

BORDERS



COLLEGE

PATHFINDER PROJECT REPORT

SRUC



Developing a joint prospectus for learning & innovation in the land-based sector – an innovative project between SRUC and Borders College



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What were the concerns and challenges about the education and skills system that you were responding to via your pilot project?

The [natural economy](#) is an area of comparative advantage for Scotland, which can also be a critical plank of the national recovery and renewal strategy supported by the best of Scotland's universities and research institutes. In 2018, the natural economy contributed to the Scottish economy £29.1 billion Gross Value Added (GVA), equivalent to more than a fifth of Scotland's GVA. In 2018 the sector employed 290,100 people, supporting 11% of employment across Scotland. If the energy sector is excluded from the definition, the natural economy generated £8.2 billion GVA and supported 223,100 jobs in Scotland.

The land-based sector is the fourth largest employer in the South of Scotland with circa 4500 new employees predicted to be required over the next 10 years to replace retirees and allow growth.

Whilst both Borders College and SRUC serve this sector in the region the scale of provision was not always visible, and it was unclear if there are gaps in the provision either in subject area or level or type of provision. This was particularly acute in terms of upskilling those within the sector already in employment in terms of flexible high-level short course training and practise-based innovation.

With a strong record of serving the land-based sector in the south of Scotland, both Borders College and SRUC aims where to improve awareness of the further and higher education courses offered in this key sector by showcasing the range of learning opportunities available. These include flexible short courses and practical-based opportunities on offer at all stages.



In addition to highlighting existing courses, SRUC and Borders College identified areas in which to develop new land-based/rural skills courses and provision in the region, which will support the local agri-tech industry and its employees, with the further aim of encouraging regional upskilling and growth, enabling candidates to develop basic practical skills required for the land-based sector.

The two key challenges for the teams are: distance & locations of the colleges, and secondly opportunity for the SME (subject matter experts) to be given time away from teaching duties to support and develop the project. We are both Rural colleges and the road infrastructure within the south of Scotland, especially between the two colleges, is in some places very minor roads, which makes journeys for meetings, collaborations etc challenging. Site visits between the teams is essential to build up the relationship, and for parties to understand the facilities available. The team acknowledged from the very start that we needed a plan for collaborations and agreed that regular meetings would be conducted online. In addition, the team planned an initial site visit to each location, along with

an end-of-project review visit to share best practice, which was hosted at Barony. The time challenge, we feel, is inherent and one which needs constant review and flexibility. At the very start of the project, a project team was formed and resource asked for from the relevant departments; senior management supported the SME, who volunteered for the project by backfilling any teaching commitments and also by aligning this to CPD time. However, the level of commitment from the team is directly attributed to their passion & commitment to the collaboration.

What was already working well for your partnership/institutions and what features did you want to build on/maintain?

The existing curricular structure of Land based provision in the south of Scotland ranges from SCQF Level 4 to Level 12 and provides an established foundation to build & develop alignment in provision.

Previous to the project there had not been anything formal or structured between the two providers, but very quickly the staff teams took the initiative to reach out to their counterparts to collaborate. Resulting in open communications and shared learnings becoming common practise between Borders and SRUC.

The project looked to create a more structured approach, one which would embed into the ways of working within the two organisations.

What inspirational practice or new ways of working emerged via the pilots?

The teams have embraced the collaboration with great enthusiasm with many new practices and ideas flowing through, online and face to face collaborations. The teams were initially directed by senior managers to set up each group, once relevant

team members were assigned and the brief understood, teams were given the autonomy & freedom to collaborate as this chose, with an expectation to report back to the senior manager on a monthly basis with progress updates. This level of autonomy and structure allowed the team to take responsibility for their outputs and has delivered the following initiatives:

Collaborated Development Approach

- Level 6 Animal Care provision developed by Borders College , shared with SRUC
- Drone training developed by SRUC, shared with Borders College
- Countryside skills award jointly developed to meet regional needs
- Sharing of on line materials
- Joint response to Skills Development Scotland review of the future of the Forestry workforce in Scotland
- The principals of SRUC and Borders College are meeting at 6-monthly intervals

Staff collaboration, CPD & Meetings

- Good practise meetings between SRUC & Borders, these meeting have been invaluable on many levels. It



must not be underestimated the effort and support provide by both the institutions and individuals to first host a team sharing event but also attend and participate. There have been many onsite sharing events between animal care, agriculture and the country side teams. Each one bringing its own individual take aways for participants

- Senior Leadership Teams from SRUC & Borders College now meet on a regular basis
- SDS and SOSE are invited and regularly attend our steering group to ensure all parties are involved in the future proofing of the venture, along with full engagement with south of Scotland enterprise partnership

Future Collaborations

- Equine Provision Pathways
- Shared staffing resource for commercial delivery
- Full time lecturers delivering for both intuitions
- Joint delivery of the Next Gen HN Agriculture
- Joint development of Animal Nursing Assistant Qualification @ SCQF Level 5
- Validation of PDA in Therapeutic Horticulture
- Developing learner skills by enabling learners to experience and study within both organisations e.g. Arable in Borders & Dairy in Barony
- Borders College Agriculture students to join with SRUC in grass growth competitions
- New areas for course development include joint delivery of an immersive summer school, providing a programme of activities aimed at international students

What innovations have been delivered as a result of your pilot project and who benefits?

