

# The Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland: Process Evaluation

This is a summary of the main findings of an independent process evaluation of the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland 2019-2021. The evaluation considered the extent to which the plan has delivered on its five priority areas, how effective its Implementation Steering Group (ISG) has been at driving actions, and whether the creation of the plan has contributed to additional activity and investment in rural Scotland.

## What is the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland?



Scotland's rural economy makes a significant contribution to national economic output and providing employment

However, rural areas face particular skills challenges including skills shortages, talent retention and attraction, and demographic challenges.

In response, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Government launched the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland in June 2019.

The plan set out the strategic, partnership approach to support the skills needs, addressing the challenges through enhanced work-based learning pathways and by increasing access to education and skills provision in rural areas.

It was intended to bring together a range of actions that would meet the current and future skills required for jobs in rural areas.

## What were the five priority areas for action?

- **Priority area A:** Better understand the skills rural employers need and align provision to support this;
- **Priority area B:** Provide individuals with accessible education and skills provision to secure, sustain and progress in their careers in rural areas;
- **Priority area C:** Develop the current workforce in rural areas through upskilling and reskilling;
- **Priority area D:** Build a secure pipeline for the future; and
- **Priority area E:** Take a co-ordinated, strategic approach to tackling skills in rural areas.

## What did we do?



A literature review

23



depth interviews  
with members of the  
Implementation Steering  
Group

7



depth interviews  
with wider stakeholders  
representing organisations  
involved in rural skills activities  
contained within the plan

## What did we learn?

Skills Development Scotland, in particular the Skills Planning Manager for the Rural Economy, played a key role in overseeing activity.

The Implementation Steering Group effectively drove activity forward and added value in four key ways:

- raising the profile of region-specific and sector-specific skills issues in rural Scotland;
- increasing understanding of the challenges and potential solutions in other sectors or regions;
- generating new opportunities or solutions through collaboration;
- raising awareness of supporting communications activities.

Cross-sector coordination has resulted in skills insights, skills interventions, skills support and promotional activity being better aligned to skills needs in the rural economy.

Considerable progress has been made across all five priority areas. However, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has meant that some expected activities have not occurred as planned.

## What did we conclude?



The evidence shows that a great deal of activity has occurred since the development of the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland, resulting in an increased focus on the skills needs of the rural economy.



In the future, policy makers could consider widening the types of skills the plan covers, focusing support and activities on particular demographics, and aligning more closely to other government strategies.



The plan has ensured that skills intelligence, skills provision, careers guidance and promotional work contain a stronger emphasis on the skills needs of the rural economy.



The findings from this evaluation will be used to inform options on the future of the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland.