SOUTH OF SCOTLAND REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Technical Paper: Stakeholder Engagement Summary

July 2021

University of
CUMBRIA

RSM

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

1.1 Report Overview

This report provides a summary of the feedback and key findings that have emerged through the stakeholder engagement process, carried out to support, and shape a new Regional Economic Strategy (RES) for the South of Scotland (SOS). The document sits alongside a series of other technical papers, acting as a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative evidence base from which the RES can be developed, ensuring full transparency and acknowledgment of the issues and opportunities affecting the region. Moreover, the report showcases the extensive level of consultation and the breadth of stakeholders that have been engaged across the region. Key messages and findings are summarised, segmented where appropriate, broken down across the core strands of co-creation – direct engagement, group consultation and surveying.

1.2 The Importance of Stakeholder Engagement

Within the context of economic strategy development, stakeholder engagement and consultations are an essential part of the underlying research process, being critical to establishing fuller and deeper insights, whilst helping to build genuine consensus on how the RES should be pitched and prioritised. Qualitative research therefore plays an integral role in forming a true picture of the region's characteristics, to understand how best to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

Reflecting on local experiences, perceptions and views is key to:

- **Going beyond data / statistics and their inherent limitations in telling a story of place; and,**

- **Developing buy-in and interest in the strategy creation process, to support long-term delivery.**

1.3 The Engagement Approach

The engagement undertaken to inform the RES has been multi-faceted, reflecting the broad array of stakeholders who have a social, economic and environmental interest in the region, and in light of COVID-19 circumstances, it has required the use of different consultation approaches. The primary engagement methods used as part of the RES research phase are summarised below:

RES Co-Creation – Stakeholder Engagement Summary[1]

---
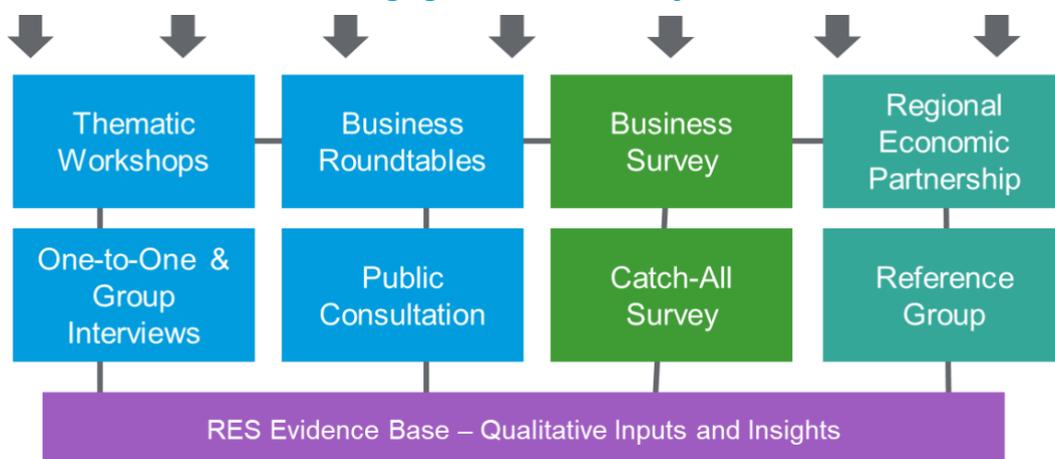
[1] See section 3 for more information on the respective surveys and how they were administered.

In total, the engagement process led to the delivery of:

- **40 one-to-one and group interviews**

- **6 public consultations**

- **9 thematic workshops**

- **3 business roundtables**

- **Business and catch-all surveys (online circulation)[2]**

A variety of research tools were developed for the purposes of engagement, including bespoke topic guides, feedback forms and questionnaires. These were used to compile detailed records of the process, including feedback, key messages and noting the sharing of further information to support the RES development process. Each advocated transparency and the importance of data handling, including confirmation that all feedback would not be attributed to individuals and personal information would be stored and managed in line with GDPR regulations. Additionally, stakeholders were given the opportunity to request that feedback be removed from any formal engagement records and notes.

It is important to note the extensiveness of the engagement process and the quality of responses received, including the regularity of inputs from the Regional Economic Partnership (REP) and Reference Group[3]. This has been at the heart of the co-creation process and, combined, has generated unique insights and a much fuller understanding of local nuance. From the perspective of transparency and the openness of the RES development process, this engagement will also play a major part.

1.4   Additional Notes on the Engagement Process

Whilst the engagement process has been wide reaching and sought to encourage inputs from as many stakeholders across the region as possible, from different backgrounds, sectors, and localities a, it does not offer a complete view of on-the-ground perspectives. Its reach has been limited by timescales, the pandemic, and the inherent nature of consultation, which are all expected constraints on the process. Some caveats that need to be considered with regards to the analysis are:

- Survey cleansing required the coding of open question responses, which meant these were re-categorised to provide a clearer sense of the response or reallocated to existing response choices.

- Survey cleansing also necessitated the removal of responses that breached protocol, did not provide a relevant answer to the question or were incomplete, lowering the sample size as a result.

- Survey response sample sizes varied between questions, which meant the reliability of data was also variable across different elements of the surveys and was caveated accordingly.

- In some cases, assumptions were applied to position the location of respondents – either adapting an incomplete postcode or selecting a single postcode, where multiple locations were cited.

- With regards to engagement, overriding and key messages were generated as part of a review of all captured feedback, which required distillation and focus on recurring themes.

---

[2] Note – see section 2 for more information survey response numbers.
[3] Note – the REP was established to respond to the economic needs and opportunities of the SOS. It brings together the private, third and further and higher education sectors, as well as the seven key public sector organisations supporting economic development in the region and will play a central role in RES delivery.

2. ENGAGEMENT RESPONSE

2.1 Engagement Participation Summary (breakdown of respondents)

The engagement process saw a large number and variety of stakeholders contribute to discussion and provide valuable insight. The breakdown of this is as follows, across each of the engagement mediums:

- **~140 people/organisations participated in one-to-one and group interviews**

- **~20 people/organisations participated in the public consultations**

- **~100 people/organisations attended thematic workshops**

- **15 people/organisations took part in business roundtables**

The geographical distribution of participants has not been collated, but efforts were made to ensure a sufficient spread of engagement with regards to:

- A balance across the two local authority areas (Dumfries and Galloway / Scottish Borders)

- Key sectors and industries, including the Third Sector and Social Enterprises

- A mix of small, medium, and large businesses

- Community representatives

- Stakeholders beyond the SOS boundary (i.e. Borderlands, Scottish Government)

A full list of organisations who took part in the engagement process is included in Appendix 1.

2.2 Survey Participation Summary

Two surveys were administered to capture sentiments and feedback from a broad range of stakeholders – a business survey and catch-all survey. The latter was developed and administered by South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) and sought to provide an opportunity for a broader audience to contribute, including members of the public. The level of engagement across both surveys is set out in more detail below.
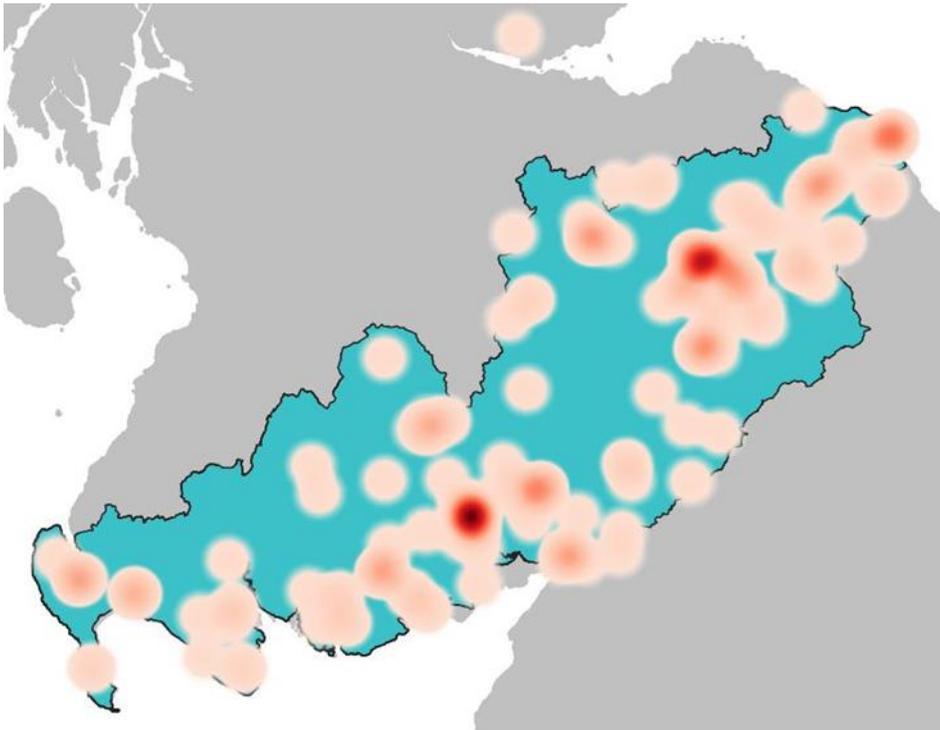
Business Survey

The business survey elicited **215 complete responses**, after data cleansing had been completed. It was administered using RSM's SmartSurvey software. Looking at sectors that engaged with the survey:

- **Agriculture and Professional Services** constituted over **20%** of respondents.

- **Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure** made up approximately **20%** of respondents.

- **Manufacturing and Engineering, Creative industries** (Art/Crafts/Designs, and Retail/ Wholesale) each made up over **5%** of respondents.

- The remaining sectors each made up less than **5%** of respondents.

The distribution of these across the region is illustrated in the map below, which suggests a good spread of participation from across the SOS.

Business Survey – Distribution Mapping

Heat Map Scale:

Lighter orange = lowest levels of response

Darkest orange = highest levels of response

Considering other facets of the businesses that responded to the survey:

- The Wards with the greatest concentration of responses were **Nith**, **East Berwickshire**, **Mid Berwickshire**, **Mid Galloway and Wigtown West**, **Galashiels and District**, **Annandale North** and **Mid and Upper Nithsdale**.

- Some **65%** of respondent businesses were VAT registered.

- The majority of respondent businesses were small-medium (SMEs) in size – **95%** employed between 1-249 people.

- Most respondents were mature businesses – **54%** had been trading for 10-years of more.

- Early-stage start-ups (trading for less than 1 year) accounted for **6%** of total respondents.

Catch-All Survey

The catch-all survey sought to engage a more general audience, with SOSE administering the questionnaire via Survey Monkey. Approximately **440 people** from a variety of backgrounds and locations took part in the survey – once cleansing had been undertaken, this led to a final sample of **359 complete responses**. Looking more closely at the characteristics of survey respondents:

- Approximately **90%** of respondents categorised themselves as individuals.

- **Community groups** and **Third sector** organisations accounted for the majority of other responses.

- Wards with the highest concentration of survey responses were Jedburgh and District, **Castle Douglas and Crocketford**, **Selkirkshire**, **Kelso and District**, **East Berwickshire** and **Lochar**.

The distribution of responses across the region again suggests a good spread of participation from across the SOS – 'hot spots' correspond with key urban centres, and rural representation is strong.

