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## Pathfinder Regional Pilots

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### Purpose

1. This paper provides an overview of our work on the Pathfinder programme, and our delivery approach to this programme, in particular our development of regional pilots to test new approaches to skills planning and alignment.
2. The initial phase of the programme of work will complete by March/April 2023, with individual work packages meeting milestones and being reported to Scottish Government. To realise the broader Pathfinders' overarching vision, delivery is focused around four complementary areas of work, underpinned by our key themes of evidence, analysis, and collaborative action.
3. At the first meeting of the National Advisory Board (NAB) we outlined the work being undertaken across the four work packages. This paper will expand on detail provided to date emerging from the workstreams, to include the new approaches and an account of 'how' the partners are collaborating as well as 'what' is being delivered.

### Background

4. In October the NAB were given an update on the early progress of the Pathfinder programme.
5. Since the last update, the significance and inter-connected nature of the Pathfinder work to national strategic priorities has become increasingly evident. The Pathfinder is a component of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation – Skilled Workforce Theme, features in Regional Economic Strategies, has been covered in Scottish Parliament Committee discussions (Public Audit and Education, Children and Young people) is germane to the Review of the Skills Landscape and links into funding initiatives around just transition and green skills – as such it will continue to attract significant attention.

### Aims

6. Through the Pathfinder we are taking a practical approach to the:
  - Alignment of provision against societal and employer need;
  - Enhanced coherence and sustainability across provision;
  - Simpler pathways and improved outcomes for learners.

7. The pathfinder project aims to achieve the following within the pathfinder regions of the North-East and South of Scotland:
  - To assess how well and in what ways colleges and universities in two regional areas plan for coherent provision as individual institutions and in partnership with SFC, each other and with other key partners (for example, local authorities, schools, industry and employer interests); and the factors that currently drive provision planning at an individual and collaborative level. This project, therefore, aims to support partners to achieve collective leadership of skills and education planning and delivery across the region in order to realise their significant role in creating a strong, productive local economy while ensuring more people are able to benefit from inclusive growth, and to maximise the impact of their collective investment.
8. SFC will use the Pathfinder regional pilots to inform potential system improvement and develop expectations and guidance for institutions on better provision planning for skills alignment.

## Work Package 1

### Data and Analysis – October/NOVEMBER 2022

9. This strand of work will provide an understanding of current skills provision, unmet demand, available data and other evidence in relation to both Pathfinder regions.
10. This includes an analysis of education and skills provision and how this has changed over time, in response to the needs of learners and the economy. It will also explore how relevant data is made available to institutions to inform provision.
11. It has been shaped by close working and partner contributions from Skills Development Scotland on demand, and by qualitative and quantitative input from SFC's data analysts and Anderson Anderson & Brown Consulting.
12. This aspect is approaching the final stages of delivery, with a view to concluding next month following stakeholder validation of its findings. The output will include a report on available data and evidence and any apparent gaps at a regional level and a report focused on the learner journey and regional pathways between school, colleges, universities and apprenticeships.

## Work Package 2

### Regional Priorities – March 2023

13. Working in the North-East of Scotland and the South of Scotland, this element of the programme is focused on developing approaches to provision planning at a

regional level, identifying early areas for action, advancing collaboration, deepening strategic connectedness to employers, piloting new ways of working.

14. The Pathfinder partners in each region have come together to develop collaborative pilot projects which seek to address regional skills priorities in relation to key sectors and are based on their local and regional knowledge and expertise. Seven pilot projects identified (*outlined in Annex A*), are being further developed by the regional partners and overseen by the Regional Delivery Boards.
15. The Pathfinder Regional Delivery Boards (RDBs) are new, and bring together the institutions, key stakeholders, and employer representatives in each region. One of the roles of the RDBs was to assess and agree the focus of the regional pilots and mechanisms for delivery- against partners' understanding of regional need and demand. A series of monthly meetings were established from May and the RDB for the South has now met on six occasions, and the North-East RDB has met on five occasions.
16. The SFC Pathfinders Team has monitored the development phase for the Pathfinder pilot projects and taken account of the issues emerging at the RDB and at the project level.
17. Each regional pilot project has completed a project summary, to outline objectives, the difference their pilot will make, key deliverables and outcomes. The Pathfinder team are reviewing the summaries received to date which cover 7 of the pilots. A Project monitoring and reporting template has been developed which the pilots will be required to complete and submit in advance of RDB meetings. The regional pilots have also submitted requests for modest levels of financial support, largely for project and development capacity support as well as promotional activities. These requests have been approved for non-core programme funding support (with offers currently being finalised by the Pathfinder team).
18. SFC has been invited to attend, as observers, the appropriate Working Groups which will develop and ensure delivery of the project outputs. For some pilots in the South this has already started and others in the North-East will begin from December 2022. This is a critical aspect to allow SFC insight into partnership working on the ground and the conditions needed to deliver successful pilots.
19. Key milestones and deliverables in the development phase of the projects will be completed, between now and through 2023 while the actual provision delivery phase will be implemented in AY 2023-24.
20. As mentioned, the Pathfinders Team members are supporting delivery through representation on the appropriate regional working groups of the pilots. This allows SFC to contribute to the design, monitor and facilitate the evaluation (formative and summative) of the regional projects. We will want to consider both the "what" and the "how" this way of working is enhancing regional planning and provision; and ensure that the lessons learned from the Pathfinder projects can be shared more widely.

