

'Reskill our Regions' Taskforces

Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party

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Foreword

The impact of COVID-19 and other labour market changes will require many people to reskill, and the support they will need is best delivered by regional Taskforces led by colleges rather than from Holyrood.

Local economies have been hit hard by the SNP's centralisation agenda and the COVID-19 pandemic, with jobs and businesses under threat and empty shops on our high streets.

To enable effective recovery and growth, local communities must be empowered to lead the work themselves. We are proposing new Taskforces in each region to bring together colleges with other agencies to engage closely with local businesses and deliver the skills they need.

This partnership will direct people to well-designed courses which will get them a job in their local area – reducing the need for people to move and supporting local businesses to grow.

The SNP have long forgotten about further education due to their focus on another independence referendum.

We will focus on rebuilding Scotland's colleges, so they can create good local jobs and lead our recovery from this pandemic.

These proposals will work alongside those outlined in our Power up Scotland paper, to promote short-term recovery, long-term growth, and a major expansion of adult learning.



Background

- **Since the SNP came to power, the number of college places has been cut by nearly 115,000.** In 2007-08, the student head count was 379,233, compared to just 264,858 in 2018-19 – a reduction of 114,375.
- **Digital technology, net zero, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic are all having a significant impact on Scotland's labour market.**
- **However, not every part of Scotland is facing the same issues** – some areas are very reliant on agriculture, while others are dominated by the hospitality and tourism sectors.
- **So the jobs available and skills required as Scotland recovers and moves on from COVID-19 will be different in Lockerbie, Livingston and Lossiemouth.**
- **The SNP Government have set out a range of immediate measures focused on skills and retraining in response to COVID-19, but they have failed to put local needs front and centre.** The SNP will be unable to deliver local skills from Holyrood, so this work must be led regionally.

Our Solution

- **Colleges have a regional structure and will be the ones ultimately delivering many of the SNP's promises** – so they must be given a stronger voice in Scotland's recovery and longer-term skills strategy.
- **New Taskforces should be set up in each college region across Scotland.** They would bring together relevant agencies to align and lead local work on the COVID-19 recovery and future skills needs:
 - bringing together the local college with local enterprise bodies, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, and the Scottish Funding Council;
 - using skills analysis to assess how well the needs of local businesses are being met by local college provision;
 - working directly with local businesses to align demand and supply and design courses which deliver the skills they need;
 - focus on the needs of SMEs, who make up the vast majority of Scotland's businesses but struggle to feed into skills strategies; and
 - consider how colleges can directly support their local communities through recruitment, procurement and real estate, including occupying vacant sites on high streets.

Example:

In the South of Scotland, Borders College and Dumfries and Galloway College have created a partnership to help people in the region 'upskill, reskill and get back to work'. The South of Scotland Economic Recovery Programme has tailored courses to the economic needs of the region (Borders College, News, 4 November 2020, [link](#)).