Catch-All Survey – Distribution Mapping
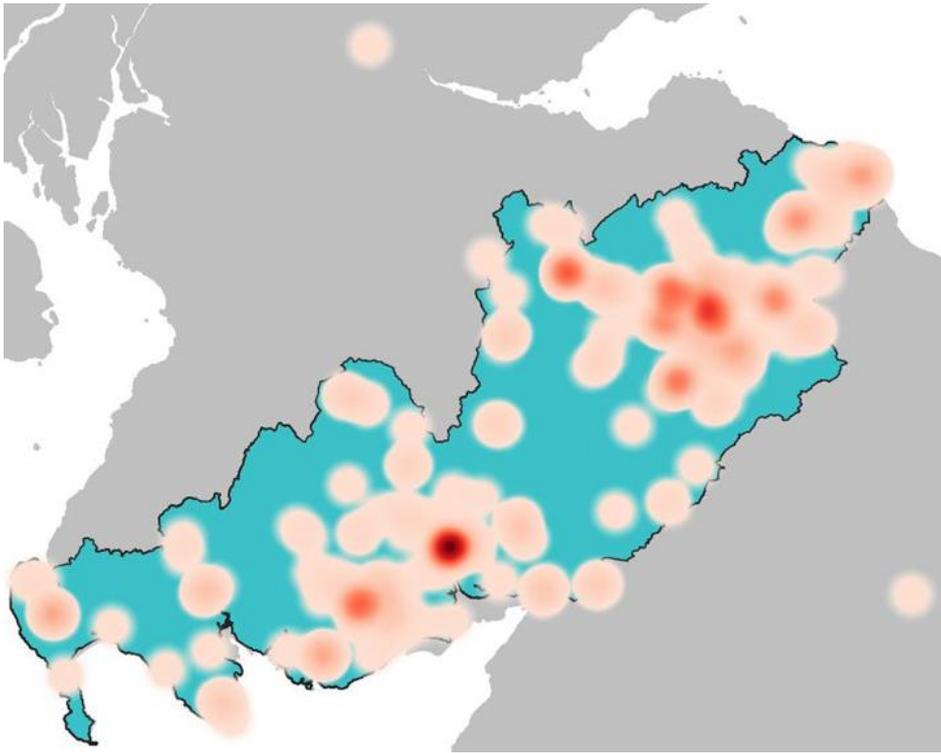
Heat Map Scale:

Lighter orange = lowest levels of response

Darkest orange = highest levels of response

3. ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK

3.1   Key Messages

Whilst the stakeholder engagement process captured a large amount of information and intelligence, this has been aggregated to provide a sense of regional priorities, highlight commonalities in view and also show the strength of ambition that stakeholders have for the region. The feedback also builds a picture of where the RES will need to focus in terms of strategic impetus, reflecting on the strengths and weakness of that currently characterise the SOS.

Aggregated Feedback Summary

Inclusivity will be created through fair and productive work…

It is acknowledged that there already are numerous strong economic sectors and businesses in the region, including Agriculture and Manufacturing. It is these sectors that people want to see investment within, in the first instance. Respondents want to see their productivity and employment levels increased to boost what is already there – building from within. In parallel, there is a recognition that new businesses will have to be attracted to the region for new opportunities to emerge – either through inward investment or through greater local entrepreneurialism.

To support this, it is felt there is also a need to provide access to dynamic and flexible workspaces, for instance, through the establishment of modern business hubs that provide good digital and transport connections. Ideally, these will be co-located with existing businesses, schools, or colleges and could potentially also be an option to rapidly regenerate Town Centres.

Across all sectors, it is felt that public policy has to be consistent and supportive – it must focus on closing the gender pay gap and on providing fair living wages that can reduce deprivation and provide real opportunity for younger generations. Any job has to give people secure career prospects and ambition, as well as a contribute towards health and standards of living.

The Importance of thriving and distinct places is paramount…

There is a strong sense that the people of the SOS value their localities and want to see them thrive, while retaining what makes them distinct. Quality of life is a key strength for the region, and whatever is done has to improve quality of life further, especially in a post-pandemic future. To achieve this, regeneration projects are seen as key opportunities, not least to reimagine and reinvigorate Town Centres, but also to improve vitality and amenity. Retail hubs are seen as possible way of bringing economic life back or strengthening it. When embarking on regeneration projects, it is felt that planning should consider ways in which wider infrastructure improvements can be delivered too.

There is a view that people need high quality and safe places to live and work. Therefore, the region will need to invest in more affordable housing that is high quality, energy efficient and accessible. Young people in particular report that they need and want places to live in the region that give them access to work opportunities and proximity to their friends and family, while living independently. Getting this right is seen as key to retaining and attracting young people to the region.

There is also an acknowledgement that communities need to be well connected, both within and with other places, in order to thrive and grow. Currently, the provision of digital and transport connectivity is viewed as a barrier rather than an enabler, despite improvements. What is more, decisions need to be made locally, so people want to see devolved responsibilities with local power over funding.

Now is the opportunity to be bold and enterprising in pursuit of growth…

Innovation, research and development are perceived as key to future success for local entrepreneurs and businesses. That means there's a need to improve local capacity to innovate as it is currently not strong enough and investment in this is also lagging. To work, innovation skills need to be front and centre in education, business support, and business networks. Especially among small businesses, more could and has to be done to promote understanding of what innovation entails.

In general, it is felt that there is a lot of support available for businesses, but the support structures are complex and could be simplified. Support on offer also has to respond to the needs of businesses of all sizes and in all stages of their development. Simplification, better sector targeting and removing market failures for small businesses are all seen as paramount.

Peer-to-peer networks are seen as a way not just to share skills and knowledge and build partnerships but also to showcase successes and thereby to inspire others. As with innovation, entrepreneurial skills have to be built into regular school curricula. Incubation hubs are another spoke in the wheel to offer businesses space to grow and scale up, which could intertwine with the reuse and redevelopment of underutilised assets, including those with a heritage focus.

Growth must be green, sustainable and net zero…

There is an appetite to make the most of the natural resources which the region has in abundance, to speed up a just transition and achieve or even exceed net zero targets. To help with this, local businesses and actors are increasingly aware of the potential to systematically develop circular economies and place sustainability at the heart of the economy. By helping local communities to be self-sufficient, there is huge potential for building local community wealth.

It is felt that clean energy has huge potential in the SOS. With its long distances, electrifying transport will play a key role decarbonising the region and protecting the environment. With some support, communities have the potential to deliver sustainable energy themselves and reduce dependency on more expensive and carbon intensive heat and power sources.

There is a view that buy local campaigns and public sector support for effective local procurement enable more local supply chains. However, local processing facilities will also be key to achieving potential in this area, not least in reducing the carbon footprint of many local industries.

The region has tremendous cultural and creative potential…

There is a view that the creative sector in the SOS is strong and growing. The region also has a wealth of historical and cultural potential which is currently vastly underutilised. Recognising the role creatives play across different sectors and providing them with the means to use regional cultural assets to their fullest could provide a strong entrepreneurial opportunity that will help promote what makes the SOS unique while creating real economic value.

Linked with making the most of its cultural heritage, the SOS has not developed a strong regional brand identity, although its recognised as improving. While locally, attractions are often well known, they are not more widely appreciated. More work is therefore required to put the region on the map as a place with a vibrant cultural and historical heritage. Events can be a key driver in the region's brand development, but also in supporting local businesses and regenerating towns and localities. Overall, all aspects of culture and history have latent potential to help differentiate the SOS.

Skilled and talented people are the cornerstone to a vibrant economy…

For the region to successfully develop, it is felt that local skills will be key, as will be their development and provision in local schools and colleges. These have to be built from within the region among its own population rather than bringing them in externally and skills infrastructure must develop too, leveraging the power of technology.

There is a view that current skills development provision could potentially have a far wider reach through embracing digital and 'smart' technologies and through improved transport provision. While there are links between employers, entrepreneurs and educators, these could be stronger and more systematic in the way they are managed. A real emphasis will have to be put on improving local digital skills, should local people be well placed to deliver the jobs of the future.

It is felt that by focusing on an improved skills landscape locally, the SOS will be able to better attract and retain people, especially young people. However, it will also give its older generations access to more diverse opportunities and overall boost local prospects for the best and brightest talent. Current trends and post-pandemic norms are a good place to start as they have transformed rural areas' attractiveness and could welcome a new wave of flexible and higher paying jobs.

3.2 Segmentation of Feedback

Below, engagement feedback is summarised in a segmented way – looking at the key aspects of feedback from:

- **Businesses**

- **Third sector**

- **Public sector**

- **Skills and education organisations**

- **Communities**

Table 1: Businesses: Key Messages

Feedback Focus	Summary Comments
Business Environment Characteristics	- Views about whether the SOS provides a good place for businesses are mixed. - On the positive side, the natural environment and quality of life are seen as key assets. The broad base of small and micro businesses can build on a loyal workforce, an abundance of space and building stock and some transport assets such as the port at Cairnryan and the Borders Railway. - On the other hand, there are considerable barriers – land and buildings need investment, the area is very rural, and local businesses don't tend to cooperate much. Transport and digital connectivity are seen as poor, and the local workforce and many business owners don't have all the skills that are needed. There's also a perceived lack of strategic ambition from which to build.
Key Constraints on Business Growth	While some businesses and bodies embed fair work principles, others don't. Fair work is seen as key to driving access and inclusivity and increasing wages. When national or regional bodies don't adapt these principles, that means an unfair disadvantage to local businesses who do adapt them.

	• Respondents felt business support bodies have to also be ambitious and supportive. Both local businesses and local people need stronger business skills, and the availability of finance is limited. • Geographically, businesses face immense challenges with transport, and with digital connectivity and also an antiquated power and heat infrastructure.
Key Issues to Support Business Performance	• Skills and workforce capacity / capability, lack of strategic ambition and aim, as well as connectivity and the quality of buildings and sites are frequently mentioned. In addition, procurement is often not accessible for local businesses, who are often too small to tender on their own, or don't have the time or resources to do so – this hinders business growth. • Access to a single port of call for support and access to finance sources are also seen as key barriers. Partnership working does not happen enough to address some of these issues, including tendering for larger procurement.
Priorities for Action	• Through strategic, umbrella body leadership, businesses would benefit from easily accessible and proactive support. • More effective partnerships between schools and businesses would help address skills shortages in a strategic way and open up career prospects to pupils. • To help address transport issues, the rail network should be expanded, but in addition more flexible, local mobility possibly accessible through an app would help solve this issue Additionally, rolling out EV charging points should be a priority. • Businesses need soft skills sector agnostic skills, such as using digital and keeping books, which are seen as just fundamental as technical and STEM skills.
Future Sector Prospects	• Sectors that could grow most are identified as agriculture and food, renewables and green construction, hospitality and tourism, manufacturing, textiles, health and care, creative industries, and potentially, life sciences.
Future Regional Opportunities	**Just Transition:** • The move to remote working can support local retail and other sectors and could be continued beyond the pandemic as part of new ways of working. • The co-location of businesses and schools should be pursued in a way that supports a circular economy. • Businesses can't change immediately – they need to be given time and support. **Inclusive Economic Growth:** • Developing skills locally, lobbying for wide-spread adoption of fair work principles and better procurement can go a long way in helping local businesses. **Community Wealth Building:** • Inclusion of fair work principles as well as the provision and development of skills locally are seen as key. • In addition, SOSE and other bodies have to actively reach out to communities and businesses to activate community wealth building. **Natural Capital:** • Public bodies have to educate the public about the dangers of climate change. In parallel they have to support businesses and communities by making finance and capacity available that allows businesses to adapt their business model. • Skills, once again, are seen as key – without the right skills, businesses won't be able to adapt, and start-ups can't make the most of natural capital in the region. • By enabling networking and by sharing lessons between businesses, space for innovation has to be proactively developed and promoted.
COVID-19 and Brexit Considerations	**COVID-19:** • Two sectors have been affected most significantly - hospitality which has lost most or all income and lacks capital to invest going forward and education, where lots of young people have faced a significant opportunity cost. • There will be an increased need for funding to allow businesses to adapt, re-start and invest. It's likely that in the short term, high skilled people will not be locally available. The move to remote working will likely increase pressure on the housing market. For hospitality, there may be an opportunity to switch to high-end provision.

Brexit:
- Some businesses and sectors have been hit hard – food and drink producers and agriculture are suffering as they can't export easily and mechanical and electronics businesses have lost access to international supply chains.
- Opportunities are identified however – with improved infrastructure local supply chains, a renewed focus on the local market could increase sustainability of businesses.

