



sleeping
GIANTS



**EQUALITIES ENGAGEMENT
PROJECT:**

Report of Key Findings



August 2022

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Following the passing of the South of Scotland Enterprise Act 2019, South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) was officially launched in April 2020 as the Economic and Community Development Agency for Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders. The Act lists its aims as to:

- a. Further the sustainable economic and social development of the South of Scotland; and
- b. Improve the amenity and environment of the South of Scotland.

SOSE, along with other key partners in the region, are working towards a shared ambition – set out in the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy published in 2021 – for a greener, fairer and flourishing South of Scotland by 2031. The core values of shared prosperity, making the most of our potential, thinking differently and pioneering environmental responsibility underpin the Strategy's vision:¹

“We will be a region of opportunity and innovation – where natural capital drives green growth, ambition and quality of life rivals the best in the UK, communities are empowered and cultural identity is cherished, enabling those already here to thrive and attracting a new generation to live, work, visit, learn and invest in the South of Scotland.”

With support from the Southern Uplands Partnership, SOSE has conducted an engagement tour across the region. The purpose of the tour was to:

- Raise awareness of what SOSE were established to do, how they can help organisations and communities across the South and to showcase some of the things they have been doing to make a difference to businesses, social enterprises, community and other organisations across the region;
- To gather feedback about their focus and performance to date; and,
- Explore what matters most to people, organisations and businesses across the region to help shape future priorities and SOSE's first action plan.

A total of 416 people were engaged across the primary public and online sessions with a further 54 people engaged through three specific business breakfasts. However, in planning its engagement approach, SOSE recognised the challenge of reaching and engaging seldom heard voices. To help achieve a genuinely inclusive approach, Sleeping Giants Community Development CIC were commissioned to support the engagement process. Sleeping Giants and SOSE then worked together to design and deliver outreach and engagement with businesses, community groups and residents who are (or who represent):

- Young people;
- Women;
- Other protected characteristic groups; and
- Those who experience financial exclusion and those who are economically inactive.

¹ South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership (2021). South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy. [South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership - Regional Economic Strategy \(dumgal.gov.uk\)](https://dumgal.gov.uk/south-of-scotland-regional-economic-partnership-regional-economic-strategy)

The key findings emerging from this engagement activity are summarised in this report.

1.2 Engagement Approach

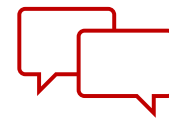
In addition to the aims of the wider tour, the engagement activities sought to explore how SOSE might address inequalities and increase the effectiveness of its approach to reaching, supporting and unleashing the potential of these target groups. To achieve this, Sleeping Giants and SOSE co-produced an approach that was informed by the Scottish Community Development Centre's National Standards for Community Engagement, Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and Engagement and SOSE's 'Have Your Say' Framework. Following targeted communications and outreach work, a series of engagement events took place across the region.



12 focus groups or self-led discussion groups were held with over 100 people. A different target group was engaged in each of these to enable in-depth exploration of views and experiences



An online survey was completed by 73 people. The majority² of respondents were women (40, 75.5%), from Dumfries and Galloway (38, 73.1%) and aged 45 years or over (53, 71.7%)



Additional feedback was captured from 3 people through self-completion questionnaires, which were based on the focus group questions

Figure 1 overleaf shows the composition of the 12 groups and the number of people that participated. There will of course be an element of crossover between these groups and the views of young people, for example, are represented within the autistic young people and young people with learning disabilities, the LGBTQI plus and the financially excluded groups. The feedback captured through the self-completion questionnaires (from another young person and people on a low income) have been incorporated within the wider focus group findings presented in Sections 2 and 3 of this report.

² The survey respondent profile is based on the number of people who answered this question (gender and age, n=53; postcode, n=52)

Figure 1: The Target Groups Engaged

4 x groups with 39 autistic young people and/ young people with additional support needs	2 x groups with 11 people who are LGBTQI plus	1 x group with 5 people from an ethnic minority	1 x group with 20 women
1 x group with 6 people who have a chronic long-term condition	1 x group with 5 people who are deaf and hard of hearing, or professionals working with them	1 x group with 16 veterans and their family members	1 x group with 7 people who are financially excluded or economically inactive. Some of these individuals also had a history of offending behaviour.

1.3 Structure of this Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2: the key findings emerging on experiences of working and living in the South of Scotland are summarised;
- Section 3: considers awareness of SOSE, how it might engage with people in the future and include a wider diversity of people in its work; and
- Section 4: presents the conclusions drawn from these findings and the recommendations they give rise to.

2 KEY FINDINGS: EXPERIENCES OF LIVING AND WORKING IN THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

2.1 Introduction

Each of the engagement methods explored views and experiences of living and working in the South of Scotland to help inform the development of SOSE's Action Plan (which looks a minimum of three years ahead); the key findings emerging from them are summarised in this section of the report. To advance understanding of the similarities and differences in the views and experiences that were expressed, findings are presented separately for each of the target groups engaged wherever possible. It should be noted that in some instances, the issues or suggested actions discussed go beyond SOSE's aims but – to ensure that their voices are heard and lived experiences understood - they are presented here as they were reported in the consultation activities.

2.2 Being Economically Active

The survey asked if there were any barriers to 'having a job that you want and treats you fairly' or 'starting your own business, charity or social enterprise'. Of the 42 people who reported a barrier, 27 were women, 5 men and 1 non-binary (the remainder chose not to identify their gender). Because only a small number of men reported a barrier, it is not possible to establish whether there are any clear gender patterns in the responses. However, the barriers identified by the 5 men were: a perception that the region had been neglected by Scottish Government, (by 2), the planning department, inward migration creating higher house prices and the personal circumstances preventing them from starting a business. Finance was the most commonly cited barrier by the remaining respondents and these answers included issues relating to personal finance (e.g. the affordability of public transport) as well as a need for business start up or development support:

"I cannot afford to learn to drive/run a car and therefore rely on public transport which in turn adds extra hours on to an already long day and costs a fortune when commuting."

