies the Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills<sup>9</sup> June 2023. This commits to a broad programme of post-school reform focused on developing an education and skills landscape that will meet the needs of Scotland's people, equipping them to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that they will need to take up roles in a prosperous wellbeing economy.

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<sup>6</sup> [Rural Scotland Key Facts 2021](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation: Skills Delivery Landscape Review - Final Report](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills Initial Priorities](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills](#)

Along with work underway to create new national education bodies, and in responding to the final report of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment<sup>10</sup>, we are about to embark on a programme of widespread, holistic reform of education and skills in Scotland. This context has shaped how we respond to and will act on the Commission's Review recommendations.

Whilst there is much to celebrate in Scotland's education and skills system, a growing set of social and economic factors mean we must transform our assumptions, structures and delivery models if we are to meet the opportunities and challenges ahead. They include globalisation; the need to transition to a fairer, greener world; the pace of discovery and technological advancement; the impact of the pandemic including the lessons of rapid response and scientific discovery; demographic changes and the changing expectations of students and of employers. All point towards the need for system-wide reform to ensure Scotland's education and skills system can deliver for the needs of learners while contributing to economic prosperity and demonstrating better value and benefit for our society. Many of these challenges are shared across sectors and geographies and were identified by the Commission in their report to Ministers.

As we embark on this reform journey, we will need to consider the requirements of the different professions, sectors and industries that make up Scotland's economy now and, in the future, including those that have been the subject of this Review. Scotland's education and skills cannot and should not be developed and delivered by government alone. This "critical national infrastructure" has to be developed, delivered and maintained by government, public bodies, industry bodies and employers. We are committed to working with stakeholders, employees and learners across the land-based and aquaculture sectors to fully consider options for delivering and progressing the response to the recommendations outlined in the Review of Land-based learning in line with our wider work on education and skills reform. In doing so, we heed the advice of James Withers who has argued for a need to ensure that skills development is fully embedded within our learning system to deliver the right people to the right roles across Scotland.

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<sup>10</sup> [It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: report](#)



## Response to Commission recommendations

In responding to the Review, each of the 22 recommendations has been considered and, as set out in Annex 1 we:

- Note one is complete (Rec 6, contribute to Skills Landscape Review).
- Accept 10.
- Accept in principle 11.

Where there are already agreed current and planned actions by the Scottish Government that will contribute to delivering actions in response to the recommendations these are noted, as are the potential next steps to deliver recommendations. 'Accept in principle' indicates our agreement with the objective of the recommendation but not a commitment to deliver it precisely as the Review recommends. How we take recommendations forward will be considered as we develop the Implementation Plan and in the context of broader prioritisation in what are set to remain challenging economic conditions and the similarly challenging fiscal outlook for the Scottish Government.

The programme of education and skills reform, as summarised above, will look at the education and skills system as a whole, considering the recommendations, insights and evidence presented in the Review of Land-based Learning amongst others. This is noted in the response to recommendations where there is direct relevance. We also recognise that the programme of reform is likely to impact indirectly on recommendations including those on skills planning (including data and research), supporting learning, and equalities improvement. (Annex 2 has a summary of the Principles and Initial Priorities<sup>11</sup> as set out in the paper published alongside the Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills).

A separate Implementation Plan will be produced with stakeholders to monitor progress and contribute to meeting our response to Recommendation 15. In line with the Commission's view, delivering the actions will generally involve collaborative working between public, private and voluntary bodies with the Scottish Government.

### Recommendation 1

Work towards the reframing of the land-based sectors as nature-based.

Accept in principle

The Scottish Government agrees with the Commission's views that promoting the land-based and aquaculture sectors is required to attract more people to work in these sectors in rural and urban areas. This includes improving awareness and knowledge of the sector, the range of job roles, types of employment and the opportunities to meet personal, social and environmental values whilst contributing to a green, growing economy. The aim in promoting the sector is that people will have sufficient knowledge of land-based and aquaculture sectors to be able to make an informed choice as a possible career. The Scottish Government, along with industry, education and skills bodies, already supports activity promoting and educating people on opportunities in these sectors.

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<sup>11</sup> [Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills Initial Priorities](#)

The Commission recommends working towards adopting the term, “Nature-Based Sector,” to refer to the land-based and aquaculture sectors collectively. They conclude that a wider collaborative, innovative and co-ordinated cross sector approach is effective in informing people about the sector and encouraging more to choose to work in them. They propose that reframing the sector under “nature-based” would support making connections between sectors, whilst each sector retains their separate identities and name. We agree with the Commission’s rationale in proposing the potential benefits of an umbrella term to communicate about these sectors.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation in principle but agrees with the Commission’s view that further research and engagement with the range of sectors is required to inform a final decision. The research and engagement could be used to understand stakeholders’ and the wider public’s views on such a change and the potential impact in contributing to attracting more people to work in the sector, including the “cost -benefits” of change and unintended consequences.

We recognise that reframing to nature-based is a significant shift in how the sectors promote themselves and are viewed. Therefore, in seeking clarity and understanding to inform any decision, our approach will be to lead and facilitate engagement and deliberation in collaboration with external stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 1.1**

Develop an effective communications strategy to support the reframing of the Sector.

Accept in principle

This recommendation is dependent on the response to Recommendation 1. Where it is agreed that there should be reframing of the Sector as nature-based, we accept a communications strategy should support achievement of this aim. The most effective approach for a communications strategy will draw on the existing partnership working with organisations, networks and beyond. Much can be achieved through using established communication channels with messages amplified with relatively small, strategic investment. We will also consider investment in communications targeted at specific groups, for example young people with no knowledge of the sector or groups with protected characteristics under-represented in employment in the sector.

## **Recommendations 2, 2.2, 3 and 3.1**

The following four recommendations are considered together as the Scottish Government Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Action Plan is referred to or is relevant to them all. (Recommendation 2.1 is not directly related to the LfS Action Plan so is included after 3.1). The refreshed LfS Action Plan was published in June 2023. This strengthened plan has been the result of a collaborative process with children, young people and educators. Scotland was one of the very first nations to embed sustainability education as a cross-curricular entitlement for all learners to Learning for Sustainability. LfS is a powerful approach as it links together themes of sustainable development education, social justice, climate change, global citizenship, children's rights, equality and outdoor learning.

## **Recommendation 2**

Establish clear progressive experiences for nature-based learning and climate literacy across all levels of Curriculum for Excellence.

Accept

The LfS Plan is framed around the Target 2030 vision, "To build an inspiring movement for change so every 3-18 place of education becomes a Sustainable Learning Setting by 2030." There are 5 key themes in the plan:

**Leadership and Collaborative Partnership:** Actions to create collective leadership to meet the "Target 2030" vision for LfS, ensuring relevant individuals and organisations recognise their specific contribution and work together to embed LfS.

**Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment:** Actions in this theme are about the experiences for learners and the support to educators to provide inspirational, relevant and impactful learning related to sustainability. One of the key actions is to create new LfS related qualifications and awards for learners.

**Learning Environment and Resources:** Outdoor Learning is a crucial aspect of this theme, and connections to nature are a key element of outdoor learning. The Children's Parliament research which helped to inform the plan, asked that "All children should have the chance to learn outdoors throughout the school year," and, "Outdoor learning should be part of every school subject." Actions in this theme are around the learning environment, the buildings, grounds, wider community spaces and connections to nature and resources.

**Learner Voice, Choice and Action:** LfS is about supporting learners to make informed choices relating to their learning, helping them to develop and flourish and to be empowered. Recognising the fundamental relationship between rights and the concept of LfS, actions are around building a culture where rights are embedded across practice, and support learners to take action and effect change as local and global citizens.

Meaning and Understanding: A key finding from the research which informed the plan was the need to ensure that all relevant stakeholders have a shared understanding of LfS, together with its values and scope. This theme is about providing a clearer definition and criteria for LfS to make the concept more accessible to educators, leaders in schools, early learning and childcare, community learning settings, local authorities and education organisations.

The actions taken forward under Theme 2 in the LfS Action plan will help to support Recommendation 2 in this Review.

### **Recommendation 2.2**

Provide ongoing Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL)<sup>12</sup> support for school-based staff and volunteers across all education authorities, supported by education providers to improve their knowledge and understanding of the opportunities within the Sector. Include practical training in supporting learning in the natural environment.

Accept in Principle

Responsibility for providing the context for CLPL for the education workforce, for providing CLPL and for delivering progressive learning experiences related to nature-based learning, rests across a wide variety of national and regional bodies, including the General Teaching Council for Scotland, Education Scotland and local authorities. It is therefore for those bodies to consider how they support CLPL related to land based education.

There is already a strong focus on supporting practitioners in Scotland to deliver outdoor learning and on helping embed learning for sustainability within their practice.

Education Scotland currently provides a range of outdoor learning resources for practitioners<sup>13</sup> including support for professional development in outdoor learning and resources which enable teachers to identify, plan and apply learning in the outdoor context.<sup>14</sup>

Learning for Sustainability has also been embedded within the suite of GTCS Professional Standards to support teachers in actively embracing and promoting principles and practices of sustainability in all aspects of their work<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) is the terminology used for the professional learning teachers engage in to stimulate their thinking and professional knowledge and to ensure that their practice is critically informed and current. It is important that a wide range of high-quality, sustained professional learning is undertaken in order to progress the quality of learning and teaching and school improvement.

<sup>13</sup> [A summary of outdoor learning resources | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Support for Professional Development in Outdoor Learning | Resources | National Improvement Hub \(education.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Learning for Sustainability - The General Teaching Council for Scotland \(gtcs.org.uk\)](#)

The refreshed LfS Action Plan's Meaning and Understanding theme includes a number of actions that relate to CLPL. This includes the creation of a new LfS portal that will be a one-stop-shop for educators and will provide training and access to resources and the establishment of an LfS mutual mentoring programme to provide a peer support network for educators. In implementing those LfS actions and in framing those broader CLPL opportunities, the government will take account of the place of land based education and the role of the land based education sector.

### **Recommendation 3**

Ensure that the Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Action Plan refresh encompasses strong progressive learning experiences relating to nature-based learning.

Accept

Throughout the refreshed LfS Action Plan there are a number of actions to ensure learners are provided with nature-based experiences and that these are a meaningful part of their daily learning experiences and the learner journey as a whole. There are also specific actions in the Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment theme that relate to the creation of new LfS related qualifications and awards for learners. Within the Learning Environment and Resources theme there is a commitment to set an outdoor learning workstream to ensure that all children receive entitlements to outdoor learning. Even though there are not specific actions on nature-based learning, contact with the environment and natural world is a key part of outdoor education experiences. For example, the LfS Action Plan's commitment to develop a Nature Discovery Map Scotland supports education settings to engage with nature networks and use their local greenspaces.

### **Recommendation 3.1**

Establish a robust approach to monitoring quality of the curriculum delivery of LfS, including the quantity and quality of nature-based and outdoor learning.

Accept in principle

There are Actions in the refreshed LfS plan to embed it better into inspection frameworks, both in schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings. This includes an action on the development of key LfS Indicators within the Leadership and Collaborative Partnership theme in order to monitor, evaluate and demonstrate the progress made against actions contained within the refreshed Action Plan. There are also a number of actions around outdoor learning, including the creation of a national policy workstream on Outdoor Learning to ensure that all children receive entitlements to outdoor learning in all its forms. It is through those actions that we will work with key partners to develop an appropriate means to capture progress against our aspirations to improve access to nature-based and outdoor learning.

## **Recommendation 2.1**

Identify ways to support an increase in Sector school/college partnership learning pathways, offered and undertaken by schools.

Accept in principle

In giving the rationale for this recommendation, the Commission proposed “There is a need to enable some funding to be re-directed to support the development of more nature-based school-college partnerships and wider uptake of current and new learning pathways”.

The Scottish Government supports the Commission’s intention of more college and school engagement and learner pathway opportunities for pupils in the senior phase to increase the uptake of land-based learning at school and progression on to further opportunities.

There is already a positive picture on school-college partnerships across all subject areas. In 2021/22, 30,565 senior phase pupils enrolled on a college course, 47% more than in 2012/13 when 20,824 students enrolled. There continues to be work which aims to develop the role of school-college partnerships in young people's learning journeys and support best practice following on from a College Development Network (CDN) report in 2021: *Co-creating the Learner Journey: School-College Partnerships and Effective Skills Pathways*<sup>16</sup>. Colleges Scotland chaired a short-life subgroup of the Scottish Education Council (SEC) which brought together representatives from schools and colleges to consider what stakeholders can do to facilitate closer working relationships. The Group reported to SEC late in 2023 and is working with partners to take forward actions.

Scottish Government will continue to engage with the education sector on best practice and the ongoing development of school-college partnerships, including in land-based subjects, and consider the forthcoming findings of the Colleges Scotland subgroup.

However, statutory responsibility for the delivery of education sits with local authorities, as set out under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. This is a long-standing feature of our education system that provides local authorities and schools with the flexibility to tailor provision to best meet local needs and circumstances. Therefore, whilst the Scottish Government provides the overall education policy framework for settings, schools are expected to plan provision, with partners including colleges, which meets the needs of the economy, the local context, and the needs and choice of their young people.

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<sup>16</sup> [Co-Creating the Learner Journey: School-College Partnerships and Effective Skills Pathways](#)

Along with work underway to create new education bodies, and to respond to Professor Hayward's Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment<sup>17</sup>, we are about to embark on a programme of widespread, holistic reform of education and skills in Scotland. This will take time but recognises the need to ensure that funding is driven towards Scottish Government's priorities and offers best value for investment.

### **Recommendation 3.2**

Promote the delivery of more outdoor learning by supporting local authorities and colleges to undertake a review of their estate, to identify the potential for carbon reduction, climate change mitigation and the creation of accessible nature spaces.

Accept in principle

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation in principle and has a number of initiatives underway to support local authorities and colleges in this area. However, the statutory responsibility for the delivery of education sits with local authorities, and whilst the Scottish Government provides the overall education policy framework for settings, colleges and schools will be expected to plan provision, as set out in the response to Recommendation 2.1.

For example, the Learning Estate Strategy underpins the £2 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) and sets out the strategic approach for managing Scotland's learning estate. This makes clear that the use of outdoor learning environments should be maximised and they should be greener and more sustainable. The energy efficiency target for schools replaced/upgraded through the LEIP is an ambitious 67 kWh, per square-metre, per year, for core hours.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced the successful LEIP Phase 3 projects on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023. Through Phase 3, and in partnership with local authorities, we will invest in net zero schools, encompassing high efficiency standards, zero emissions heating, electric vehicle charging points and ambitious embodied carbon targets. These schools are also expected to have outdoor covered spaces of 1m<sup>2</sup> per pupil.