Table 2: Third Sector: Key Messages

Feedback Focus	Summary Comments
Business Environment Characteristics	• Most charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations don't think that the environment in the SOS is supportive for business development. • Communities have been reported as being engaged and highly responsive during COVID-19 however, filling gaps that the public sector or businesses leave. • There is a feeling that there is not enough subsidiarity and strategic leadership from public bodies to enable communities to identify needs, develop projects, and implement them. • There is also a perception that businesses in the sector struggle to be recognised as professional organisations. • Road, rail, public transport, and digital infrastructure are all cited as key issues which challenge the business environment enormously.
Key Constraints on Business Growth	• The main constraint is a perceived lack of strategic leadership, which has hampered effective partnerships and long-term planning, as well as how the sector is viewed by the public sector. • A lack of a permanent local base of skills and capacity on which to build successful community organisations or charities is a challenge, as is the availability of flexible, long term funding limits sustainable planning for TSO's.
Key Issues to Support Business Performance	• Views suggest skills and capacity have to be available locally and funding must be long-term and has to be flexible, recognising local requirements. • There is a sense that public sector bodies have to develop greater trust in the sector and be willing to delegate decision making powers to communities and provide strategic leadership. • Infrastructure improvements are seen as an absolute priority for the region, especially digital connectivity, which has been exposed due to COVID-19.
Priorities for Action	• Respondents feel that the establishment of a permanent delivery vehicle which provides local capacity support to deliver projects would be a huge step forward. • The establishment of a regional fund for community and socially driven projects, which can provide long-term core investment is also a priority and should be addressed in the context of new regional powers. • It is felt that communities would benefit from local hubs which offer high quality space for social businesses and create a space for collaboration and integration with other sectors.
Future Regional Opportunities	**Just Transition:** • Promoting active mobility and improving local transport infrastructures would allow people to live and work closer proximity. • There is a perceived opportunity for the public sector to work with communities to develop local skills, to promote sustainable development and further renewable energy production. • Communities would like to see support to acquire and develop good quality local premises and further delegation of decision-making powers through community organisations. **Inclusive Economic Growth:** • There is a real opportunity for communities to conduct real participatory budgeting. • Local hubs, which could be community run, would provide a space for entrepreneurs but also help provide remote communities with a space to access vital services.

Community Wealth Building:
- Community organisations, charities and other sector businesses see support to develop local skills and local capacity as key to supporting community wealth building.
- Greater empowerment and ownership of good quality assets which is also seen as fundamental.
- Supporting the growth of local supply chains, through physical and digital infrastructure, will enable communities to embrace buy local initiatives.

Natural Capital:
- There is a view that providing local skills so that communities can themselves develop, maintain, and protect their local natural assets is key.
- Tt will be necessary for SOSE and others to communicate the value of natural assets, for instance by building on COP26 and promoting sustainable tourism.

COVID-19 and Brexit Considerations	**COVID-19:** - There is a view that local capacity has been stretched, and funding may become quite limited going forward, leaving a threat to sector sustainability. - COVID-19 has exposed mental health issues but there are not enough skills or resources to deal with them, compounded by future uncertainty. **Brexit:** - Two concerns are highlighted in relation to Brexit – issues with trade, and the loss of EU funding sources. - Looking ahead, the main issue is expected to be uncertainty, mainly around the replacement of funding programmes and shape of new legislation.

Table 3: Public Sector: Key Messages

Feedback Focus	Summary Comments
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats	**Strengths:** - It is believed that the region's key strengths are related to geography and natural beauty, as well as the communities and people of the region. **Weaknesses:** - Transport and digital connectivity are generally seen as being poor, in terms of transport especially links from East to West. - The region's demographics are challenging to the place and economy, with young people not seeing the SOS as an attractive or viable life proposition. - There is also a sense that more could be done to build a tangible regional identity **Opportunities:** - There is a view that, by improving the physical transport infrastructure and providing better joined up, flexible public transport, the region could flourish. - Tourism and renewable energy production are seen as significant opportunities, as are remote working arrangements and the future of work, given the region's quality of life. **Threats:** - An ageing demographic and an innate aversion to change, as well as a tendency to not be ambitious are viewed as the most prominent threats.
Key Issues to Regional Prosperity	- The main threats identified are sustained demographic change, lack infrastructure improvements, limited R&D investment, low and competitive wages, alongside perpetuating skills shortages holding back growth.
Priorities for Action	- There is a sense that businesses and public bodies should be encouraged to partner up and network more effectively. - Public bodies have to make it easier for small, local businesses to tender for work and buy local. - The extension of the rail network will be key, not least from net zero point of view, as well as making rural areas increasingly accessible.

Gaps in Provision and Support	**Businesses:** • There is a real need to provide sector agnostic business skills support, including use of digital, planning and bookkeeping. • A mentorship scheme for businesses and pupils alike could help to instil entrepreneurialism amongst the resident population. **Social Enterprise:** • The mapping of community enterprises and organisations across the region to help networking and lesson sharing is seen as a missing link at present. **Communities:** • Communities require support to effectively network and cooperate, alongside more flexible funding arrangements. • There is also a view they need stronger local skills and capacity before local empowerment is championed more fully.
Strengthening Regional Economic Development Structures	• There is a view that a more accessible, single port of call for support is needed, so that businesses and others know who to turn and to help local businesses procurement opportunities. • In terms of new regulations and policies, public bodies have to communicate early and clearly what the costs will be to local businesses so that they can prepare appropriately. • There is also a case for the simplification of economic development and business support structures.
Future Regional Opportunities	**Just Transition:** • It is felt educating people about what it means to have local energy production and distribution is key. **Inclusive Economic Growth:** • Enabling people to use digital technology to access services such as health care and banking but also to work remotely will be important to ensure no one is left behind. • Childcare and elderly care will become more and more important locally too if people continue to work remotely. • Tapping into the large pool of retired people, either through mentorship schemes or through giving them the opportunity to start a new business can also drive inclusivity. **Community Wealth Building:** • Examples like Castle Douglas Food Town and Wigtown Book Festival show that some of communities can successfully developed local projects with local skills – it's felt that there is an opportunity to share lessons and advocate best practice. **Natural Capital:** • The prevailing view is that there are already numerous local opportunities, but they have to be linked up to work at a whole-region level. • Renewables are seen as a huge opportunity, particularly if they are in the hands of community groups. • There is a shared sense that environmental protection and preservation must come hand in hand with sustainable growth.
COVID-19 and Brexit Considerations	**COVID-19:** • There is a view that the pandemic has had highly variable effects on the region – sectors like tourism have been hit incredibly hard, yet digital and remote working has increased, and carbon footprints decreased, which are both significant opportunities to build on. **Brexit:** • Changing trade relationships and potential cost and regulation barriers are seen as the prime challenges that will affect businesses across the SOS.

Table 4: Skills and Education: Key Messages

Feedback Focus	Summary Comments
Key Issues to Address and Deliver Inclusive Growth	• It is viewed that the main issues are demographic change, providing access to education in an inclusive way and closing the skills gap not least through strong business / school / public partnerships. • In addition, fostering and enabling entrepreneurial thinking is seen as key and a lost opportunity at present. • Again, there is palpable sense that the region needs clear strategic leadership coupled with better partnership working and infrastructure to thrive. • Skills shortages, poor infrastructure are seen as key barriers too.
Priorities for Action	• There is a strong view that local hubs could be used to promote entrepreneurial thinking and start-ups and can also practically start to close the skills gap by establishing close links between businesses and schools. • It is felt that young people in schools also need to know from an early age what potential careers are available locally and gain practical work experience, building on the businesses and sectors that are already prospering. • Marquee investment into research centres, for instance into digital health care or climate change, could attract entrepreneurs and help drive productivity in existing sectors.
Regional Specialisms	• The Crichton Campus with its multiple of present academic institutions works well to drive education collaboration. • One particular strength at Crichton is dairy and environmental studies, the University of Glasgow offers environmental studies at Crichton Campus and a Primary Education degree. • Open University has a presence at Crichton with high volume of distance learners.
Improvements to Skills and Education	• There is a view that some skills aren't taught sufficiently within the local curriculum and institutions – this includes entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership. • There is potential for a medical school to be established at Crichton and could help build a stronger offer of health care training.
Future Regional Opportunities	**Just Transition:** • Attracting anchor institutions through investment in physical locations and fostering entrepreneurialism in school curricula will help transform the economy of the SOS. • In parallel, there is a view that investment in cafes and other social infrastructure must occur in parallel to create the ecosystem needed to attract young people. **Inclusive Economic Growth:** • By using local hubs as well as digital technology, there is a real opportunity for the whole population of the SOS to better access spaces to network, work, learn and engage • Investing in innovative, digital health and social care can turn the sector into a real career option while providing for the region's ageing population. **Community Wealth Building:** • There is support for the sharing of lessons learned from successful projects and providing communities and local businesses with soft business skills. • There is a view that communities need access to flexible, appropriate finance, but also need skills and capacity – the SOS diaspora could be a source of mentoring support. **Natural Capital:** • There is a strong view that public policy needs to set the right framework for communities to develop and use their natural assets in an efficient and productive way.
COVID-19 and Brexit Considerations	**COVID-19:** • There is a view that funding will become sparse once grant support ends, at least in the short term and this will affect sectors such as cultural and creative industries, but also tourism. • Digital care and digital teaching; upskilling the population with other soft business skills such as entrepreneurialism and leadership will all be key in a sustain recovery.

- The region has potential for the development of advanced fusion energy, but in general the key is to make more of the region's natural assets.
- Local expertise in elderly care or intergenerational living can be an export commodity that drives value locally.
  Brexit:
- While there is an acknowledgement that much remains unclear, there is a likely loss of skilled labour from people returning to the EU.
- There is a view that rural areas need replacement funding to make up for loss of EU funding.
- Wages in the region also need to increase so that people can buy higher quality local products.
- Making the most of natural assets, such as the UNESCO Biosphere would help drive a re-emergence of domestic tourism, and international tourists, building on pandemic 'staycationing'.

Table 5: Communities: Key Messages

Feedback Focus	Summary Comments
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats	**Strengths:** • The region's primary strengths are deemed to be quality of life with strong cultural and historical heritage and beautiful landscapes – each contribute to the region's attractiveness to visitors well as those relocating. • Local communities show strong cohesion and have a real sense of local identity and the creative industry is playing a key role in this context. **Weaknesses:** • The main themes of weakness relate to demography, physical and digital infrastructure, and public transport, as well as struggling town centres and poor-quality housing. • In addition, factors such as low wages and high under-employment are key concerns. • There is a view that the region lacks strategic focus and leadership and suffers from both a lack of entrepreneurial capacity and spirit. **Opportunities:** • Creating a stronger skills base, especially in terms of soft business skills, is seen as a key opportunity, alongside the provision of high-quality hubs which are well connected and technology ready. • Importantly, SOSE's strategic leadership is seen as a real opportunity to drive partnerships, networks, and the region's economic development. **Threats:** • The main threats identified are growing poverty, procurement strategies that exclude local businesses, as well as climate change and an ageing building stock.
Gaps in the Economic Development Ecosystem	• There is a view that supporting entrepreneurial skills mindsets through funding, incubator hubs, and school-business-public body partnerships of vital importance. • In general, networking between businesses, sectors, and other organisations should be promoted as a strategic priority, which could attract a new generation to the region. • For communities there is a real desire to see strong subsidiarity arrangements that enable and empower communities to identify their needs and develop and deliver projects locally, guided by a clear strategy and strategic leadership.
Priorities for Action	• There is a need for specific infrastructure investment in physical and vacant spaces, can help re-invigorate town centres while providing businesses with a space to sell and network. • Similarly, local hubs of incubators can provide entrepreneurs with a cheap but high-quality space to start up. • To build the right kinds of skills and to help families identify career opportunities, businesses and schools and public bodies must systematically cooperate from early years onward so that children and parents recognise local career opportunities

	• It is felt that SOSE and other partners could support the development of targeted, local training programmes as well as to foster local work experience schemes
Future Regional Opportunities	**Just Transition:** • Strategic leadership needs to be in place in order to provide localities, businesses, and others with a decision-making framework. • Investment in centres of excellence, for instance for robotics in agriculture, could put the region on the map and support the region's key sectors. **Inclusive Economic Growth:** • The main theme cited is to empower communities by devolving decision making powers and budgets, accompanied by strategic leadership and a shared vision. • It is felt that schools, businesses, and the public sector must systematically cooperate to build the right skills and deepen knowledge about career opportunities from an early age. **Community Wealth Building:** • To help address issues of uneven distribution of skills and capacity in different communities, a mentoring scheme for businesses and communities based on peer-to-peer support should be developed. • In addition, there is a shared view that buy local initiatives need to be supported with stronger supply chains. **Natural Capital:** • There are strong opinions that suggest funding needs to be provided to retrofit buildings, but the skills needed also have to be developed locally. • Where there are local windfarms, there is a desire to explore ways to retain profits locally – through community funds to retrofit local housing or provide community assets.

4.   SURVEY FEEDBACK

4.1   Business Survey – Key Messages

This section presents the most salient and relevant findings from the business survey the survey.

Key Markets

As is shown in Figure 1, the SOS itself is the largest market for all businesses in the region. When business size is considered, businesses with 5 – 9 employees are the most likely to be active outside of the SOS, although, those of 50 – 249 employees are likely to have the largest international export market (**24%**).

Figure 1: Main markets by sector
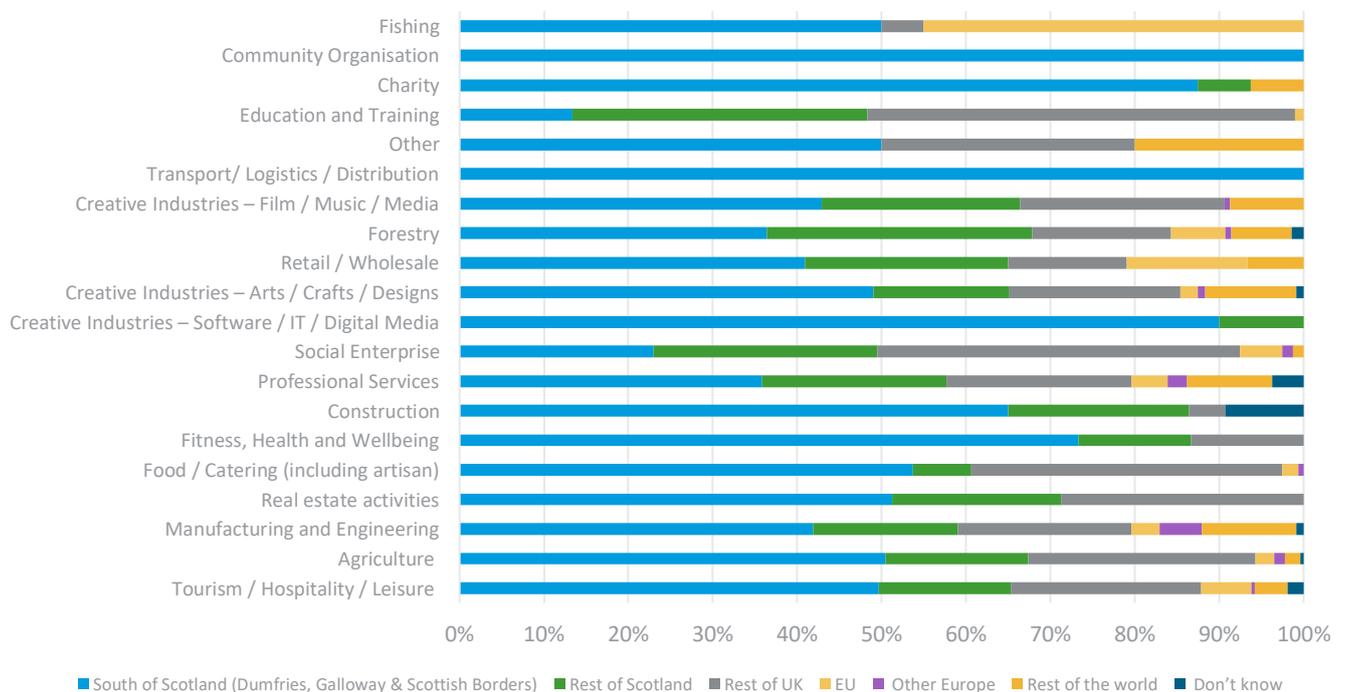
Regional Strengths

The general sentiment expressed across **all sectors** is that the region has a **good quality of life** and **natural environment**. Perceived regional strengths are outlined in detail in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Regional strengths
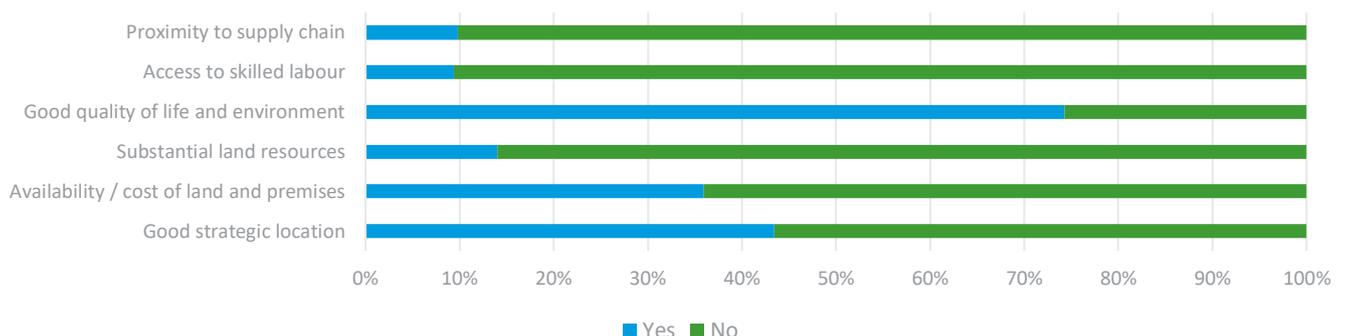
At a sector level, Agriculture and Tourism, Hospitality, Leisure (THL) businesses highlight **poor access to skills and poor proximity in terms of access to supply chains** as key issues. The THL sector sees SOS as having a **strong strategic location**. However, **land resources** and **availability/cost of land** are not considered a particular strength. The majority of businesses in the Creative sector perceive **access to skills and proximity to supply chain** as not a regional strength. The respondents also perceived **substantial land resources** as not a particular strength. Forestry businesses indicate the SOS has a **strong strategic location**, as do half the Fishing businesses and Education and Training firms. Conversely, Manufacturing and Engineering sector businesses suggested that the **availability and cost of land** is a particular strength.

Barriers to Growth

More than **66%** of businesses indicate that provisions (infrastructure, connectivity, skills, premises, etc.) need either **some or significant improvement**. Figure 3 shows the overall view of provision required. These trends broadly reflect the more granular sector breakdown – as is shown, **transport infrastructure** is reported to require the most significant investment. Trends are similar across business sizes, although increasing business size sees firms highlight the need for **more provision in innovation and R&D**, **availability of skilled staff**, and **availability of financial support** as key barriers. The key constraints on business growth highlighted included the **lack of skilled staff available**, **poor transport availability**, **inadequate business support**, **poor digital connectivity**, **external factors including Covid-19 and Brexit** and **access to finance**.
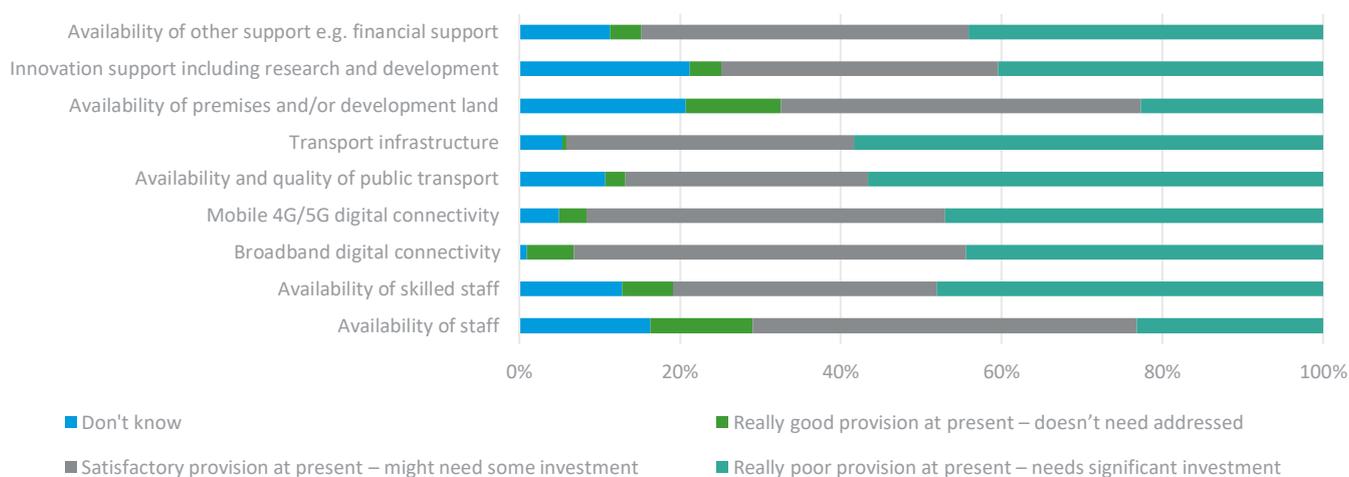
Figure 3: Requirement of investment in provisions

Legend:
- Don't know
- Really good provision at present – doesn't need addressed
- Satisfactory provision at present – might need some investment
- Really poor provision at present – needs significant investment

Future Plans

Over **70%** of businesses are either **likely or very likely to invest** across the next 12 months, 3-years, and 5-years. This is true across most sectors, with a key exception being Real Estate, which report being **highly unlikely equally as much as they would**. The Tourism, Professional Services, and Construction industries, although still more likely to invest in the next 12 months, do show **more uncertainty**, than sectors such as Agriculture or Manufacturing and Engineering. With regard to the size of businesses, the general trend shows that as the business size increases there is **an increase in the proportion of businesses that are likely or highly likely to invest** additional money into their businesses. For those unlikely to invest, the reasons stated are highlighted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Reason for not Investing

Chart data:
- Unable to attract staff: 1%
- No space to grow: 1%
- Health Reasons: 3%
- Retirement: 3%
- Political Instability: 4%
- Poor Future Prospects: 12%
- Lack of Finance: 13%
- Part of the business plan/ no further growth…: 15%
- Public funding certainty needed: 15%
- Covid-19 and Brexit Uncertainty: 16%
- Focusing on survival: 17%
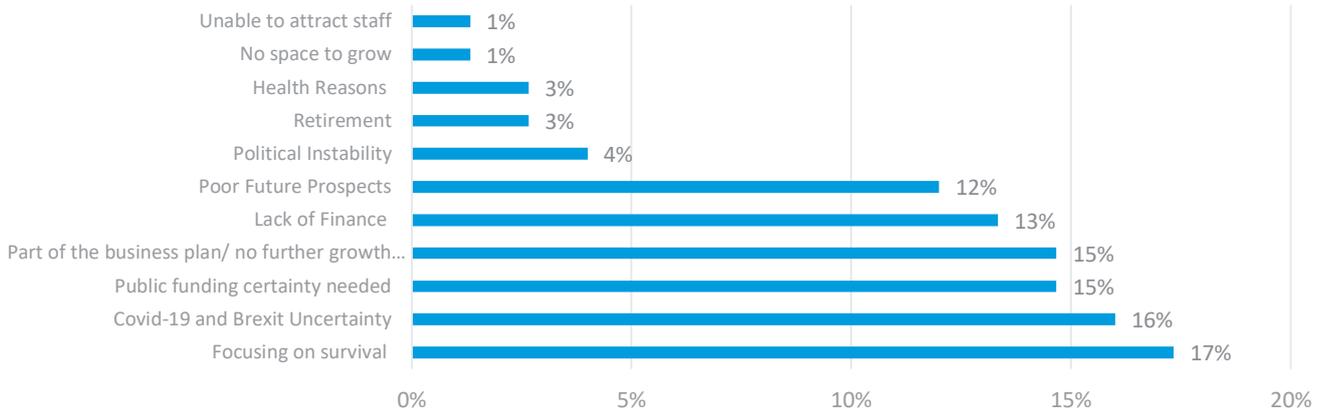
For businesses that are investing, the areas they are most likely to invest in is the **expansion of their premises**, **followed by marketing**, **workforce expansion**, **technology**, and **capital equipment**. R&D is an area that businesses across the region are unlikely to invest in. Investment priorities are found to vary on busines sector requirements. Similarly, with business size, larger businesses (250+ FTEs), **expansion of workforce and training**, whilst for smaller (1-9 FTEs) companies, **training and premises** are much more likely to be invested in and **research and development** significantly less so. For companies of 10 to 249, investment priorities included **premises and expansion**, **capital equipment** and **marketing**.