"Running your own social and not for profit business is hard and often getting the revenue to start and sustain is difficult particularly for core costs. Many charities and social enterprises can get funded for projects but not the core infrastructure costs that keep a business ticking away."

"Start up costs for business"

"Lack of funding support."

9 people identified an aspect of the region's infrastructure as a barrier; transport links were the most commonly cited but available office space and internet connectivity were also mentioned. Other barriers included: job availability; low wages; geography (i.e. long distances to travel) and a disability.

The barriers experienced by each of the target groups are summarised in turn below but a key and important finding emerging from the focus groups with autistic young people / young people with additional support needs is that only 1 of the 39 participants felt that it was easy to find a job or run a business (the remainder said they were unsure or answered 'no' to this question).

The responses to the question *'Is there anything SOSE could do that would help?'* were also diverse but funding and the provision of support were the most common amongst survey respondents (by 7 and 12 people respectively). Although some simply stated **"help with funding"**, others called for SOSE to lobby for an alternative to LEADER, provide grants rather than loans or reduce the reliance on match funding. The requested help and support included mentoring, the establishment of a business association or forum, and supporting start ups to create jobs.

Other responses included promotion of the region as a place for investment or tourism and improvements to transport links. Again, because of the small number of men answering this question, it is not possible to identify whether there are any gender differences (4 out of the 39 people who described how SOSE could help identified were men).

Barriers to gaining the skills and experiences required for employment or starting a business were also explored and a total of 29 respondents (only 3 of whom were men) cited such a barrier. The costs associated with upskilling were cited by 7 people and for some of these, reflecting the long distances reported to be necessary to access an appropriate course:

"Again, funding. Our location means that getting training always means travelling and often accommodation."

"Need to travel long distances to access training."

Knowing what is available was reported to be a barrier by 3 people and transport links for another 3. 28 respondents (only 3 of whom were men) identified something that SOSE could do to help with these barriers. The provision of funding, training or other forms of support were most commonly cited, for example:

"Scheme for guidance/support/funding for people of all ages and backgrounds to help gain the necessary info/experience/money for people to better their situations financially and in terms of being happy/stable in a job they want."

"Provide pathways and online training."

"Encourage courses, etc to be delivered across the rural region or have funded transport to urban areas for trainees."

"Ensure that training opportunities are available online wherever possible, so folk don't have to travel long distances to centres such as Dumfries."

"Access to discounted courses would be amazing. Or help in finding the funding to be able to upskill."

"Hold information sessions on how to set up your own business, etc."

Insight into the target groups' experiences of these issues is provided by the focus group discussions and, although transport is a barrier for all, some issues specific to the lived experience of these groups also

emerged. The barriers identified as shaping the target groups' experience of finding a job, starting a business and of gaining the experience and skills required are summarised below.

Autistic young people and/or young people with additional support needs	
Barriers	<p>Only 1 of the 39 people taking part in these groups thought that it was easy to find a job or start a business and 6 that it was easy to get experience, learning and skills. Many barriers were cited but lack of experience (<i>You need experience but no one will give it to you</i>), skills and opportunities were all commonly mentioned. Some also described how a disability created challenges for them in a workplace, for example, one person who is autistic described how they found busy and noisy environments difficult. Personal finance was also commonly mentioned; most often this related to the ability to travel but having to volunteer to gain experience (and therefore having no income) was also cited. Low wages were also mentioned as a barrier, which meant that young people lacked the financial means to live independently and therefore young people had to 'settle' for an available opportunity in the region. In relation to running a business, a lack of knowledge and understanding of how to set one up and having the money to do it were identified as barriers. Other barriers included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bad experience of interviews/ school/ college - Literacy skills - School/ learning environment didn't meet needs e.g. more time for processing required - Lack of knowledge of how to find a job or where to go for support - Low wages for young people - Lack of confidence - Mental health - Biased view of young people or people with a disability (<i>think we're only good for volunteering</i>) - Neurodiversity isn't valued - Lack of understanding of young people's needs - Lack of courses in local area and in general, including for those that struggle to read and write - College entry requirements
How SOSE can help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved public transport and support travel costs (including for courses/training opportunities outside of region) - Provide free driving lessons/ help with driving - More jobs and more diverse jobs - Help with CV writing (for all young people – with and without additional support needs) - Training sessions and online events in schools and elsewhere (for all young people – with and without additional support needs) - Coaching (to find work and start up a business) - Interview training (1 person suggested interview questions were provided in advance) - Increase the range of courses on offer (e.g. creative writing, acting) - Increase funding for young people studying - Advertise available opportunities - Provide flexible learning opportunities that are inclusive of different learning styles - Support organisations like the Better Lives Partnerships to provide training - Source and create placements and apprenticeships

Autistic young people and/or young people with additional support needs

- Support Project SEARCH (internships for students with disabilities and additional support needs) and Kickstart
- Encourage employers to allow breaks to destress/ provide quiet rooms or quiet workstreams (to avoid sensory overload for people who are autistic)
- Promote work from home to enable people to create own workspaces that suits needs
- Educate employers about autism, diversity and how to support young people more generally
- **'Shout loudly about the talents of people with disabilities'**
- Employers should employ a percentage of people with additional needs (incentives suggested as a way to achieve this)
- More facilities like the Cloverglenn Centre (support services for young adults with learning difficulties or mental health issues)
- Funding for businesses (grants not loans)
- Business start up courses and advice

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Barriers	<p>BSL interpreters were identified as providing a gateway for all interactions for people who are deaf or hard of hearing; the lack of interpreters in the region was therefore a key barrier faced by participants in this focus group. For example, 1 person described how the wait for an interpreter made interview access difficult. In addition, the poor connectivity experienced in some parts of the region had a disproportionate impact on sign language users: any time lag or freezing screen can limit the ability for people to accurately communicate. More general communication difficulties were also reported (if contact was by telephone for example) and deaf people were described as being 'behind the curve of chit chat... incidentals that people take for granted.' Because of this self-esteem and confidence were reported to be issues. Participants also described a fear of stigma or a lack of understanding about how to achieve accessibility in the workplace. More specifically in relation to starting a business, the following barriers were also reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of knowledge and support on how to run a business (compounded by the distances needed to travel to access specialist support) - Deaf people feel that they are not listened to or treated equally - Expectations of deaf and hard of hearing people meant that self employment wasn't encouraged in education settings
How SOSE can help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise awareness of the communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing people - Communicate responsibility for arranging BSL interpreters with employers ('Wheelchair users are not asked to bring their own ramp.') - Set up a group of people who could work with BSL users and people with hearing loss - Funding is needed for locally trained interpreters (be aware of Equality Act) - Change perceptions of deaf people and the valuable contribution they can make - Need for a level playing field for deaf people - Access to work doesn't cover training so could SOSE cover that gap

Ethnic Minorities	
Barriers	<p>Communication emerged as a key barrier for participants in this focus group. Participants highlighted the difficulties experienced when moving to a new country, especially when English is not spoken (at all or as a first language). As a result, people may lack confidence when interacting with others (there was a fear of saying the wrong thing for example). Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Association (DGMA) was reported to have provided language support through ESOL classes, but this had been challenging through the pandemic. Some people may face legal barriers to their right to work and others feel daunted by the local culture and systems. Without an understanding of the culture and system or a lack of confidence in communicating therefore made finding the appropriate help for key services (e.g. housing, employment) a challenge. Again, DGMA was identified as providing critical support here and the importance of ensuring that it was sufficiently resourced to do this was emphasised. These issues are compounded by the isolation from friends and family. More generally, discrimination was perceived as a potential problem. Knowing where to start and where to access funding was identified as a barrier to starting a business.</p>
How SOSE can help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentors to help people exploit the opportunities available (thought to have more of an impact if from a BME background – role (or ‘real’) models are important - people like ourselves that we can relate to) - To tackle the isolation experienced, multi-cultural events and increased awareness around multi-culturalism would help to make the region an attractive place for friends and family members to visit. Links could be made here to DGMA’s cultural events (e.g. Turkish, Bulgarian, etc.) - Establish BME staff networks - Befriending and translation services could help with appointments, Job Centre, etc (it was suggested that community interpreters could be paid to support people from ethnic minority groups) - Help promote and advertise businesses

Financially Excluded/ Economically Active (some of whom also had a history of offending)	
Barriers	<p>For participants in this target group, mental health (and understanding of it), confidence and being labelled according to past mistakes were all reported to be barriers to either finding a job, starting a business or gaining experience and skills. 1 person perceived that young people from areas of deprivation are “pushed to the side as soon as they apply for jobs” and that they “do not have a fair chance at gaining experience, learning or skills.” For parents, childcare was also a key challenge. More specifically in relation to starting a business, a lack of help and support (particularly for those aged over 25 years) was identified as an issue along with a lack of role models.</p> <p>Other reported barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medical issues - Lack of jobs - Pay – apprentices and young people should receive living wages - Financial issues to do courses - Availability of local training opportunities - Cost of travel and transportation more generally

Financially Excluded/ Economically Active (some of whom also had a history of offending)	
How SOSE can help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Run a workshop to help employers and staff understand health problems (e.g. when someone sits with headphones, it may be because they don't like loud noises or to be in the crowd and the headphones help them cope) - Mental health support - Support with interview preparation - Support more local charities who do not discriminate against age, mental health or illness - Tackle wider barriers to business start up - Provide funding for training courses - Provide clear signposting to help on how to start a business or social enterprise

LGBTQI Plus	
Barriers	<p>For young people in particular, there was a feeling that they had to 'come out' again and again as and when they met new people. Use of the correct pronouns was also an issue and young people felt that they shouldn't have to compromise who they are in the workplace (e.g. people with bright hair and tattoos shouldn't be excluded). More generally, participants in 1 focus group expressed a fear of prejudice both in the workplace and public transport. They perceived there to be little or no safeguards on public transport (i.e. a bus driver may not intervene) and therefore were anxious about using it. There was a perception of 'backwards thinking about LGBTQ+ and women' and that trans people often chose to work in roles where they can work on their own because of this. This group also felt that employers don't promote being LGBTQI plus inclusive. Discrimination, alongside digital barriers and lack of awareness on where to access coaching were identified as barriers to setting up a business. Other reported barriers in relation to gaining experience and skills more specifically included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of awareness of where to go to develop skills - People might not travel outside their local area
How SOSE can help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help young people with their CVs and provide advice on where they can go for help finding work - Education in the workplace is key and SOSE should work more in partnership with other organisations to support this, e.g. LGBT Youth Scotland, local LGBTQI plus organisations - Support the costs of diversity/ LGBTQI plus training in the workplace to remove potential barriers - Insist that contractors/ businesses funded by SOSE have standards e.g. sign up to LGBT Charter, Stonewall Equality Index or Rainbow Flag Award and ensure this is monitored - Support LGBTQI plus businesses specifically and ensure all gendered work is trans inclusive - Funding for business start ups - LGBTQI plus friendly business courses and coaching, which are advertised in appropriate LGBTQI plus magazines and networks

People Living with a Chronic Condition

Barriers	There was perceived to be a lack of flexibility in the workplace that meant that their needs were not accommodated. Participants in this focus group also described how they felt that employers didn't believe in their condition, that they weren't treated seriously or that there was disparity in the support they received compared with more 'understood' diseases. This was reported to create stress and exhaustion. In relation to starting a business, the fluctuating nature of their condition created challenges. More generally, the low earnings threshold for those receiving benefits was also identified as a barrier.
How SOSE can help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies around adaptations and practical support for employees receiving adaptations - Treat employees as experts in their own needs - Employers have a responsibility to educate employees - Provide a place to go for help with, for example to complete forms, navigate bureaucracy, and for advocacy

Veterans

Barriers	A poor experience of Job Centres emerged as a key theme from the Veterans group discussion: their location (and the transport links for rural areas to them), appointment duration and customer service were all cited as issues. With regards to starting a business, the closure of banks in rural areas and complicated local authority paperwork with little or no support to complete it were also identified as issues.
How SOSE can help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use social media to advertise local opportunities - Improve customer service at Job Centres - Provide advice on the resources available to help find a job - Provide grants for over 40 year olds to help support a change in career - Support innovation for business development - Provide start up grants for over 50 year olds - Provide grant information and advice, take action to ensure that it reaches the self employed - Offer local training opportunities to reduce the transport costs

Women

Barriers	A wide range of barriers were reported and included a need for flexible hours to meet the demands of childcare, lack of confidence, poor rates of pay (particularly in the creative sector) and difficulty gaining experience. Specifically in relation to starting a business, networks, confidence to take risks, knowledge of how to start up and access to finance were all identified.
How SOSE can help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer paid internships for graduates - Support incubators and start ups more generally - Support mentoring partnerships and make mentoring relatable to women - Provide clarity on the support available and reduce duplication - Call out unwelcome behaviours and attitudes - Offer expertise and opportunities - Run regular events and networking opportunities - Educate and influence employers - Work with schools to highlight local opportunities and share local success stories

2.3 The Local Area

Why participants had chosen to move to or stay in the region was explored in some of the focus groups and for some (particularly the financially excluded), the decision to stay was simply because they'd been brought up here and lacked the financial means to move. Should a job opportunity arise elsewhere though, they would consider moving. 22 out of the 39 autistic young people / young people with additional support needs wanted to stay in the region (12 were unsure and 8 wanted to leave) with family and friends and being settled in the area they grew up in being cited as reasons why. Other reasons given for leaving included: lack of things to do, wanting a better social life and poor perceptions of local towns.

Survey and focus group participants were asked what is currently missing and what could SOSE do to encourage more people to move to the area. As might be expected, improved transport links was the most commonly cited (by 21 out of 53 people answering this question). In addition to some calls for improved links between specific towns in the region (e.g. a rail link between Dumfries, Newton Stewart and Stranraer), a need for more general improvements to the road and public transport infrastructure were identified:

“Campaign for improvements to transport infrastructure. Motorways made to replace A75 and A77. No use making the area better for visitors/employers if they can’t get here? Also, I think it’s disgusting that there are no well maintained/serviced public toilets along the entire length of the A75.”

(survey respondent, man)

Of those citing improved transport, 4 were men, 12 women, 1 non-binary and the remainder chose not to identify their gender. Other more commonly suggested ways of encouraging more people to move to the area included more jobs, better paid jobs or more diverse jobs (7 people, 4 of whom were women) and more affordable housing (7 people, 4 of whom were women). 6 people also called for improvements to the social, cultural and leisure facilities in the region – 4 of whom specifically felt that more was needed for young people. Other less commonly suggested ways in which SOSE could encourage people to move to the region included:

- Regenerate high streets;
- Support businesses – new and existing;
- Promote the area and home working opportunities;
- Improve its connectivity (Wi-Fi/broadband coverage); and
- Improve the NHS, particularly by increasing the number of nurses, doctors and dentists.

Some of the findings from the focus groups resonate with the survey: for example, more affordable housing, better transport links and more things for young people to do. However, as Table 1 below highlights, some of the suggestions were more specific to the lived experience of the target groups. For example, LGBTQI plus youth felt that there was no ‘gay’ scene which made socialising difficult and the deaf and hard of hearing group again emphasised the need for BSL translators in the region. To attract people from ethnic minorities, it was suggested that multi-cultural events could be offered but more generally, create a social scene that goes beyond ‘pub life’. For the financially excluded/social excluded, there was a frustration that employers asked for experience but opportunities for them to gain experience were lacking.

Table 1: Target Groups Views on Attracting People to Live and Stay in the Area

Group	Key Themes
Autistic young people/ young people with additional support needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More facilities for young people e.g. shops (with several calls for a Primark), varied restaurants, entertainment such as a cinema, bowling alley, social activities other than drinking and <i>'alternative activities like nerd shops, cafes like Geek Retreat'</i> - More youth groups or places for young people to meet in rural areas - Better transport - Better housing - Better connectivity (Wi-Fi) - More and better job opportunities - More schools and education opportunities - More events and cultural activities (including theatres and museums)
Deaf and hard of hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bring different groups together - Educate - deaf people are as capable and valuable as everyone else is to our economy and communities - Promote tourism - Encourage participation in sports etc, rugby, horses, etc. - Attract BSL interpreters to this area - Set up local networks to give deaf and hard of hearing people the opportunity to set up a business or work - A mobile resource centre
Ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More job opportunities and higher paid jobs - More access to higher education so they don't have to go to Glasgow, etc for courses - Better quality restaurants and recreational activities - Multi-cultural film festivals - Support initiatives e.g. like Turkish Bath social space - Support to bring families over to see how we live - Need an alternative to the pub culture, nowhere to go to mix after work - Work placements in local area for young people e.g. apprenticeships - Issues for older people needing care if children move away - Library which has books in different languages etc - Explore other cultures to bring communities together - People are raising funds to send home to family. Can't afford expensive gyms, etc
Financially excluded/ economically inactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work opportunities - Help getting experience as employers look for people with experience but don't give people a chance - Make it easier to buy a house - Make transport cheaper or free - Improve the reliability of rail links (frequent delays and cancellations were reported) - More for younger people (e.g. attractions, shops) - More diversity (e.g. multi-cultural food shops and stores, a LGBTQI plus community)

Group	Key Themes
Autistic young people/ young people with additional support needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More facilities for young people e.g. shops (with several calls for a Primark), varied restaurants, entertainment such as a cinema, bowling alley, social activities other than drinking and '<i>alternative activities like nerd shops, cafes like Geek Retreat</i>' - More youth groups or places for young people to meet in rural areas - Better transport - Better housing - Better connectivity (Wi-Fi) - More and better job opportunities - More schools and education opportunities - More events and cultural activities (including theatres and museums)
LGBTQI plus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More facilities/ activities (especially for younger people) e.g. vegetarian friendly cafes, Primark, comfortable cinema - Lack of social life – no gay 'scene' – and social and support groups - Lack of art/cultural activity - Better transport links (but acknowledged that the Borders rail line has improved access to Edinburgh) - Community hubs where different organisations and charities etc. could be located and information was centrally available
Veterans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More affordable housing - Better and more diverse industry to provide opportunities for employment, better training and skills (especially for young people) - Transparent decision making in communities
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More and wider diversity of job opportunities and industries - Improved transport infrastructure - More affordable housing and schemes to support access to housing market - Provide networking events (particularly more informal/ relaxed opportunities to meet others) - Support a business culture

2.4 Barriers to Services

Survey respondents were presented with a list of demographic and other factors and asked to select those that had made it more difficult to access services. As shown in Table 2, geographical location (28, 38.4%) and lack of transport (18, 24.7%) were the most commonly selected and therefore further highlight the significant challenges these issues present in the region. Because a large majority of the survey respondents were women, lived in Dumfries and Galloway and aged over 45 years, it is not possible to identify if there are any differences in the groups experiencing these barriers.

Table 2: Barriers to Accessing Services

	Count	Percent
Your geographical location	28	38.4%
Your lack of transport	18	24.7%
Your confidence	15	20.5%
Your personal finances	14	19.2%
Your mental health	10	13.7%
Your age	9	12.3%
Your gender	6	8.2%
Your caring responsibilities	6	8.2%
Your disability	6	8.2%
Your religion or belief	4	5.5%
Your ethnic background	1	1.4%
Your sexual orientation	1	1.4%
Your transgender status	1	1.4%

Base: All Survey Respondents (n=73)

3 KEY FINDINGS: MAKING SOSE STRONGER

3.1 Introduction

In addition to replicating the aims of the wider engagement tour, the target groups were also asked for their views on how SOSE could involve a wider diversity of people in its work and strengthen its engagement approach more generally. The findings emerging from the survey and focus groups on these issues are summarised in this section.

3.2 Awareness of SOSE

Of the 73 people who completed a survey, just under half (36, 49.3%) had previously heard of SOSE which resonates with the finding from SOSE’s own engagement tour where 30% said they knew little if anything about SOSE ahead of their attendance. Discussions within the focus groups suggest that awareness was lower still amongst the target groups; for example, 12 out of 16 veterans hadn’t heard of SOSE, nor had 6 of the 8 LGBTQI plus participants and 5 out of 7 financially excluded/ economically inactive participants.

When discussing SOSE’s engagement approach so far, a small number of participants in an LGBTQI plus focus group felt that **“it’s felt very insular and that they are communicating to a certain ‘in’ audience.”** Continuing to engage with groups and organisations and more generally, asking what people thought, were all suggested as ways in which SOSE could increase awareness of it and its activities. More specific suggestions included:

Organise local events and participate in communities (Veterans, survey respondents)	Be more visible and transparent (including about how to access funding/support) (LGBTQI Plus)	Come and talk to us (LGBTQI Plus, young people with additional support needs, financially excluded, survey respondents)	Engage community members, not just community groups (Veterans)
Advertise on social media (LGBTQI Plus, young people with additional needs, survey respondents)	Build relationships with wide diversity of groups (LGBTQI Plus)	More promotional materials (LGBTQI Plus, financially excluded, survey respondents)	Work with schools (survey respondents)

3.3 Keeping the Conversations Going

The engagement work conducted by SOSE to date represents the starting point for their work and the consultation with the target groups was used as an opportunity to explore how they might ‘keep the conversations going’. Both the focus group and survey responses centred on more engagement activities such as surveys, having some sort of presence in local communities through events and meetings and communications (e.g. social media and mailouts):

“Continue with surveys etc, to reach the widest audience you can.”
(survey respondent, woman)

"All media channels, noticeboards, community trusts, local paper, social media."

(survey respondent, woman)

"Regular community surgeries in more than just the biggest towns too."

(survey respondent, woman)

"Real connections within communities, maybe a 'community panel'?"

(survey respondent, woman)

"Celebration events, engagement/outreach events, newsletters etc."

(survey respondent, woman)

Other points that emerged from the focus groups included:

- Talk to us and engage in genuine dialogue, where findings are fed back before actions are taken (LGBTQI plus, veterans, autistic young people/ young people with additional needs);
- Visit schools and colleges (autistic young people/ young people with additional needs);
- Communicate how views and experiences have been used (financially excluded);
- Participate in community events (veterans) and meet face-to-face rather than online all the time (financially excluded); and
- Run drop-in centres (veterans) and other events (autistic young people / young people with additional support needs).

3.4 Including a Wider Diversity of People

The survey asked participants what SOSE could do to make sure they include a wider diversity of people in their work and the focus groups asked a more specific question about how they could be more inclusive of participants' equality group. Of the 35 survey respondents who suggested how SOSE might do this, communications and improving awareness of the agency and its activities was the most common response (by 9 people, 7 of whom were women and 2 men). For example:

"Advertising and publicising your role, aimed at those who currently don't know about you."

(survey respondent, woman)

"Make more people aware of who you are and how they can help."

(survey respondent, man)

Some form of community outreach or engagement (by 7 people, all women) and the approach to recruitment (9 people, 5 of whom were women, 3 men and 1 didn't identify their gender) were also more commonly mentioned. 3 of these responses called for advertising of the available opportunities and the remaining references to recruitment were more varied, for example:

"Encourage a more diverse range of people to want to be involved and include this in the recruitment plan."

(survey respondent, gender not identified)

"Target community groups with protected characteristics and canvas for members and staff."

(survey respondent, women)

“Current staffing levels look rather skewed towards women and a large chunk appear to live out with the area in Lothian and Edinburgh. Ensure interview panels are not all women (or all men).”

(survey respondent, man)

“Take a chance on those with passion but potentially lacking the experience in community working etc as then you’ll have a true voice behind your work rather than experienced people using jargon and unknowingly excluding normal people from your platforms. Have a wide range of jobs for schools students to uni leavers to retirees in various departments to have wide range of people within the organisation and also give those in need some working experience they might otherwise not have access to as internships etc in cities with no pay are not viable for most of us.”

(survey respondent, woman)

“You need to be aware of where your gaps are - do an equality audit of board and staff and then do targeted recruitment to fill gaps.”

(survey respondent, non-binary)

Key discussion points emerging from the focus groups about how SOSE could be more inclusive of specific equality groups are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Target Groups’ Views on Widening Diversity

Group	Key Themes
Autistic young people/ young people with additional support needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with more voluntary youth clubs - Allow people to work from home - Offer paid placement for young people - Mentoring - Support young people to gain experience - Provide more education on autism in the workplace and develop an autism friendly award for employers
Ethnic minorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure equality of access to training and job opportunities which includes thinking about how recruitment is advertised and how accessible processes are to people who have English as a second language - Interview training and mentoring to build confidence and skills - Positive action – guarantee interviews for BME groups - Training for staff and leaders on racism, equality and diversity, unconscious bias (there was a perception that people don’t get interviews because of their names) - Training on cultural differences and cohesion e.g. not looking at you directly, using hands, etc - SOSE should support ethnic minority communities to organise language classes (English and multi-lingual)
Financially excluded/ economically inactive:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help with social skills (especially after COVID-19) - An ageless, genderless application process

Group	Key Themes
LGBTQI plus: Veterans:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieve the LGBT Charter mark - A top down and bottom up approach is needed - Support community groups and organisations with grant funding and sustainability plans to diversify their boards - Map our local communities and provide information in different languages <p>NB: veterans were asked about including a wider diversity of people rather than a specific equality group</p>
Women:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wherever possible, there should be flexibility in all roles - Offer internships - Equality strategy and policy (that is acted upon) - Lead by example - Role models - Highlight the benefits

3.5 Becoming Equality and Diversity Champions

Participants also discussed how SOSE could become a real champion for equality and diversity across the South of Scotland. 34 people answered this question in the survey and a wide range of responses were made with few consistent themes. However, there was a general feeling that SOSE should in some way demonstrate equality and diversity within the agency itself or advocate for it more widely (i.e. it should lead by example); of the 12 people who gave such a response, 11 were women and 1 non-binary. 2 of these people specifically referred to some form of certification or standards (an equal opportunities employer and the LGBT Charter), but others made more generic statements about equality and diversity. For example:

“Follow the law, demonstrate visibility on these issues.”

(survey respondent, woman)

“Show real diversity.”

(survey respondent, woman)

More specific suggested actions included:

“Become aware of the needs of protected characteristic groups and make sure you start meeting needs from within. Create a network of equality champions within the organisation and safe places for staff to raise issues around E&D. Take part in initiatives like the LGBT Charter mark and encourage others to do the same. If other groups don’t have a similar scheme support its development e.g. autism friendly workplaces, racially Inclusive workplaces etc.”

(survey respondent, women)

“Outwardly advocate for equality and diversity on social platforms and keep in mind in every piece of work that you do. Promote and donate to charities and organisations in the region that help tackle equalities issues. Include gender, social and racial minority people in all the conversations you conduct and continue to push for these individuals to be a part of the workforce, board etc.”

(survey respondent, woman)

Outreach and engagement activities were cited by 3 people (2 women, 1 man) and another 2 (both women) called for understanding of the issues. Other less common responses included:

- Increase diversity in region by attracting more people;
- Improve pay and conditions; and
- Work in schools and colleges to break norms and stereotypes.

Focus group participants were asked a more specific question about how SOSE could ensure it was a champion for their equality group and the suggestions made are therefore summarised separately in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Target Groups’ Views on how SOSE can Become a Champion

Group	Key Points
Autistic young people/ young people with additional support needs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask for our opinion and act on it - Improve job opportunities and transport links - Communicate via social media - Lobby for better pay (wages should be the same as for over 25s) - Job match young people with additional needs - Support employers to take on people with additional needs (e.g. through financial incentives) - Educate – change people’s opinions to be more inclusive - Develop understanding by bringing different groups together
Ethnic minorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help organise international events and festivals - Keeping traditions and identities is important
Financially excluded/ economically inactive:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get to know young people - Advertise on social media - Be accountable, admit to and learn from mistakes
LGBTQI plus:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fund South of Scotland PRIDE - Support the development of Community Hubs (and include online information) - Support community groups that work with marginalised groups (core, sustainable funding needed) - Demand LGBTQI plus inclusive standards from contractors and funded organisations
Veterans:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities - Increase the number of affordable homes available to buy and rent - Improve our high streets and make our towns and villages more attractive to visitors - NB: Veterans were asked how SOSE could become an equality and diversity champion rather than about a specific equality group
Women:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vary staff attending events to include quieter/ less confident women - Reach out to seldom engaged with groups of women - Access to male dominated organisations - Connect and support existing women’s events and collaborate with other organisations - Provide financial support to allow women to try things without the risk of loss - Act as a sounding board - Provide encouragement and knowledge that we can continue to give

3.6 Encouraging People to Get Involved

A wide range of suggestions were made as to how SOSE could help people to become more involved in the local community and in protecting the environment. Many of the responses, and especially those relating to community involvement, reflected wider views on how SOSE could keep the conversation going (see Section 3.3). For example, simply talking to people or supporting/promoting community organisations and events were all suggested by survey and focus group participants:

“More non-alcohol related activities. Funding for community anchor organisations e.g. community resilience teams to put on super local activities would help.”

(survey respondent, non-binary)

“Organised community events and promote existing events.”

(survey respondent, woman)

“Have something in town for the whole community to get involved in.”

(survey respondent, woman)

“Promote existing events in relevant ways.”

(women’s focus group participant)

Again highlighting the significance of the issue in the region, 5 survey respondents (4 of whom were women) identified improvements to transport as necessary to enable their involvement:

“For me it’s about transport. So hard to get anywhere if you have no car and can’t walk long distances.”

(survey respondent, woman)

Other suggestions by 3 people (2 of whom were women and the other didn’t identify their gender) included working with existing organisations in the public and voluntary sector (e.g. the local authority and NHS) or setting up new organisations (e.g. charities, business associations). However, some survey respondents stated that there is **‘nothing’** SOSE could do to involve them (4 people of whom 2 were men, 1 a woman and 1 didn’t identify their gender) or that they were happy with the way in which they were currently involved (6 people, all of whom were women).

Suggested actions specific to the target groups engaged in the focus groups included:

- Attending DGMA is a good way to get information across, helps to break down barriers and build confidence (ethnic minorities focus group);
- Support Better Lives – it provides a sense of community for young people and without it there would be nowhere for them to go (autistic young people/ young people with additional needs focus group);
- Support groups and facilities for young adults (autistic young people / young people with additional needs focus group);
- A young persons’ radio station for the South of Scotland (autistic young people / young people with additional support needs);
- Support local events like Guid Nychbarris (autistic young people / young people with additional support needs);

- Cultural fears e.g. around the police (ethnic minorities focus group);
- In the absence of a good peer group, people can feel frightened to go to places where lots of hearing people – peer support is needed (deaf and hard of hearing focus group);
- Learning about deaf history and culture for young people (deaf and hard of hearing focus group);
- Cross-generational activities are needed and BSL and hearing loss communities should work together (deaf and hard of hearing focus group); and
- Set up deaf clubs/ community hubs to provide opportunities for connections and peer support (deaf and hard of hearing focus group).

41 survey respondents suggested how SOSE might help people become more involved in protecting the environment and providing information or educating people emerged as the most commonly suggested action (by 10 people, 6 of whom were women, 2 men, 1 non-binary and 1 did not identify their gender):

“Organise community events. Provide guidance and information on recycling for example Promote recycling and eco living.”

(survey respondent, woman)

“Help promote environmentally friendly practices. However these mainly have added costs that it is not always easy to pass on.”

(survey respondent, man)

“More accessible information on domestic renewable energy.”

(survey respondent, woman)

Funding or subsidising greener behaviours was also suggested (6 people, 5 of whom were women, 1 non-binary):

“Awareness raising is key and incentivising the change. Give people bins they will recycle, we’ve seen that. Electric cars are unaffordable for most. Grants for business and personal vehicles to swap to electric would be great.”

Other less commonly suggested actions included:

- Monitor data on the impact of local strategies;
- Support workplaces to reduce energy use;
- Make it easier for people to use public transport either by improving existing provision, extending cycle paths or introducing bikes/scooters for hire;
- Improve recycling facilities;
- Supporting environmental projects in local communities;
- Support green businesses; and
- Promote good practice and lead by example.

Where protecting the environment was discussed in the focus groups, education and awareness raising activities also emerged as key themes. For example, participants in a women’s focus group emphasised the need to educate on choices and behaviour change but also the importance of working with schools and colleges so that they could better understand their environmental impacts. Similarly, an ethnic

minorities focus group called for education/ information sessions but highlighted the importance of ensuring that this information was available in other languages.

3.7 Other Comments

A small number of participants used the survey as an opportunity to express their frustration either with SOSE or wider governance structures. For example:

“Very badly thought through. If local government was working SOSE totally unnecessary.”

(survey response to ‘Is there anything else you would like to mention?’ gender not identified)

“I understand what SOSE is meant to do but see little or no evidence of it in my area. Also they seem to work in silo instead of working with partners & communities. Ff they need to understand in rural areas like these partnerships & collaboration is key.”

(survey response to: ‘is there anything else you would like to mention?’ woman)

“This is all very well but nothing will change in Whithorn unless the community council is replaced. We’ve been told economic development is not their remit.”

(survey response to: ‘is there anything else you would like to mention?’ woman)

Other comments made about the future development and regeneration of the region included:

“Sustainable business far more important than number of businesses. Do not get sucked into the false premise that National Park status will save everything. All D & G needs is a good tourist board.”

(survey response to: ‘is there anything else you would like to mention?’ woman)

“We’re a neglected part of Scotland and that needs to change. It is just as beautiful here as it is in many other places in Scotland, more so in many cases, and you need to be as forthcoming and progressive with your campaigns as the Highlands and the Islands.”