The SFC funded Rural Pathfinder project has enabled Borders College and SRUC to realise a cost-effective integrated vision that combines tertiary provision from school to post-graduate, coupled with world class research and innovation to drive green growth and 'just transition' within a prosperous and sustainable economy.

SRUC and Borders College pathfinder project realised a realignment of both institutions' curriculum offer from SCQF Level 4 – 12, thus offering individuals opportunities in education, research, and innovation.

<https://www.borderscollege.ac.uk/rural-skills-pathways>

SRUC and Borders College wish to consolidate and expand to develop a place-based innovation approach to encourage stakeholders in the Natural Economy to develop locally applicable solutions which drive upskilling and innovation in the region.

We are identifying new areas for course development with a focus on areas of regional need, modes of delivery and levels of provision which are not serviced within the region, and thus either require learners to move out the region or forgo career progression.

We will leverage the power of SRUC's degree awarding power should the current TDAP (Taught Degree Awarding Powers) application be successful to establish new joint activities in an accessible form that is appropriate to learners at all stages.

What is your ambition for your students/learners? What is your future aspiration for the outcomes from your project?

The publication of the Rural Skills Pathfinder highlighted learning opportunities in a number of disciplines, which include

Animal Care, Horticulture and Landscaping, Conservation, Forestry and Game keeping, and Landscaping, from SCQF Level 4 to SCQF level 8 and above.

Learners will be able to see the courses on offer within the south of Scotland region from either organisation and at which level they can study, along with the opportunities to further develop within their chosen area.

The creation of a co-located tertiary education, innovation, and world class research centre within a place-based approach to realise the potential for green recovery with sustainable and resilient economic growth.

Our Ask

We are searching for funding to develop the feasibility study as outlined in phase 1 and develop an outline business case for phase 2.

Phase 1: Feasibility study

To research the full potential for joint provision in the region we are proposing a feasibility and mapping study to explore the extent to which the partners can meet

demand and drive innovation through the sharing and optimising of existing resources.

This will be explored into sub-tasks.

1. Gathering and testing demand base current and future demographics
2. Mapping the current and future demand to existing partnership capacities.
3. Optimising delivery models to maximise capacity for delivery, addressing economic development within the Natural Economy. Resulting in the creation of a co-location of tertiary education, innovation, and world class research within a place-based approach.

Phase 2: Outline Business Case

If, as expected demand cannot be met through the optimising of existing resource, phase 2 will explore and investigate what additional resource will be required. This will take the form of an outline business case for joint provision in the Borders region supporting the development of a place-based centre for education and innovation in the Natural Economy.





Impact & benefits

Our proposal

- Provides the underpinning infrastructure to address predicated growth in the Natural Economy.
- Realises Scotland's ambition for the implementation NSET (Scottish Government March '22), 'Just transitions' (Scottish Government, Climate Change Act 2019).
- Provides an inclusive learning environment in all land-based education, research, innovation, and employment opportunities (in both the existing land-based sector and in the new opportunities that will develop as we address the challenges in the Natural Economy)
- Avoids unnecessary duplication and simplifies and enhances the learner journey.
- Saves the public pound in the sharing of expertise and resources.
- A potentially scalable model that could be deployed in other regions of Scotland.

What are your final conclusions/ thoughts about your Pathfinder work?

Both learning providers have collaborated to successfully deliver the joint prospectus.

The practises developed within the pilot have formed the foundations for continuous joint development, with many projects still work in progress and more on the horizon.

However the collaboration of the team, cross fertilisation of ideas and shared resources is by far the greatest achievement. This brings the most benefit not only for students but also for the staff delivering the tertiary education and skills.

The pilot highlighted the lack of specialist staff specifically within the forestry sector and commercial short course provision. A partnership approach to delivery of schools provision & potential apprenticeships will aim to bridge this gap.

With increasing sector demand for a skilled workforce to support the transition to net zero, particularly at SCQF 9 and above, the pathfinder group propose that future funding, for example Next Generation HNC agriculture and professional development awards, should be focused on increasing the number of student places available. This, combined with attracting school leavers and new entrants, would avoid delays to increasing student enrolments on land-based and nature-based career pathways.

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