Figure 5 details the factors influencing the investment decision. **Satisfactory performance of the business** is the leading factor in influencing a business decision to invest, with **economic recovery** and **availability of finance** close behind. For primary industries (Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing) **satisfactory performance** is the core factor, whilst **availability of finance** influenced Charities/Community Groups as well as Manufacturing/Engineering respondents. **Economic recovery** is the biggest factor to influence the THL, Retail and Fitness, Health and Wellbeing sectors.

Satisfactory performance of the business is the leading reason for businesses with 1-4 employees to decide on investing. This is also true for the other business sizes. Additionally, businesses across all bands are inclined towards investing, **subject to mainly economic recovery and stability**, **satisfactory business performance** and the **availability of finance**. For businesses with more than 50 employees, **economic recovery** and **satisfactory performance of the business** are the main areas that influence decision to invest.

Figure 5: Factors influencing decision to invest

Categories:
- Availability of other sources of business support (e.g. business mentoring, coaching, guidance and advice)
- Availability of finance/ funding
- Monetary and fiscal stability (e.g. certainty of tax rates and borrowing costs)
- Investment by the public sector in supporting infrastructure (e.g. transport infrastructure, town centre regeneration)
- Satisfactory performance of the business
- Economic recovery/ stability (post Covid-19)

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No

Business Support

Approximately half of the respondents had not received any funding in the last three years. Of those that did receive support, Agriculture, Social Enterprise, and the Creative sectors (Software/IT/Digital Media) received the **largest proportion of financial support**. The Charity sector had the **largest proportion that received financial and other support** – this is shown in Figure 6. Regarding company size, 10-19-employees-sized businesses received the most **business support**, both financial and other. Businesses with 20-49 employees received the largest portion of **financial support**, only. Companies of over 250 employees reported the **lowest receipt of support**.

Figure 6: Business support by sector

Legend: ■ Don't know ■ No ■ Yes – Both financial and other support ■ Yes – Financial Support ■ Yes – Other Support (Advice & Information)
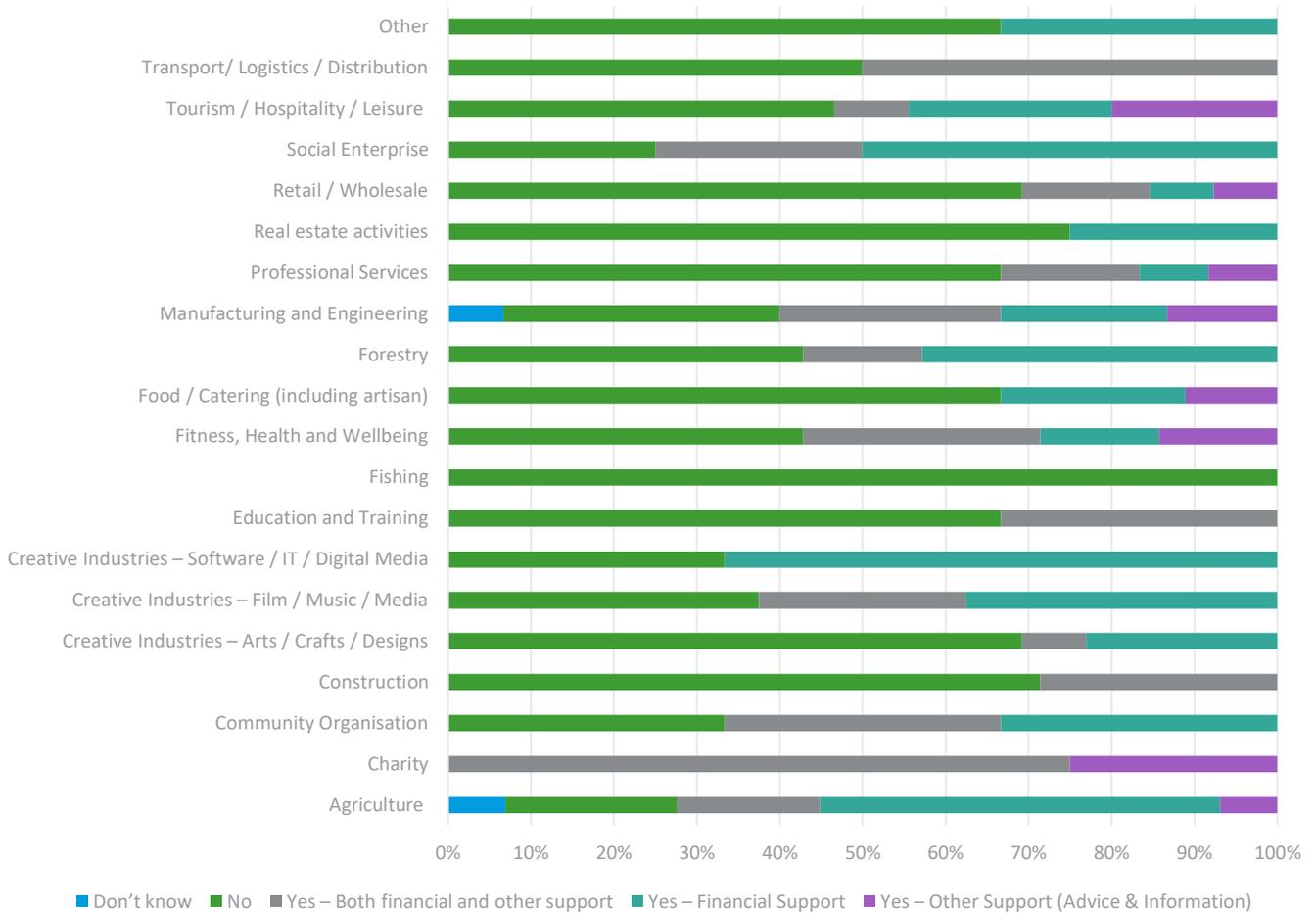
For those not accessing funding / support, the most commonly cited reasons are **a lack of access of what is available**, **not being sure what support is out there**, or **not requiring support**, shown by business size in Figure 7. Other reasons identified by consultees included that **support wasn't appropriate to specific needs** and that it **wasn't previously helpful**.

Figure 7: Reasons for not accessing funding

Legend:
- I haven't needed to access support
- Too far to travel/ distance
- Too costly
- I haven't the time to access the available support
- I don't know what help is available
- The support that is available is not appropriate to my needs
- I've used it in past and didn't find helpful
- The support I need is not available for my business sector
- I'm not sure what would be best for my business
- I'm not looking to develop my business
- I don't know where to go for help
- I have paid the full cost for any support needed
- Other (please specify):

Respondents highlighted the gaps in provision that needed to be addressed. Key gaps noted included **strategy development**, **research and development/innovation support**, **access to finance**, and **skills development**, which is highlighted by around **a third** of businesses, shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Gaps in Provision

Figure 8 data:
- There are no gaps in support: 3%
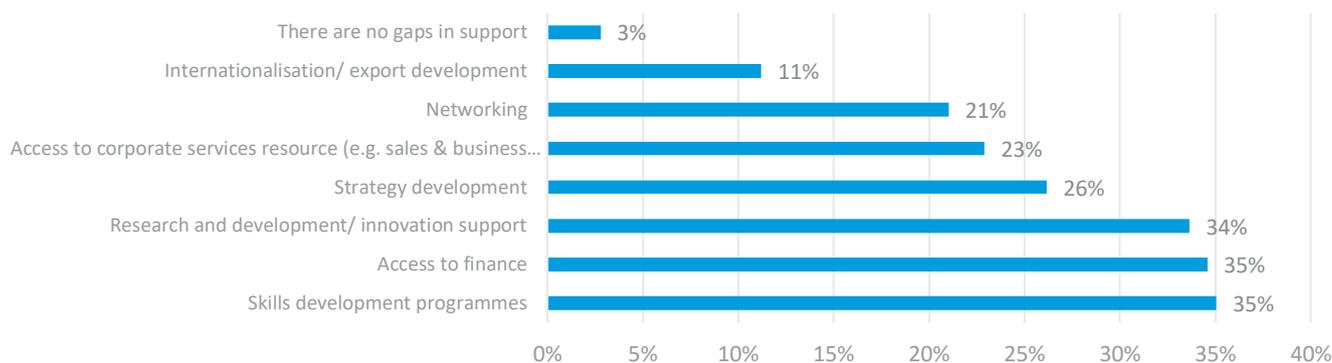- Internationalisation/ export development: 11%
- Networking: 21%
- Access to corporate services resource (e.g. sales & business…: 23%
- Strategy development: 26%
- Research and development/ innovation support: 34%
- Access to finance: 35%
- Skills development programmes: 35%

The Agriculture, Creative, Education and Training, Manufacturing and Engineering and THL sectors all recommended the **need for provision in research and development/ innovation support**, **access to corporate services resource** (e.g. sales & business development, HR, legal, digital marketing, finance); **access to finance**, **skills development programmes**, **networking** and **strategy development** as significant gaps. The smallest and largest sized businesses are **more likely to report that there aren't gaps in provision**, whilst companies employing between 9 and 250 employees cited gaps, particularly in **access to finance**, **skills development programmes**, **R&D,** and **innovation support**.

Success in the Region

As shown in Figure 9, the key areas identified to enable future success in the region are **attracting and retaining young people in the region** (most common are amongst sectors that are important in the SOS), **improving digital connectivity in the region**, and **providing support for business growth, innovation/research and development**. Key sectors that selected these areas as important include Agriculture, Creative Industries, Professional Services and THL.

Figure 9: Areas for Future Success for the SOS

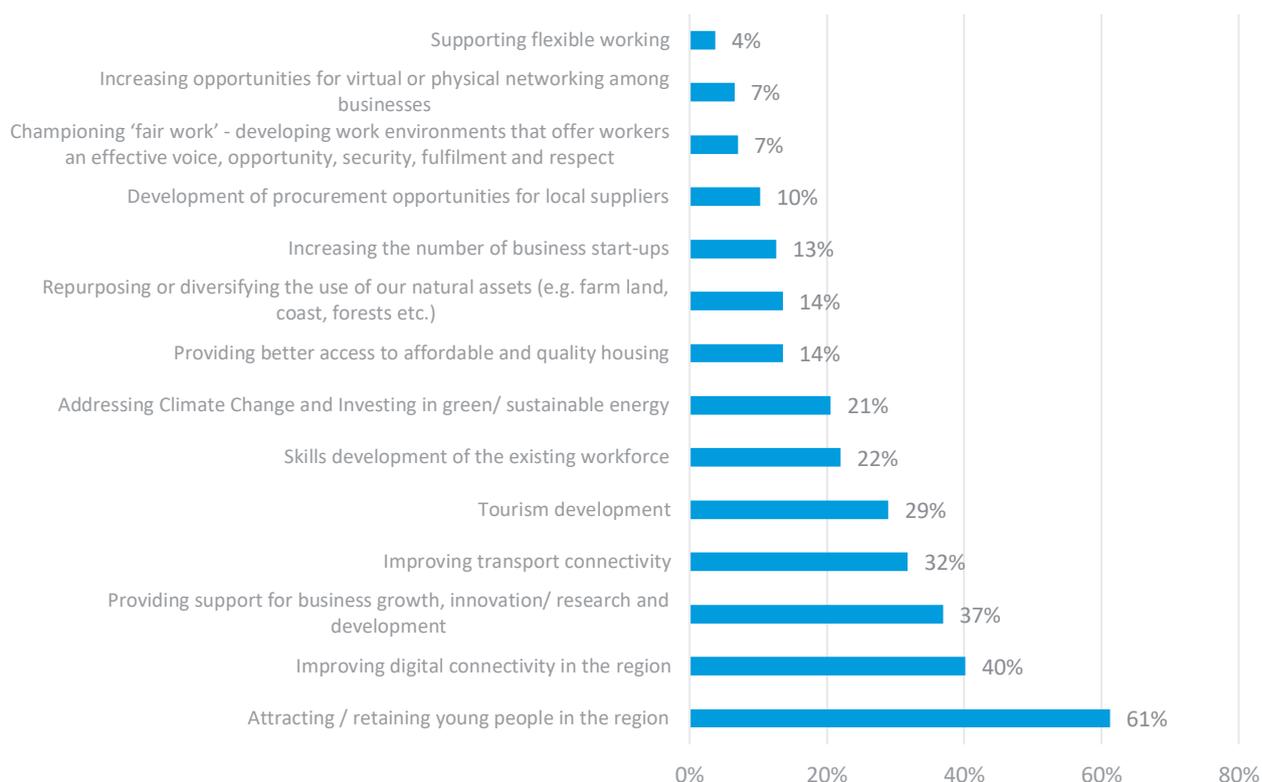| Area	Percentage
Supporting flexible working	4%
Increasing opportunities for virtual or physical networking among businesses	7%
Championing 'fair work' - developing work environments that offer workers an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect	7%
Development of procurement opportunities for local suppliers	10%
Increasing the number of business start-ups	13%
Repurposing or diversifying the use of our natural assets (e.g. farm land, coast, forests etc.)	14%
Providing better access to affordable and quality housing	14%
Addressing Climate Change and Investing in green/ sustainable energy	21%
Skills development of the existing workforce	22%
Tourism development	29%
Improving transport connectivity	32%
Providing support for business growth, innovation/ research and development	37%
Improving digital connectivity in the region	40%
Attracting / retaining young people in the region	61%