On LEIP projects, Architecture & Design Scotland (funded by Scottish Government) will provide local authorities with:

- Support through carbon conscious placemaking and design approaches, that can mitigate the impacts of climate change;
- Support for the effective use of new and existing outdoor learning spaces, to enhance learning and teaching environments;
- Continuing their work in relation to the climate ready school grounds project which will support local authorities to develop the learning estate grounds to do more, to adapt to the anticipated local impacts of climate change, increase biodiversity, and encourage community engagement and participation in climate action.

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<sup>17</sup> [It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: report](#)

In October 2023 we published a new chapter of our popular Out to Play series of national guidance for the ELC workforce, “Caring for our Outdoor Spaces”<sup>18</sup>. This will set out sustainable ways to explore, develop and care for outdoor spaces.

Whilst it doesn’t specifically reference outdoor learning, the Scottish Funding Council’s (SFC) College Infrastructure Strategy: The Approach to Delivering Scotland’s College Infrastructure Plan<sup>19</sup>, was published in November 2022, and supports the college sector’s ambitions for net zero with the planned production of an Infrastructure Investment Plan for the college sector by autumn 2024.

The strategy recognises that investment in college infrastructure is needed and presents a significant opportunity for colleges to play their part in tackling the climate emergency. SFC will support colleges to progress their net zero ambitions that are integral to any future infrastructure investment. Colleges will need to prioritise;

- investment into their digital infrastructure
- response to the climate emergency,
- size of their estate in response to future demographic and learning trends
- collaboration opportunities.

We are separately aware that this year may see the introduction of a Private Member’s Bill to ensure that young people, in particular those in their first four years of secondary school, have the opportunity to experience residential outdoor education to an approved educational standard. As with any draft legislation that is proposed, we will give it our full consideration but will reserve our final position until any draft Bill comes forwards. Our position will be based on the alignment or otherwise of any proposed legislation with our policy on outdoor learning, based on the financial cost of any proposals – which is increasingly important in the current context – and based on a careful consideration of all stakeholder perspectives.

Whilst residential experiences are an important aspect of outdoor learning, it is important that all forms of learning in the outdoors are supported, and that one particular experience does not reduce flexibility and choice over other forms of school trip and other outdoor learning experiences (for example, day-to-day use of greener education settings including school playgrounds). Our Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Action Plan is relevant here, as in response to recommendations 2, 2.2, 3 and 3.1. The LfS, which has benefited from input from Nature Scot, includes a commitment to set up a new dedicated national policy work-stream on outdoor learning. The work-stream will be supported by a working group, which will report to Ministers with recommendations to ensure pupils have access to a much wider range of opportunities to learn in the outdoors.

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<sup>18</sup> [Caring for our Outdoor Spaces](#)

<sup>19</sup> [College Infrastructure Strategy: The approach to delivering Scotland’s College Infrastructure Plan](#)



#### **Recommendation 4**

Ensure funding to support core and innovative nature-based education and training programmes, to ensure sustainable provision to allow for fluctuating uptake.

Accept in principle

The reforms of the post-school education and skills system that have been signalled in the Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills<sup>20</sup>, could deliver significant change and efficiencies in the way that money flows through the system and how it meets learner and economic needs.

We have committed to take responsibility for skills planning and to develop new, needs based (rather than demand led) approaches to planning at a national level that are driven by clear prioritisation. Underpinning this will be a regional approach to skills planning that builds on existing regional economic partnerships and has employers and local providers, in particular colleges, at the centre. Such processes should offer autonomy to regional partners to work together to plan and align investment to provision that meets the needs of their local economies.

Besides developing a new SG-led approach to skills planning at the national level, we are continuing work on the development of new funding models for post-school learning and training provision, including apprenticeships. We currently invest over £2 billion in post-school education and skills annually and a redesigned funding model will be able to more clearly ensure that funding is driven towards priorities and offers best value for investment. Alongside this, we are exploring options to simplify funding arrangements, including bringing learner support funding together and bringing funding for provision, including apprenticeship provision, into one place.

Reform of this nature will not happen overnight and in the meantime, we will be focused on how we can maintain existing services as we transition to continue supporting learners and employers to get what they need out of the system.

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<sup>20</sup> [Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills](#)

### **Recommendation 5**

Ensure that accreditation bodies (at all curriculum levels) have sufficient capacity to respond timeously to review existing awards and develop new awards, guaranteeing the skills and knowledge requirements of the Sector are met.

Accept in principle

It is critical that our qualifications are flexible, relevant and deliver the best outcomes for learners, as well as meeting the needs of employers and the economy.

The reforms of the post-school education and skills system, including the work on a new qualification body, are significant and will take time. We are focused on how we can maintain existing services as we transition to continue supporting learners and employers to get what they need out of the system.

As stated above, we are continuing work on the development of new funding models for post-school learning and training provision, including apprenticeships. We currently invest over £2 billion in post-school education and skills annually and a redesigned funding model will be able to more clearly ensure that funding is driven towards priorities and offers best value for investment.

### **Recommendation 6**

Contribute to the Skills delivery landscape independent review, ensuring that the complex needs of the sector are understood and addressed.

