Regional Tertiary Pathfinders Programme
Project Overview: SoS Digital Skills Pathfinder

The tables below provide insights into projects delivered through the Regional Tertiary Pathfinders Programme, which aimed to strengthen collaboration between colleges, universities, employers, and local authorities.

Each project includes two tables:

1. **Collaboration & Impact** – covering the history of partnerships, project focus, geographic reach, and target beneficiaries.
2. **Delivery & Leadership** – outlining governance structures, project characteristics, stakeholder involvement, and key aims.

These tables highlight the context in which projects tested new ways of working, enhanced learner pathways, and improved regional skills planning. For further details, please refer to the System-Level Report.

Definitions of Project Characteristics

History of Working Together

- **None** – individuals and teams had not worked together previously.

- **Emergent** – individuals and or teams and organisations had previously done some work together. Relationships existed which could be built on and developed.

- **Previous positive experience** – individuals, teams and organisations had a history of successfully working together, in some cases over many years. These existing relationships were an accepted part of 'how work was done' and could be built on and further developed and strengthened.

Project Focus

- **Tight** – the project was tightly focussed on delivering specific products/pathways/outcomes.

- **Broad** – the project explored a broad range of topics or areas for improvement and developed associated products/pathways/approaches to deliver outcomes.

- **Multi-theme** – the project explores multiple themes which may be distinct or may intersect and overlap with each other, delivering products/pathways/outcomes related to the themes.

Target Beneficiaries

- **Providers** – colleges, universities and schools, benefit from the work done through the project e.g. increase student numbers, develop complementary provision which reduces competition etc.

- **Learners** – new products, pathways and provision are developed which improve the opportunities, experience and outcomes of learners.

- **Employers** – employers establish positive working relationships with the colleges and universities and become involved in the design of products/provision to meet their needs. Learners acquire the qualifications and skills needed by employers.

Geographic Reach

- **Regional –** for the Pathfinder programme this means aligning to the boundaries of the Regional Economic Partnership (REP).

- **Sectoral –** aligned to the needs of a particular sector e.g. Health, Energy.

- **Local Authority/Community Planning Partnership/Local Employability Partnership –** working within a particular LA Boundary rather than across the REP.

Starting Emphasis

- **Efficiencies –** cost saving as a result producing the desired outcome with little waste of time or resources.

- **Pre-considered improvement –** changes and improvements which had already been identified as needing to be made but which this programme gave the opportunity to catalyse and deliver with renewed focus and pace.

- **Innovation –** the development and delivery of a new method, idea or product to achieve desired outcomes.

Leadership and Sponsorship

- **Diffused –** responsibilities are spread between organisations and groups.

- **Central individual –** a leader/coordinator acts as the main driver for change and delivery.

- **Small group –** a small number of people champion and lead the work acting as a guiding coalition.

Who Was Involved at the Outset

- **Project beneficiaries** – learners, employers and organisations which would benefit from the outputs/outcomes from the project were involved from the outset.

- **Frontline staff** – staff who would be developing/delivering products/courses were involved at the outset.

- **Senior decision makers** – senior staff able to provide authorisation and create the conditions for project success were involved at the outset.

Character of Project

- **Pragmatic –** projects were identified and developed based on practical considerations and a realistic view of what could be achieved.

- **Adaptive –** projects evolved to take account of changing contexts or as a result of gaining more understanding/information about what was needed/possible.

- **Radical –** project affecting fundamental/far-reaching change.

Table 1

Project: SoS Digital Pathfinder			
History of working together	**None**	**Emergent**	**Previous positive experience**
			Strong previous collaboration existed through the South of Scotland Digital Skills Hub which was established in 2020. The Digital Skills Hub included many of the local, regional, and national partners involved in the Digital Pathfinder (DP) project and created many of the networks and foundations which the DP built on – to drive deeper and broader collaboration around digital skills development in the region.
Project focus	**Tight**	**Broad**	**Multi-theme**
		The DP focused on helping the SOS region become more competitive by facilitating the delivery of higher-level digital	

skills to students, individuals and employers and aimed to help align provision, programmes and curriculum offerings to the current and emerging digital skills needs of students and employers across the region.

The DP set out to achieve the following five objectives:

- To develop a highly skilled and adaptable digital workforce by equipping learners with the digital skills required by employers across the region.

  - To increase diversity and inclusion in the digital skills pool.

- To increase the number of post-sixteen learners on digital courses.

- To strengthen employer connections to reinforce digital skill pipelines and strengthen the

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		capacity and capability of college staff. • To simplify the digital skills landscape and focus on continuous delivery for learners, employers and the regional economy.	
Geographic reach	**Regional**	**Sectoral**	**Local Authority/CPP**
	Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway local authority areas (SOS).	The main focus was on digital – to help the SOS region become more competitive by facilitating the delivery of higher-level digital skills to students, individuals and employers, aligning with both employer and societal digital skills needs across the region. However, it is worth noting that the DP's work did not just align to the skills needs of one particular sector. The DP carried out digital projects which supported and aligned to the skills needs of a range of industrial sectors, such as	Scottish Borders Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council.