Table 6 highlights the additional factors that respondents emphasised as needed to build a successful and inclusive economy in the SOS.

Table 6: Additional Factors that can help build SOS economy

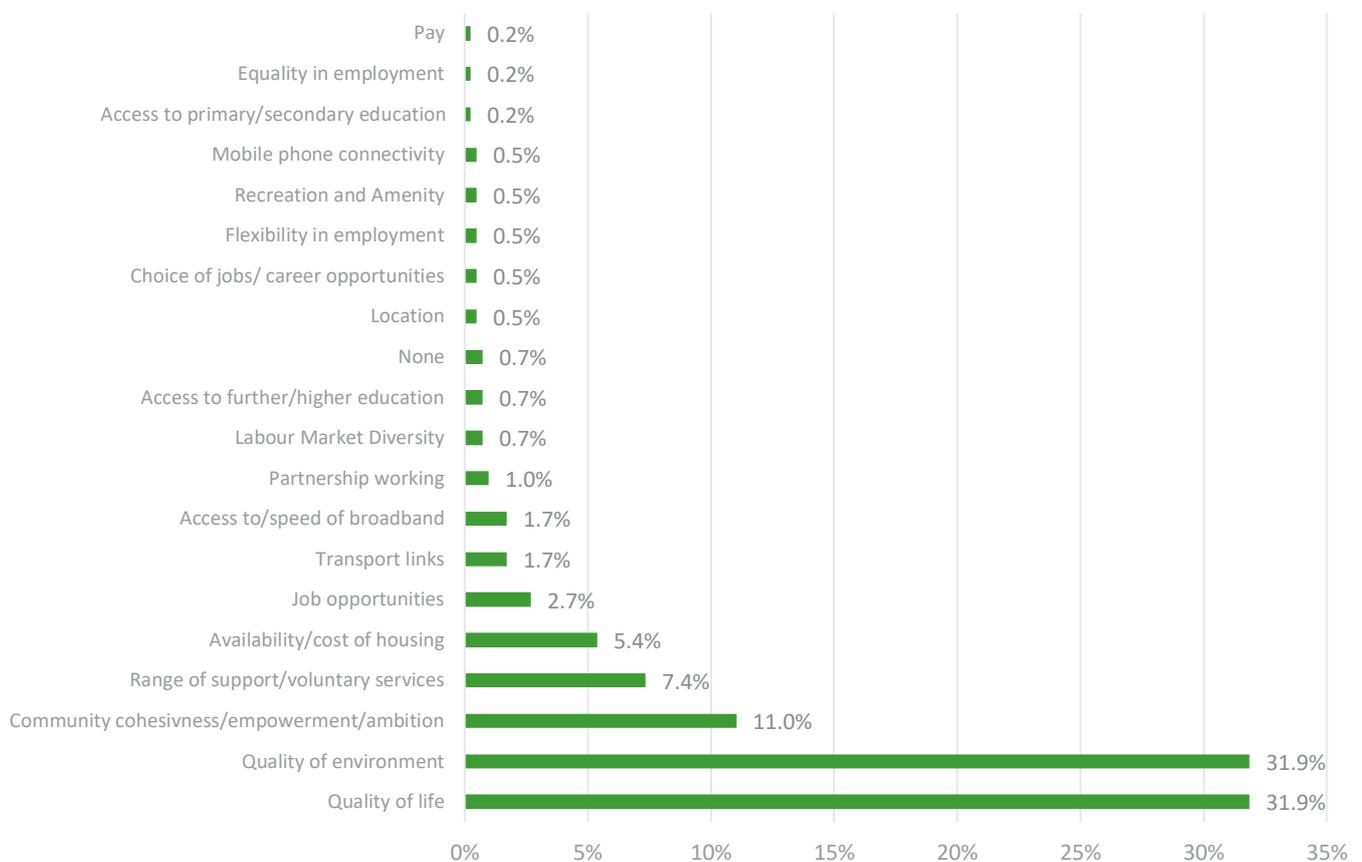| Factors	Respondents
Development of long-term strategic vision	22%
Infrastructure Investment and Regeneration	16%
Back Creative Industries and the Visitor Economy	10%
Scale Up Business Support Services	9%
Developing Green Energy Capacity	7%
Celebrate and Promote SOS	7%
Skills and Training Investment	7%
Build Community Capacity and Engagement	6%
Improve and Expand Housing Stock	4%
Development of Local Supply Chains	3%
Tax and Business Rates Reform	3%
Planning System Reform	3%
Secure National Park Status	2%
Create Improved and Modern Business Spaces	1%

4.2 Catch-All Survey – Key Messages

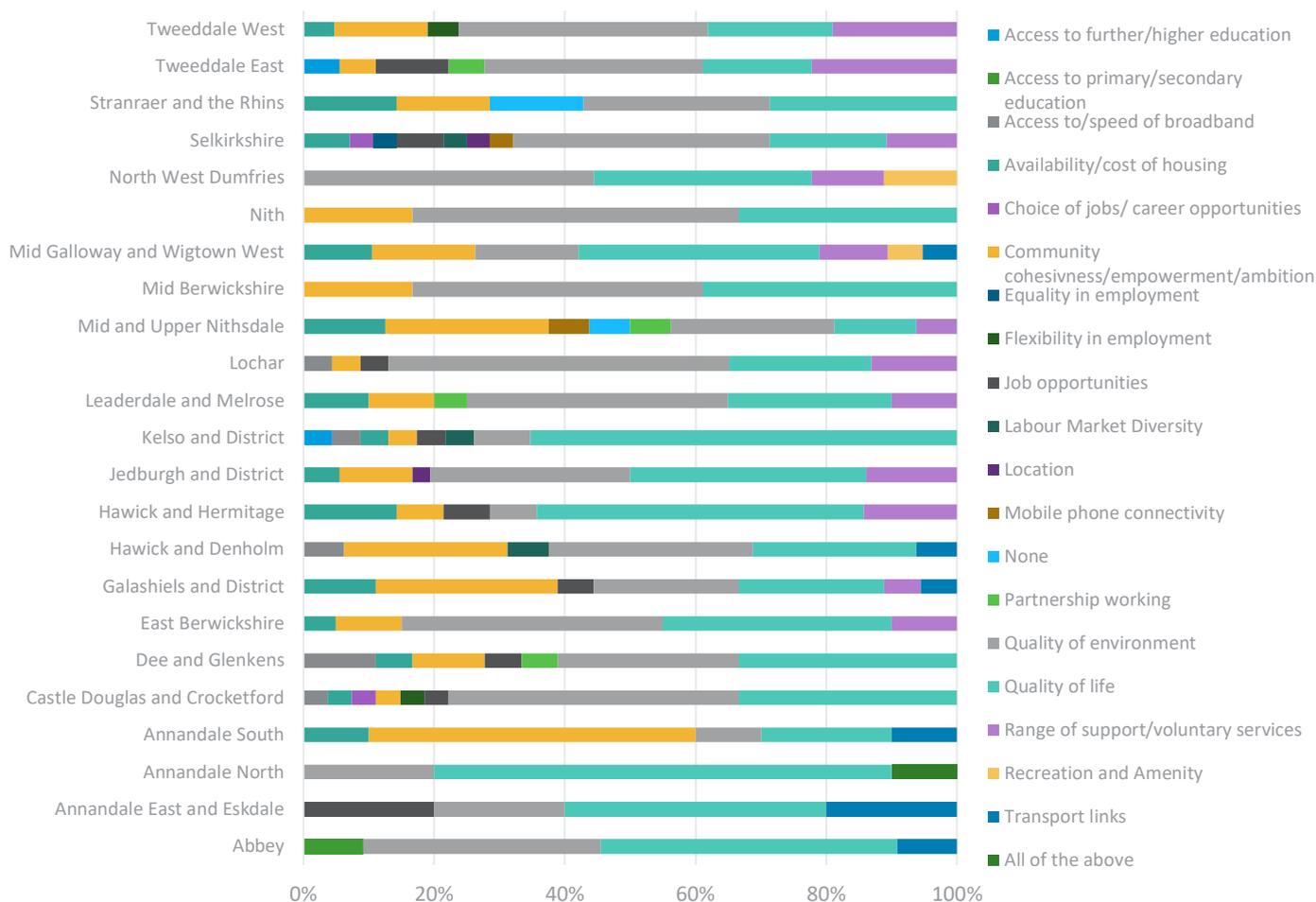This section presents the key findings from the catch-all survey, relevant to the RES.

Strengths of the SOS Economy

As shown in Figure 10, the major strengths of SOS relate to **lifestyle and living**, and the **strength of the pockets of communities and their voluntary support**, with the **quality of life** and **environment** the overwhelmingly most favoured strength of the region, and **community cohesiveness / ambition / empowerment and support / voluntary services** following this. These main strengths are broadly consistent across the regions reflected in the survey, although **support / voluntary services** are not thought to be a strength across the board. Other strengths identified include **natural capital**, **economic diversity,** and **civic spirit**.

Figure 10: Most important strengths of the SOS economy

Category	%
Pay	0.2%
Equality in employment	0.2%
Access to primary/secondary education	0.2%
Mobile phone connectivity	0.5%
Recreation and Amenity	0.5%
Flexibility in employment	0.5%
Choice of jobs/ career opportunities	0.5%
Location	0.5%
None	0.7%
Access to further/higher education	0.7%
Labour Market Diversity	0.7%
Partnership working	1.0%
Access to/speed of broadband	1.7%
Transport links	1.7%
Job opportunities	2.7%
Availability/cost of housing	5.4%
Range of support/voluntary services	7.4%
Community cohesivness/empowerment/ambition	11.0%
Quality of environment	31.9%
Quality of life	31.9%

Figure 11: Strengths by council area

Although **quality of life** and **environment** are prominent across all council areas, there is variation in the perceived strengths based on geography. For some regions, **Job opportunities** and/or **transport links** feature prominently, whilst others do not see these as regional strengths. Equally, many cite **available housing**, however this is not reflective in every council area, highlighting the variability of views and perceptions when considering regional strengths.
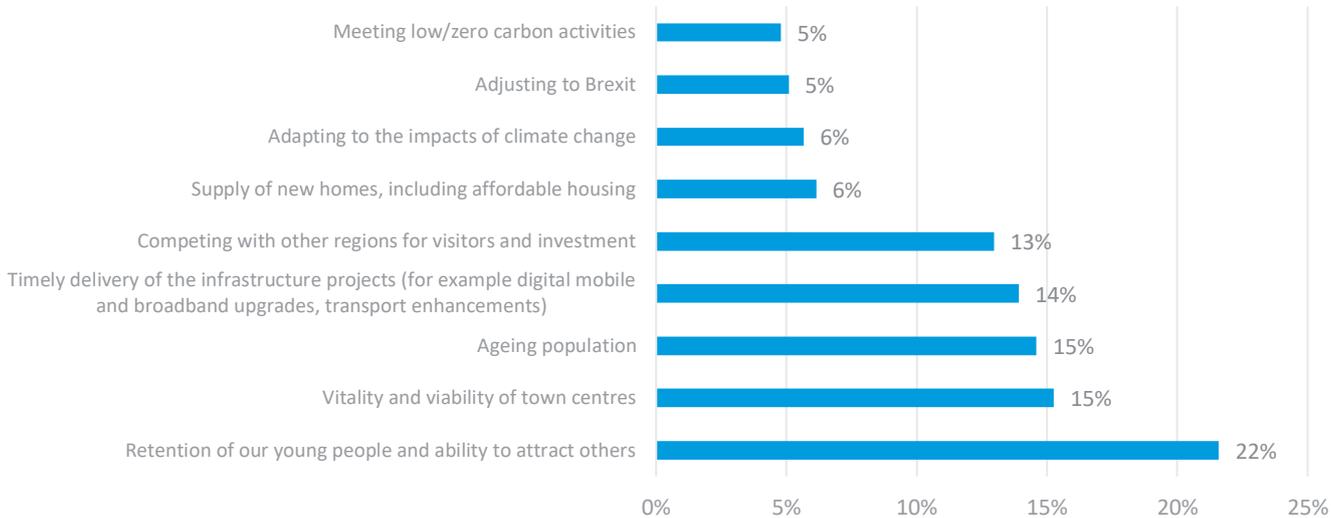
Challenges Facing the SOS

Figure 12 shows the respondents views on the biggest challenges facing the SOS. Key challenges identified include:

- **Retaining and attracting young people** – across the regions, **retention of young people** is important. The areas where this challenge is most prevalent are: East Berwickshire, Jedburgh and District, Mid Galloway and Wigtown West, and Kelso and District, which make up around **25%** of respondents who considered this as a big challenge.

- **Vitality and viability of town centres** – this is particularly acutely felt in Jedburgh and District, Selkirkshire, and Castle Douglas and Crocketford.

- **Ageing Population** – Jedburgh and District, Selkirkshire, Kelso and District, Dee and Glenkens, Castle Douglas and Crocketford and Hawick and Hermitage regions make up around **1/3** of respondents that consider the challenge of an **ageing population** to be paramount.

Other challenges not listed include **infrastructure capacity complaints**, **lack of opportunity**, **political change**, and **marginal identity**.

Figure 12: Challenges facing the SOS

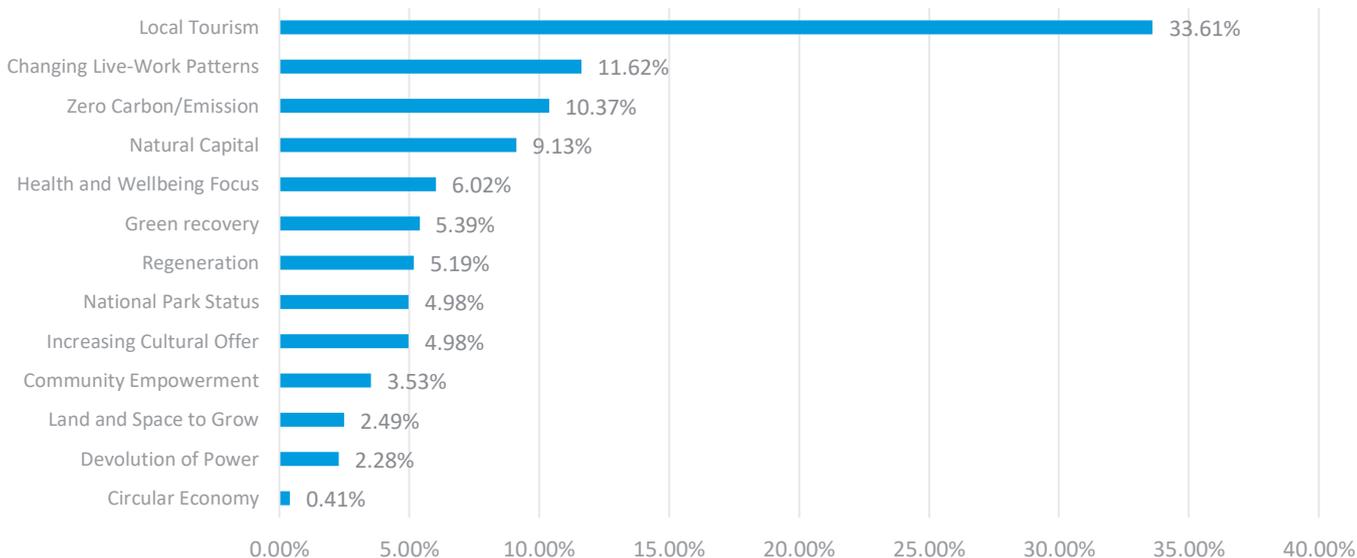| Challenge	Percentage
Meeting low/zero carbon activities	5%
Adjusting to Brexit	5%
Adapting to the impacts of climate change	6%
Supply of new homes, including affordable housing	6%
Competing with other regions for visitors and investment	13%
Timely delivery of the infrastructure projects (for example digital mobile and broadband upgrades, transport enhancements)	14%
Ageing population	15%
Vitality and viability of town centres	15%
Retention of our young people and ability to attract others	22%

Opportunities for the SOS

Tourism is regarded as the **biggest opportunity for the region**. Indeed, **natural capital**, **rural environment**, **culture,** and **heritage** are important selling points for many wards, in particular those that see local tourism as an important opportunity in the future. Also ranking highly is **changing life-work patterns**, in the wake of COVID-19, a particular opportunity identified for a rural area. **Investment in digital connectivity** is seen as key to helping overcome transport challenges and enable better living and work patterns without having to move away from the region or travel out to the central belt or North England for work. **Zero-carbon/emission**, alongside the **green recovery**, **natural capital** and the **circular economy** are all too identified as opportunities.

Around **40%** of respondents suggested the opportunities are mainly due to **promotion and celebration of the environment**, and **growing tourism** in the region. **Changing working patterns maximising transformative potential** and **building on existing strengths** follow in importance.
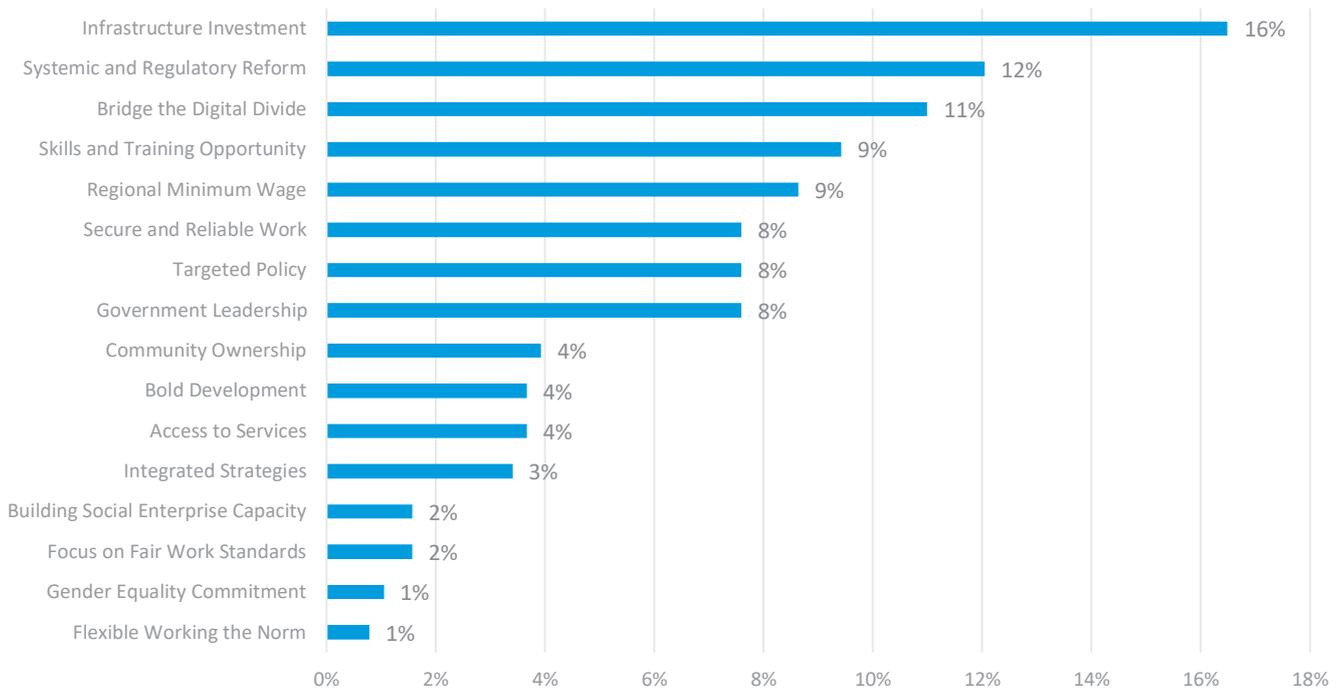
Figure 13: Opportunities for the SOS

Opportunity	Percentage
Local Tourism	33.61%
Changing Live-Work Patterns	11.62%
Zero Carbon/Emission	10.37%
Natural Capital	9.13%
Health and Wellbeing Focus	6.02%
Green recovery	5.39%
Regeneration	5.19%
National Park Status	4.98%
Increasing Cultural Offer	4.98%
Community Empowerment	3.53%
Land and Space to Grow	2.49%
Devolution of Power	2.28%
Circular Economy	0.41%

Developing a Fairer Economy

Respondents highlighted the factors to consider in developing a fairer economy, shown in Figure 14. Issues most often cited for consideration included investment in infrastructure, **systematic and regulatory reform** and **bridging the regulatory divide**. Business respondents specifically highlighted **flexible working norms** and **systematic regulatory reform** as key routes and the public sector suggested **Government leadership** and **focusing on fair work standards** are key.