Complete

One of the Commission's Co-chairs met James Withers to discuss land-based skills and a copy of the Review report was provided to inform the Skills Delivery Landscape Review. In the Skills Delivery Landscape Review the needs of the land-based sector are explicitly recognised and its recommendations are consistent with those of the Land-Based Review:

“the reforms I’ve proposed to skills planning, and to agency responsibilities and structures, I believe will help to deliver the ambitions in the Commission for the Land-based Learning Review which recommends the adoption of nature-based learning in schools and colleges as well as changes to the development of apprenticeships. Their contention that “you can’t be what you can’t see” struck a particular chord with my emphasis on embedding work integrated learning and careers experiences across curricula from early years onwards and the creation of a body with a singular focus on careers advice and education (Recommendation 11) should help to achieve this. The recognition that some of us learn better in nature-based, practical environments is also entirely consistent with parity of esteem for different pathways<sup>21</sup>.”

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<sup>21</sup> [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation: Skills Delivery Landscape Review - Final Report.](#)

As stated in the Introduction, Ministers have accepted the basis of the Skills Delivery Landscape Review recommendations through the Initial Priorities paper that will support delivery of the Purpose and Principles for Post-school Education, Research and Skills<sup>22</sup>. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring the needs and benefits of the land-based and aquaculture sectors are recognised and addressed in the process and delivery of the new skills landscape.

### **Recommendation 7**

Contribute to the Skills delivery landscape independent review, ensuring that the 16+ Data Hub captures the wide range of job roles undertaken across the Sector to allow for effective monitoring and impact.

Accept

As noted above, the Co-chair from the Land-Based Learning Review contributed to the Skills Delivery Landscape Review<sup>23</sup>. The essential requirement for data and intelligence is highlighted in both Reviews, with the Skills Delivery Landscape Review final report noting it is “to support and inform decision-making and enable measurement of impact” (4.19). We will continue to work with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and through wider partnerships to further enhance the 16+ data hub, including exploring if jobs in the sector can be captured.

### **Recommendation 8**

Support the retention of critical Higher Education (HE) provision in areas such as forestry and aquaculture by developing innovative ways to extend the reach of their delivery.

Accept in principle

The report from the Land-Based Learning Review reported that: no Higher National progression routes are available to any general Aquaculture related degrees; that there is only one specialist forestry degree in Scotland; and that both industries support the need for flexible higher-level qualifications and would like to see Technical and Graduate apprenticeships. In addition, the report states that a loss of specialist training facilities remains a concern.

Apprenticeships in Scotland are demand-led and our apprenticeship system aims to be as responsive to industry demand as it can be. In response to industry demand, an Aquaculture Management Technical Apprenticeship was developed to enable individuals to gain a qualification in Aquaculture Management at SCQF level 9, supporting their progression within the sector.

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<sup>22</sup> [Purpose and Principles for Post-school Education, Research and Skills](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation: Skills Delivery Landscape Review - Final Report](#)

We support articulation, where a student gains entry into second year of a degree with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) gained at college, or into third year with a Higher National Diploma (HND) gained at college. This is a useful route to widening access to university across a variety of subject areas. A number of colleges work in partnership with universities to create clear progression routes to higher levels of study, from traditional articulation models to integrated learner journeys.

The lack of clear, coherent pathways was also a finding of the Skills Delivery Landscape Review<sup>24</sup>. It recommended that a single agency – the new qualifications body – should have oversight of all publicly funded post-school qualifications (except degrees), and that an audit should be carried out of post-school qualifications to look at ways to rationalise and refine existing pathways using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

The Skills Delivery Landscape Review also argued that we need to break down the division between vocational and academic qualifications and build our understanding of the professions and roles where specific, technical skills are required as opposed to those which can be carried out based on transferable meta-skills<sup>25</sup>.

As noted earlier, through the Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills<sup>26</sup> we have accepted the basis of the Skills Delivery Landscape Review recommendations on pathways reform. We will now work to build a comprehensive understanding of the post-school qualifications landscape including leading work to inform our future approach to apprenticeship development and delivery. This should lead to more transparent processes for identifying, developing, approving and assuring qualifications including apprenticeship frameworks.

Approaches to qualifications and pathways development will be complemented by the work, detailed above, on the development of new, needs-based skills planning processes and the redesign of a funding model for post-school provision. Together, these reforms should mean that Scotland's colleges and universities are better able to plan their provision to respond to changing economic needs.

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<sup>24</sup> [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation: Skills Delivery Landscape Review - Final Report](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Skills Development Scotland meta-skills progression framework](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Purpose and Principles for Post-school Education, Research and Skills](#)

Additionally, and specifically through our Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture<sup>27</sup> we will work to connect businesses with educators and communities to raise the profile of aquaculture careers and equip more people with the skills needed to work in the modern sector. This Vision seeks to enable knowledge exchange and promote collaboration to support the development of crucial research, development and innovation capacity. Agreed and developing City Deals provide support to Higher Education providers and other infrastructure agencies active in aquaculture, notably the establishment of the National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub. The Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture recognises the importance of innovation to the future success of the sector.

There is already action on forestry provision, with the sector meeting with the HE providers of forestry courses in Scotland. The main actions were to work on a model of a shared placement year, consider a block release structure and the case for a Graduate Apprenticeship for forestry and convene an annual meeting.

### **Recommendation 9**

For the new Agriculture Scotland Bill, as part of Tiers 3 and 4, to include provisions to enable support to fund upskilling/Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training for farmers and employees to support priority, quality non-legislative training towards a just transition to a green economy.

Accept

The Scottish Government agrees with the aim of this recommendation that the agriculture sector's farmers and employees' skills and learning are supported to build a more highly qualified, trained, diverse and flexible workforce that is also necessary to meet net zero commitments. Our Vision for Agriculture, published in March 2022, outlines the long term vision to transform how farming and food production is supported for Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. The main vehicle of delivery of this Vision is the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill which was introduced into the Scottish Parliament on 28 September 2023.

The Bill provides a framework to support and work with farmers and crofters and includes a four Tier support package. Tier 4, complementary support, is concerned with people development and will include new skills, knowledge training and CPD, advisory services and business support. Tier 3 deals with the elective payments rather than specifically skills support, although skills support will need to underpin activities in this and the other tiers. The responses to the consultation on the Agriculture Bill of August 2022 were fully supportive of support for knowledge transfer, innovation and skills development.

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<sup>27</sup> [Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture](#)

The Scottish Government policy to provide a support system in knowledge, innovation, education and training, including continuing professional development (CPD) activities, in agriculture and land use or related sectors, is included in the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill.

#### **Recommendation 10**

Strongly recommend that Scottish Government incentivise uptake of structured Education and Training programmes to support the Agricultural sector.

Accept in principle

The Scottish Government is proceeding with a view to introduce, as per Recommendation 9 above, and aligned to the Vision for Agriculture, a new continued professional development system for agriculture in Scotland. This will form part and parcel of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill process which is currently underway, and will, in due course, look to introduce support mechanisms to incentivise uptake of appropriate training and professional development for farmers, crofters and land managers.

#### **Recommendation 11**

Amend the annual compulsory Agriculture Census to include specific Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) questions, which can be used by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and others to inform the Sector's skills needs more accurately.

Accept in principle

Scottish Government accepts that there is currently a data gap around Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) in the agriculture sector. We have an opportunity now to address this data gap, of which one possible solution could be through the annual Agricultural Census. Consideration can now be given to whether the data needs identified are best met by using the Agricultural Census, for example, through the modular question approach used in the Census. Any new questions and topics would need to be considered as part of an overall feasibility study and meet an acceptance criteria threshold as part of the annual business processes for delivering the Agricultural Census.

**Recommendation 11.1**

Identify opportunities to add LMI questions to other Sector surveys sent out by the Scottish Government or related agencies.

Accept

Scottish Government agree that seeking opportunities and using existing Scottish Government surveys to gather LMI data on the sector is a practical and effective way to proceed. The Scottish Government Office of the Chief Statistician has carried out a review of surveys led or sponsored by Scottish Government. We will use this to engage with survey managers to assess whether there are opportunities to add LMI questions to surveys.

**Recommendation 12**

Undertake research which identifies key transferable skills required across different job roles within the Sector.

Accept

We accept this recommendation and agree that research which identifies key skills that are transferable for different roles in the sector will improve understanding of what these skills are, improve their use and support more people to have better employment by deploying their skills in different job roles.

Scottish Government analysts and policy officials, working with internal and external stakeholders will scope the project, existing evidence and analysis and draw on this to produce a research output.

Recommendations 13 and 13.1 both aim to bring more people from currently underrepresented groups into the sector workforce, and so we respond to them together.

**Recommendation 13**

Ensure learning from interventions such as the Women in Agriculture Taskforce and Women in Scottish Aquaculture is used to inform actions to attract more women into sectors where there is a gender imbalance.

Accept

**Recommendation 13.1**

Ensure learning from interventions support other groups which are under-represented in the Sector.

Accept

The Scottish Government accepts these recommendations and will continue to work with the land-based and aquaculture sectors with our commitment to the widening access agenda.

The Women in Agriculture, Women in Aquaculture, Women in Rural Economy and New Entrants activity demonstrates that targeted positive actions can achieve step change and increased equality across land-based sectors

We will continue to deliver the recommendations of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce and support increased gender equality in agriculture. Already in 2023/24 we have committed £500,000 to supporting the delivery of practical solutions to support women to increase the resilience of business and increase their skills to contribute to our economy.

We are already applying elsewhere the lessons learnt from the successful Women in Agriculture programme. One example is Scottish Forestry funding for the new Women in Forestry training fund in collaboration with the Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies Industry Leadership Group. The aim is to support the growth of a more diverse workforce and ensure there is no gap in provision for upskilling women with technical knowledge and practical training experience.