21. The Pathfinder team is mindful of the need to engage and capture the views of learners on pathways as key stakeholders and a Learner Forum is being established to this end.

## Early Observations

22. The SFC Pathfinders Team has monitored the development phase for the regional pilots and taken account of issues emerging at the RDB and project level. Based on our discussions at RDB meetings, with project leads and stakeholders we have some early observations on the work of the Pathfinders.
23. These reflections are outlined below in advance of the first SFC-led evaluation point of the programme scheduled for January 2023 and include:
  - The creation of novel pilot partnerships – eg multi- partner / bilateral
  - Building relationships and collaboration – eg planning discussions for senior phase provision
  - Role of modest investment support
  - Creating a new space for dialogue and planning – Regional Delivery Boards
  - Provision planning- engender broader collaboration eg co-location and initial exploration of common services and course promotion
  - SFC role as a scaffold for collaboration, a catalyst and regional agent
  - Systems approach
  - The pathfinder and RDB approach as a model to address other regional issues – eg recruitment challenges for staff and shared apprenticeships
  - RDB as an effective filter for provision propositions
  - The importance of employers as partners in pilots that respond to regional priorities and are aligned to regional strategic drivers
  - The critical role for careers advice information and guidance

## Process Analysis (Understanding the Curriculum Review and Planning Process) – December 2022

24. As a result of this work we will gain an understanding of provision planning and curriculum design within and across colleges and universities, how links with employers and other key partners influence provision planning. In addition, we will begin to explore the impact of provision planning on the learner journey.
25. We are working collaboratively with two expert groups (College and University) across the sector to produce a range of materials, case studies and exemplars which together will clearly describe how provision planning decisions are made and implemented by institutions across Scotland, as well as an analysis of how SFC and other partners support

and influence this process. These outputs will be focused and available to a wide group of stakeholders. We will also consider how the outputs from this work can be best used in the development of SFC's assurance and evaluation processes.

26. The College and University Working Groups have been convened to facilitate discussion and the approach to delivery of case studies reflecting current processes and good practice. Representation includes a cross-section of senior leaders working on curriculum design and strategic planning from across the tertiary education sector.

## Reflections and Recommendations – March - December 2023

27. The programme is adopting an action research approach to capture learning and insights from the new approaches to skills planning. This feeds into the fourth work package of Pathfinders and sits across our activity and aims to capture and share the outputs, recommendations and lessons learned from the Pathfinders programme, as well as communicating new and emerging policy thinking in skills planning and alignment.
28. It will also use the insights of the broad range of academics, practitioners, thought and local leaders who have been involved in shaping and delivering the Pathfinders activity.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

29. There is now an underpinning architecture and governance structure to the Pathfinders including the RDBs, NAB, Curriculum Expert Groups and key stakeholder groups. A significant element of the programme reporting is to Scottish Government, through the Shared Outcomes Assurance Group (SOAG) alongside SDS.
30. Importantly the regional pilots are taking shape with associated steering groups driving forward on the delivery. That said we are attentive to the progress across the seven pilots as not all are at the same level of maturity and development – partly attributed to their respective focuses and new areas of work.
31. Over the coming period, the Pathfinder team will be working across the four work packages including:
  - With the consultants, AAB, to finalise their report output on the data work package to outline current regional demand and provision.
  - Work to finalise regional pilot project reporting, working group arrangements and funding support through the RDBs and pilot leads.
  - Follow up the NAB's consideration of further progress of the Pathfinder alongside key system challenges and opportunities concerning provision planning.
  - Establish initial programme and process for evaluation of pathfinder pilots utilising an action research approach from January 2023

32. The Pathfinder will also explore other tests of change and opportunities for deeper collaboration which would fit within the new approach to provision planning.
33. The Team will connect the Pathfinder as appropriate into engagement with the Review of the Skills Landscape.

## Recommendations

34. The NAB is invited to:
  - Note the work to date on the Pathfinder regional pilots.
  - Reflect on the initial learning and observations on 'how' the Pathfinder pilots are driving new forms of collaboration.

## Further information

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## Annex A - Regional Priorities – Collaborative Pilots

### South of Scotland

Project	Summary	Institutional/Stakeholder Collaboration	Project Leads(s)
<b>Developing a joint prospectus for learning and innovation in the land-based sector</b>	Work to be established to build clear pathways of provision to ensure the circa 4500 new employees being predicted for the land-based industry in the South of Scotland have access to flexible high level short course training and practise-based innovation, particularly those requiring upskilling who are currently in the sector.	SRUC, Borders College, SOSE	Professor Jamie Newbold, (SRUC)
<b>West of Scotland Educational Pathways</b>	Strengthen partnership working model between UWS and DGC in the Dumfries and Galloway region, through the delivery of a fresh approach to joint regional portfolio planning in regionally relevant areas across two institutions, creating a more integrated tertiary landscape in the South-West of Scotland. Aiming to launch pathways, including integrated degrees, in Academic Year 2022/23.	Dumfries and Galloway College and University of the West of Scotland	Joanna Campbell (D&G College) and Marcus Ross (UWS)
<b>South of Scotland Digital Skills Hub</b>	This pathfinder project will expand the region’s digital talent to provide employers with the skills pipeline they need as we move towards a more digitised economy. The pathfinder will build upon the work of the South of Scotland Digital Skills Hub and will help align provision, programmes and curriculum offerings to the current and emerging needs of students and employers across the region.	D&G College, Borders College, D&G Council and Borders Council and members of the Digital Skills Hub Management Group	Joanna Campbell D&G College and Jane Grant Borders College

## North-East Scotland

Project	Summary	Institutional/stakeholder collaboration	Project leads(s)
<b>Energy Transition Skills Interactive Pathway</b> led by the National Energy Skills Accelerator (NESA)	<p>The NESA partners recognise skills demands which are emerging as a result of the energy transition. The Pathfinder project will engage with all relevant stakeholders and test and map the pathways for individuals into new green energy roles.</p> <p>It will explore the basis for development of an accreditation system to validate relevant courses, qualifications and pathways and signpost routes from school to the workplace. A key output will be an interactive pathway with clear signposting for learners on routes through the education system into jobs in the energy sector. It will raise the profile of jobs in green skills, working directly with employers, schools and other community-based agencies.</p>	University of Aberdeen (UoA), North-East Scotland College (NESCol), and Robert Gordon University (RGU)	Professor John Underhill, (Chair, North East Skills Accelerator - NESA) and Lauren Braidwood (Project Manager, NESA)
<b>Developing demand-led, aligned, and sustainable learner pathways</b>	<p>This Pathfinder project sets out the proposed intensification of partnership arrangements between NESCol and RGU, to ensure the establishment of an industry-informed and student-centred sustainable education and skills infrastructure within the North- East of Scotland that is agile and responsive to both the challenges currently facing the region, and the opportunities of the future.</p> <p>Central to the partnership will be a joint response to new and increased demand across a number of key sectors including renewable energies, carbon capture and storage, life sciences, and care. This pilot will test a joint approach to skills and provision planning, curriculum development and delivery.</p>	NESCol and Robert Gordon University	Robin McGregor (NESCol) and Duncan Cockburn (RGU)

<p><b>Enhancing and Co-ordinating the Region’s Simulation Infrastructure for Health and Social Care Education</b></p>	<p>The pilot project will focus on the strategic alignment and coherent provision of simulation facilities throughout the region, taking a holistic approach to health and social care education and skills provision, from attracting new entrants from school, attracting and upskilling individuals who have no formal training/qualifications and providing enhanced facilities for upskilling the existing workforce.</p> <p>It will enhance education pathways into health and social care via access to alternative and critical real-life clinical and social care experience throughout the learner journey. It will impact positively on upskilling and provide simulated experiences for school children to expose them to the possibilities of healthcare careers.</p>	<p>RGU, NESCol and University of Aberdeen with NHS Grampian, , Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnerships (Includes both LAs) Health and Social Care Moray, SDS, Third Sector Partners being explored, and regional schools.</p>	<p>Professor Lynn Kilbride and Duncan Cockburn (RGU)</p>
<p><b>Enhancing the Senior Phase</b></p>	<p>The establishment of a strategic working group, involving all partners will facilitate a renewed focus on an enhanced senior phase offer. The initial “tests of change” will include : improving prospects and promoting positive destinations for winter leavers: enhancing the opportunities for S6 pupils to access articulation opportunities to FE, HE or employment and increasing enrolments from school leavers.</p> <p>The remit of the group will be to maximise opportunities, as a collective, for the enhancement of the senior phase and require improved access and understanding of regional data on school leavers, pathways and destinations.</p>	<p>NESCol, the two Local Authorities and RGU and UoA</p>	<p>Robin McGregor – (NESCol)</p>