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		Construction, Health, Social Care and Hospitality.	
Target beneficiaries	**Employers**	**Learners**	**Providers**
	The DP developed an interactive Digital Skills Provision Map (DSPM). This allows employers to locate and access local digital skills support and training for their employees. The map was developed and designed in partnership with employers in order to create a product which was able to meet their needs. Employers were able to provide feedback on digital skills demand within their sectors by taking part in employer engagement round table discussions which were held by the project. The round table events provided local employers with the opportunity to become	Learners benefit from curriculum developments which enhance their digital skills and future employment opportunities – through the DP's curriculum projects. School and college students who attended the 'Meet the Learner' online events were inspired by the information on digital pathways which were outlined at the 'Meet the Learner' sessions. Taking an innovative approach to CIAG, the events showcased learner journeys in tech at school, college and university level.	The 'Meet the Learner' events allowed providers (schools, colleges and universities) to promote their digital courses to young people and other students. The DSPM will enable the main public, education and third sector providers across the region to support more businesses with digital skills development and training. Most of the work which was initiated and progressed through the DP has now been transferred to business as usual.

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	actively involved in shaping the skills provision relevant to their sector. The availability of a local digitally skilled workforce boosts productivity, profitability and reduces the need for post-recruitment training of employees.	Learners benefit from the digital learning opportunities which are available across the region, as they are now articulated more clearly through the DP's 'digital offer' for schools. This 'offer' includes digital courses, digital-related events and digital resources provided by the region's colleges, Developing the Young Workforce and Skills Development Scotland. This more coherent regional offer will help to encourage more young people to take up post-school education opportunities in digital.	

Table 2

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Leadership sponsorship	**Diffused**	**Central individual**	**Small group**
	There was a large number of initial partners including the two education institutions, public sector agencies, the third sector, DYW, local authorities, industry representatives and key partners from outwith the region, e.g., innovation centres and universities. These partners were involved in the DP's Management Group which was formed to provide strategic guidance for the successful implementation and running of the DP.	The DP's project manager acted as the main driver for change and delivery.	The project manager was supported by a small number of senior leaders from the two colleges. The project manager met fortnightly with the senior curriculum leads from Borders College and DGC. These meetings with the AP Curriculum & Sustainability (Borders College) and the Director of Student Experience & Academic Performance (DGC) provided the operational authorising environment for the project and largely, but not wholly, focused on the curriculum development aspects of the DP.

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			The project manager also met monthly with the project leads at both colleges; the Executive Director – Enterprise & Business Innovation at Borders College and the Depute Principal at DGC. These meetings covered all aspects of the DP.
Who was involved at the outset	**Senior decision-makers**	**Frontline staff**	**Project beneficiaries**
	Senior leaders from regional institutions were the initial project leads, supported by the DP's project manager. The Digital Skills Hub Management group, where membership included the project leads, project manager, representation from DYW, SDS, SFC, SOSE, innovation centres, local universities, Scottish Borders Council, D&G Council, ScotlandIS and the third sector	Teaching staff from Borders College and DGC were members of the workstream groups. Staff from DYW Dumfries & Galloway and DYW Borders.	Local employers looking to source digital talent and digital upskilling were involved in the workstream groups. Local providers of digital skills learning, training and development were also members of a workstream group, formed at the outset of the project. The involvement of these groups enabled the DP to create skills

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	met quarterly. An update on each of the six workstreams was presented to the members at these meetings and members discussed and approved the next steps for the progression of the DP.		solutions which met the needs of its beneficiaries.
Character of project	**Radical**	**Adaptive**	**Pragmatic**
	Engaging learners through 'Meet the Learner' events that allow young people in schools to learn from their peers and students in college and university pursuing digital skills pathways.

Working through political and territorial barriers to gather data / information to produce outputs, for example the DSPM. | The DP used existing labour market intelligence and employer engagement to inform planning, specifically in relation to curriculum development.

This was important due to the fact that existing data relating to employers' digital skills needs (e.g., the Digital Economy Business Survey 2021 for the South of Scotland) did not provide sufficient sector-based intelligence. As a result, the project manager needed to | The DP invited employers to round table discussions and actively involved them in identifying the digital skills needs in the Construction, Health and Social Care sectors.

Working groups were created for each of the six workstreams. Each workstream group consisted of key stakeholders with significant levels of expertise. |

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		supplement existing data with intelligence from sector employers in the form of the employer round table events.	The 'Meet the Learner' events were delivered online so: • they could be recorded and shared with schools, parents and future students; and • due to the geography of the SoS and lack of a common timetable across D&G schools it was felt that online events would be more inclusive for schools.
Starting emphasis	**Innovation**	**Pre-considered improvement**	**Efficiencies**
	The DP increased digital skills in the region for future and current learners. Concurrently providing employers with a DSPM to locate local digital skills training for their employees.	The DP built on the previous work of the South of Scotland Digital Skills Hub.	Working groups created for each workstream and having access to the right partners who brought a wealth of expertise and skills to the DP's working groups.

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	Organising the 'Meet the Learner' events to actively engage with learners in the region to inspire them to select a digital pathway at school, college or university. A digital offer for the region's schools, provides a platform for digital upskilling opportunities to be promoted in a more coherent way to the region's schools. This will help to encourage more young people to take up post-school education opportunities in digital.		Having a dedicated project management resource to drive the project forward. Access to specialist staff - specialist lecturing staff were required to develop the DP's curriculum resources.