We remain committed to supporting increased gender equality in the aquaculture sector and continue to support Women in Scottish Aquaculture which takes forward initiatives to enable women to pursue and develop rewarding careers. We will use the learning from these, and identify other interventions, where they will encourage people from other underrepresented groups to the sector. More broadly we will work with our refreshed Fair Work Action Plan: Becoming a Fair Work Nation by 2025. This incorporates actions from the previous Gender Pay Gap, Fair Work and Disabled People's Employment Action Plans and was published with the new Anti-Racist Employment Strategy.

We have also committed to promoting existing and new advice and guidance on the benefits of flexible working to employers across Scotland. This will support the creation of good quality, well paid flexible jobs which will allow workers to progress in the workplace and help low-income workers, especially women and disabled people, raise their income levels alongside addressing pay and employment gaps.

#### **Recommendation 14**

Sector 'Industry Leadership Groups' (or equivalent) to establish what help or interventions would enable their industries to meet fair work requirements.

Accept

Fair Work is a key driver for achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth and our ambition for a wellbeing economy. Our vision is for Scotland to be a leading Fair Work Nation by 2025, where fair work drives success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses, organisations and society. It is a model for innovation and success, with many employers in Scotland already implementing fair work practices.



It is our belief that public sector funding should lever in wider societal benefits, such as the promotion of Fair Work, in order to support the development of a sustainable and a successful wellbeing economy over the long term that is fair, green and growing. Our Fair Work First approach levers change through applying principles to public sector spend, driving fair work practices across the labour market. In line with the Bute House Agreement, we have strengthened our approach, by introducing a requirement on public sector grants recipients to pay at least the real Living Wage to all employees and to provide appropriate channels for effective workers' voice, such as trade union recognition. The requirement applies to public sector grants awarded on or after 1 July 2023. Fair Work First has been applied to some £4 billion of public sector funding since 2019.

As they are the large land-based workforces, specific issues for in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture are outlined. Specifically for agriculture, the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board (SAWB) is an autonomous body under the Agricultural Wages (Scotland) Act 1949 and is empowered to set minimum rates, holiday entitlement and certain other conditions of service for agricultural workers in Scotland. The Board comprises of 17 members: 6 representing the interests of employers nominated by NFU Scotland and the Scottish Land & Estates; 6 representing the interests of workers nominated by Unite the Union; and 5 independent members appointed by Scottish Ministers, one of whom is designated Chair.

In order for the SAWB to set the minimum Agricultural Wage at Real Living Wage the Board has to agree this during the annual negotiations. This has been raised at the last two annual negotiation meetings, however agreement has failed to be reached.

The forestry sector operates with a mix of companies ranging from large multinationals to individual contractors. In general, the commercial sector not only complies with the UK Forestry Standards but also with certification bodies (Forest Stewardship Council and/or Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification through the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS)). Certification requires set standards for workers' rights that cover requirements for the living wage, equality and the right to unionise and engage in collective bargaining. These should meet or exceed the Scottish Government's fair work practices. The forestry Industry Leadership Group will work with Lantra to ensure that these are being met.

The aquaculture sector is characterised by a small number of large internationally owned finfish businesses alongside smaller SMEs which are often family owned. The sector typically pays wages at above local averages and larger employers routinely operate sophisticated employee reward schemes and codes of conduct which exceed Scottish Government's fair work standards. Globally recognised certification schemes require producers to operate in a socially responsible manner and care for their employees in line with the core principles of the International Labour Organisation, including providing safe and equitable working environments where employees earn a decent wage and have regulated working hours.

Already under its workplan for 2023/24, funded by the Scottish Government, Lantra Scotland is showcasing fair work employers to help to change the perception of the sector as poorly paid with limited options, and working with the Industry Leadership Groups and Skills groups, to help employers within the land-based and aquaculture sector to offer Fair Work.

**Recommendation 15**

Annually review recommendation progress, whilst sharing best practice and lessons learned.

Accept

Although the work of the Commission has ended, its members agreed that there was a need to regularly review progress against the accepted recommendations to ensure the effective implementation of the resulting actions and to share good practice across the sector.

We accept this recommendation and will work with previous Commission members and involve many others to review progress and share good practice. This will, probably be at an annual in person or hybrid event, hosted by the Scottish Government.

## **Annex 1 – Recommendations and Scottish Government Response**

1. Work towards the reframing of the land-based sectors as nature-based.  
Accept in principle
- 1.1 Develop an effective communications strategy to support the reframing of the Sector.  
Accept in principle
2. Establish clear progressive experiences for nature-based learning and climate literacy across all levels of Curriculum for Excellence.  
Accept
- 2.1 Identify ways to support an increase in Sector school/college partnership learning pathways, offered and undertaken by schools.  
Accept in principle
- 2.2 Provide ongoing Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) support for school-based staff and volunteers across all education authorities, supported by education providers to improve their knowledge and understanding of the opportunities within the Sector. Include practical training in supporting learning in the natural environment.  
Accept in principle
3. Ensure that the Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Action Plan refresh encompasses strong progressive learning experiences relating to nature-based learning.  
Accept
- 3.1 Establish a robust approach to monitoring quality of the curriculum delivery of LfS, including the quantity and quality of nature-based and outdoor learning.  
Accept in principle
- 3.2 Promote the delivery of more outdoor learning by supporting local authorities and colleges to undertake a review of their estate, to identify the potential for carbon reduction, climate change mitigation and the creation of accessible nature spaces.  
Accept in principle
4. Ensure funding to support core and innovative nature-based education and training programmes, to ensure sustainable provision to allow for fluctuating uptake.  
Accept in principle
5. Ensure that accreditation bodies (at all curriculum levels) have sufficient capacity to respond timeously to review existing awards and develop new awards, guaranteeing the skills and knowledge requirements of the Sector are met.  
Accept in principle