Figure 14: Factors to focus on to develop a fairer economy

Factor	Percentage
Infrastructure Investment	16%
Systemic and Regulatory Reform	12%
Bridge the Digital Divide	11%
Skills and Training Opportunity	9%
Regional Minimum Wage	9%
Secure and Reliable Work	8%
Targeted Policy	8%
Government Leadership	8%
Community Ownership	4%
Bold Development	4%
Access to Services	4%
Integrated Strategies	3%
Building Social Enterprise Capacity	2%
Focus on Fair Work Standards	2%
Gender Equality Commitment	1%
Flexible Working the Norm	1%

To develop a fairer economy, **bridging the digital divide** and **systematic regulator** reform are key across all wards, however, granular analysis reveals that there is a more varied sub-regional picture, with for some wards, **minimum wage** and **secure and reliable work** feature more strongly than others. Across all there is a reported need for **infrastructure investment**, as seen in Figure 15.
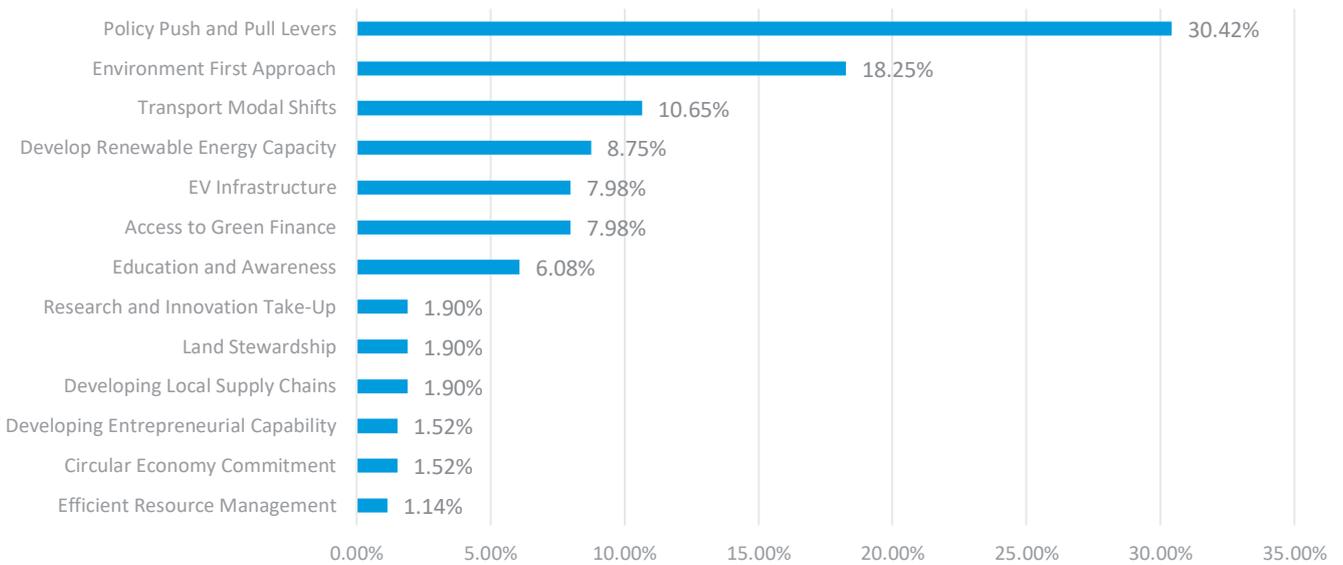
Figure 15: Developing a fairer economy, intervention by ward

Legend:
- Bridge the Digital Divide
- Focus on Fair Work Standards
- Infrastructure Investment
- Integrated Strategies
- Secure and Reliable Work
- Skills and Training Opportunity
- Government Leadership
- Systemic and Regulatory Reform
- Access to Services
- Regional Minimum Wage
- Bridging the Digital Divide
- Targeted Policy
- Community Ownership
- Flexible Working the Norm
- Bold Development
- Gender Equality Commitment
- Building Social Enterprise Capacity

Wards (top to bottom):
Tweeddale West, Tweeddale East, Stranraer and the Rhins, Selkirkshire, North West Dumfries, Nith, Mid Galloway and Wigtown..., Mid Berwickshire, Mid and Upper Nithsdale, Lochar, Leaderdale and Melrose, Kelso and District, Jedburgh and District, Hawick and Hermitage, Hawick and Denholm, Galashiels and District, Elsrickle, East Berwickshire, Dee and Glenkens, Castle Douglas and..., Annandale South, Annandale North, Annandale East and Eskdale, Abbey

Developing a More Sustainable Economy

Policy levels are the key approach identified by respondents to make the economy fairer, with over **30%** of respondents highlighting this as the most important intervention. Other prominent responses include the **Environment First Approach**, **moving away from an extractive economic model to a circular economy**, **providing shifts in the transport system** and **developing renewable energy capacity**.

Figure 16: Factors to focus on to develop a more sustainable economy

- Policy Push and Pull Levers — 30.42%
- Environment First Approach — 18.25%
- Transport Modal Shifts — 10.65%
- Develop Renewable Energy Capacity — 8.75%
- EV Infrastructure — 7.98%
- Access to Green Finance — 7.98%
- Education and Awareness — 6.08%
- Research and Innovation Take-Up — 1.90%
- Land Stewardship — 1.90%
- Developing Local Supply Chains — 1.90%
- Developing Entrepreneurial Capability — 1.52%
- Circular Economy Commitment — 1.52%
- Efficient Resource Management — 1.14%

At a sub-regional level, there is a **more varied picture**. Key interventions identified above are still prominent, however, for some wards, access to green finance, transport modal shifts, and **education and awareness** are identified as the primary intervention sought, shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Factors to focus on to develop a more sustainable economy, by ward
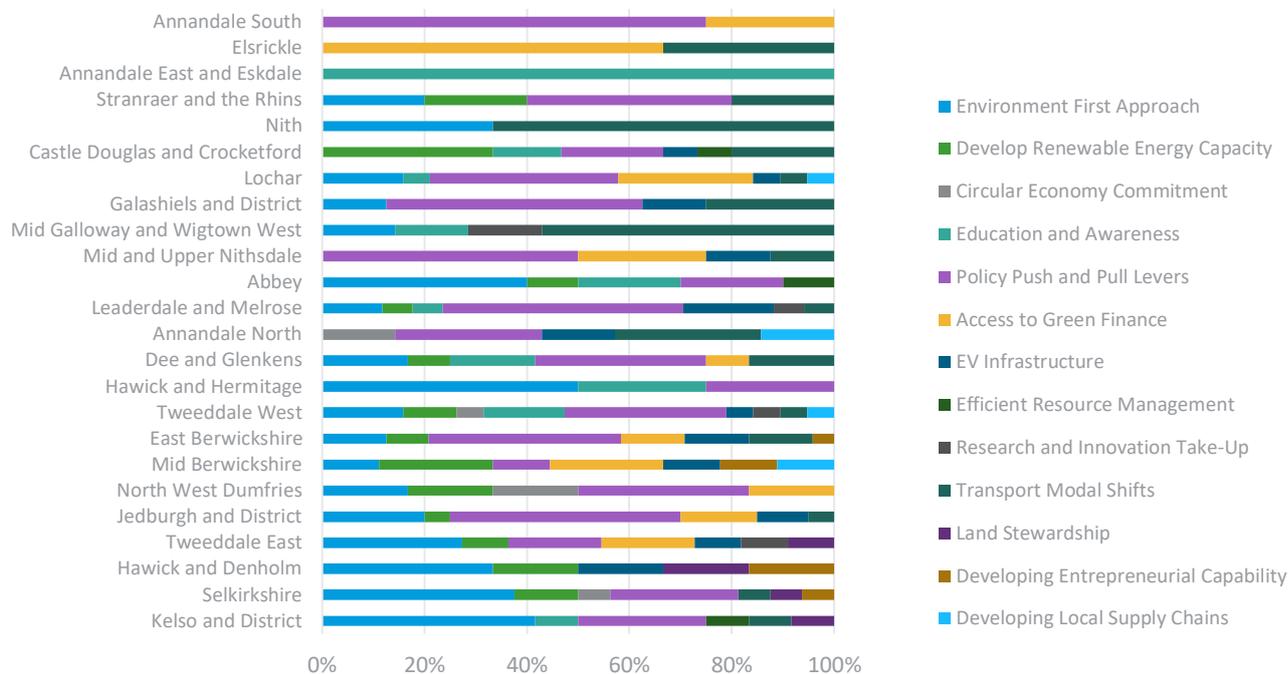
Enablers and Drivers of Economic Transformation

As shown in Figure 18, **over a fifth** of respondents identified **access to finance** as an important tool in enabling the economic transformation of SOS. **Finance** is an important enabler for investment in the needs of the region. Finance provides flexibility and can be directed specifically to the economic needs of the region. Other key enablers encompass **connectivity in a general sense** – **improving transport**, **business support**, **community cohesiveness** to connect and align on important strategic visions.

Figure 18: Enablers of economic transformation
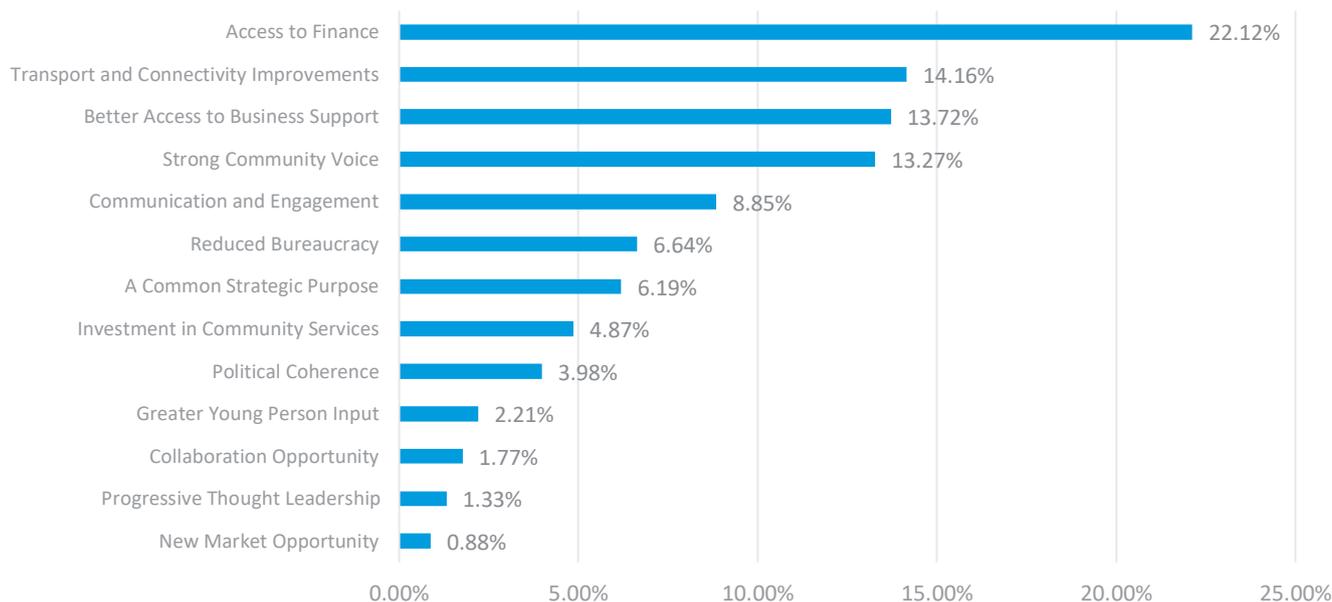
4.3   Select Respondent Quotes

The following quotes are a sample of some of the statements provided through responses to both surveys. **They help to position the strength of local sentiment, desire to deliver positive change and rationale for action through the development of the RES**.

"Improving public transport links and services across the region (improving the infrastructure must be matched by efficient, reliable, clean and affordable public transport); countering the 'pull' effect of urban centres… e.g. Edinburgh, Carlisle, Newcastle)"

"Investment in physical and infrastructure, including public transport is essential. We must better understand the spectrum of drivers behind enterprise activity – there's too much assumption by the public sector that private sector enterprise is profit and growth hungry, while social enterprise is intrinsically 'better' from a community wealth building point of view. All are important."

"Developing an appreciation of the value of the rural economy is difficult but this complexity is a true reflection of the region. It means we're understanding and reflecting on the complex drivers behind our economic systems and making the region more competitive as a result of this intelligence."

"A highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce is fundamental – we should be advocating more green learning, sustainable tourism, agriculture, forestry and energy production as key priorities. Related courses should be taught at Borders College/Heriot Watt and made accessible from a funding point of view, with our young people encouraged into those career paths."

"I would like to see more of our young people opened up to careers in the arts (I predict a boom after COVID) and the video game industry. With decent infrastructure there is no reason why these industries need to be urban and can be 'greened'. We also need to improve formal opportunities for the older workforce to retrain to suit the new economy."

"Promotion of living wage, more opportunities to develop digital skills), re-enter education, up skill and better promotion of healthy lifestyles will lead to a long-term increase in productivity for individuals in the area. Also, investment in renewables that empower / give something back to communities must be a strategic priority."

"The imbalance that encourages corporations and large commercial concerns to exploit the area over smaller locally based businesses must be corrected. One has only a single concern - to increase profits. The other has also to address local concerns."

"Regulated land management needs to be considered, to ensure that residents and visitors are of greater focus in the outcomes of the management of the land and other assets in the area, not just a few benefitting. More priority could be given to population entitlement to local parks, play areas, woodlands, walks, riversides, recreation community facilities to promote inclusion, healthier lifestyles and combat poverty."

rsmuk.com