6. Contribute to the Skills delivery landscape independent review, ensuring that the complex needs of the sector are understood and addressed.  
Complete
7. Contribute to the Skills delivery landscape independent review, ensuring that the 16+ Data Hub captures the wide range of job roles undertaken across the Sector to allow for effective monitoring and impact.  
Accept
8. Support the retention of critical Higher Education (HE) provision in areas such as forestry and aquaculture by developing innovative ways to extend the reach of their delivery.  
Accept in principle
9. For the new Agriculture Scotland Bill, as part of Tiers 3 and 4, to include provisions to enable support to fund upskilling/Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training for farmers and employees to support priority, quality non-legislative training towards a just transition to a green economy.  
Accept
10. Strongly recommend that Scottish Government incentivise uptake of structured Education and Training programmes to support the Agricultural sector.  
Accept in principle
11. Amend the annual compulsory Agriculture Census to include specific Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) questions, which can be used by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and others to inform the Sector's skills needs more accurately.  
Accept in principle
- 11.1 Identify opportunities to add LMI questions to other Sector surveys sent out by the Scottish Government or related agencies.  
Accept
12. Undertake research which identifies key transferable skills required across different job roles within the Sector.  
Accept
13. Ensure learning from interventions such as the Women in Agriculture Taskforce and Women in Scottish Aquaculture is used to inform actions to attract more women into sectors where there is a gender imbalance.  
Accept
- 13.1 Ensure learning from interventions support other groups which are under-represented in the Sector.  
Accept
14. Sector 'Industry Leadership Groups' (or equivalent) to establish what help or interventions would enable their industries to meet fair work requirements.  
Accept

15. Annually review recommendation progress, whilst sharing best practice and lessons learned.  
Accept

## **Annex 2 Summary of the Principles and Initial Priorities**

### Principle:

Transparent, Resilient and Trusted: The system is financially and environmentally resilient; trusted to deliver, and subject to effective governance.

### Initial Priorities:

- To lead the development of a new model of public funding for all forms of provision.
- To investigate the options to deliver a single funding body, including tuition and living cost support, paying regard to issues such as the status and scope of the body's responsibilities
- To include responsibility for overseeing all publicly funded post school qualifications (except degrees) and the underpinning occupational standards and skills frameworks as part of the new qualifications body.

### Principle:

Supportive and Equitable: People are supported throughout their learning journey, particularly those who need it most.

### Initial Priorities:

- Within financial constraints, build on manifesto commitments and undertake a review of student support for part-time learners to improve the parity of support on offer, especially for those who are returning to learning and may have other caring or work-related responsibilities.
- Develop a model for student support and engagement that takes account of all provision pathways and not just further and higher education, including considering apprenticeships and CLD

### Principle:

High Quality: High quality opportunities are available for people to enhance their knowledge and skills at the time and place that is right for them.

### Initial Priorities:

- Build on the work of the recommendations from the Careers Review to consider options for embedding careers advice and education within communities, educational settings and workplaces across Scotland; including options for future delivery of national careers services;
- Build a comprehensive understanding of the post-school qualifications landscape to inform processes for developing, funding, assuring and approving publicly funded qualifications, and actions for wider reform of the qualifications landscape - including improved articulation with the senior phase.
- Lead work to inform our future approach to apprenticeship development and delivery as part of an integrated landscape of pathways.
- Work with institutions, public bodies and unions to ensure that staff at all levels are supported and empowered to deliver the high-quality work required by students, society and the wellbeing economy, in keeping with fair work principles

Principle:

Globally Respected: Research, teaching, innovation and knowledge exchange undertaken in Scotland, must make a difference; enhance and contribute to global wellbeing, addressing 21st Century challenges and attracting inward investment and talent to study, live and work in Scotland.

Initial Priorities:

- Use and improve Study in Scotland materials as part of our approach through NSET to talent attraction and retention.
- Take forward a pilot international mobility programme co-designed with sector representatives.
- Continue to seek to influence the UK Government to secure our future association to Horizon Europe and other EU research programmes and ensure Scottish interests are protected regardless of outcome

Principle:

Agile and Responsive: Everybody in the system collaborates to deliver in the best interests of Scotland's wellbeing economy.

Initial Priorities:

- To take responsibility for skills planning – developing an approach at a national level that works with partners to set clear priorities.
- Enhance and embed the role of employers in shaping system planning priorities, pathways and provision.
- This will be supported by a regional approach that builds on existing regional economic partnerships and has employers and local providers, in particular colleges, at the centre.



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