(survey response to: ‘is there anything else you would like to mention?’ man)

4 CONCLUSIONS

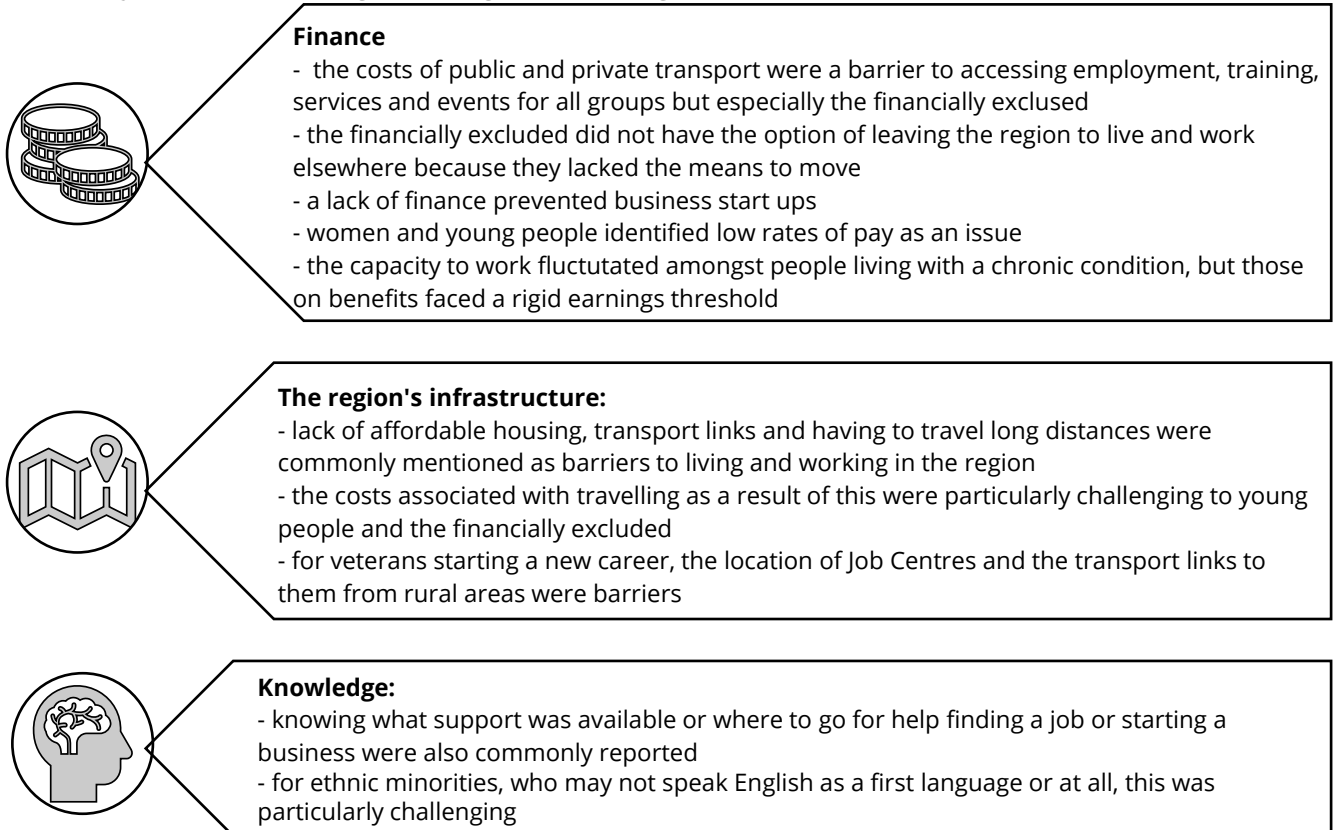
4.1 Introduction

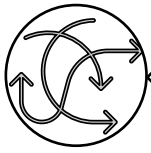
This consultation activity targeted seldom heard voices throughout the South of Scotland to ensure that their views and experiences inform and shape SOSE's future activities. The emerging findings highlight the barriers and challenges faced by seldom heard groups living, working and learning in the region. The conclusions that can be drawn from these findings, and the recommendations that arise from them, are presented in this final section. In considering these conclusions and recommendations, as stated in Section 2.1, it should be noted that some of emerging issues go beyond SOSE's aims and are relevant to the wider public sector; they are nevertheless presented here to ensure that the voices of the participating groups are heard.

4.2 Conclusions

The views and experiences shared by the seldom heard groups engaged here highlighted the challenges and opportunities associated with living and working in the South of Scotland. Importantly though, they provided insight into how these issues intersect with the more specific barriers and, in some cases, inequalities they face. For example, the geography of the region and transport infrastructure is a barrier for many but for LGBTQI plus people, available public transport is perceived to offer little protection from discrimination. It is these lived experiences that shape how people and groups interact with communities, work, services and activities in the region; Figure 2 below summarises the key themes emerging from the consultation and highlights the different ways in which seldom heard groups experience them.

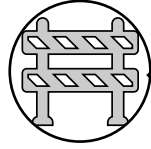
Figure 2: Key Barriers to Living, Working and Training in the South of Scotland





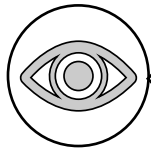
Need for flexibility:

- women highlighted the need for flexible working to enable them to manage childcare
- autistic young people described how busy and noisy environments were difficult for them
- people living with a chronic condition were frustrated by the lack of flexibility from employers



Lack of experience:

- lacking the experience needed to get a job was a particular barrier faced by autistic young people and young people with additional support needs. Volunteering was identified as one means through which they could gain experience, but this meant that they would have no income and would therefore be unable to live independently
- those at risk of offending behaviour also found it difficult to find an opportunity to gain experience



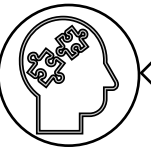
Expectations and perceptions:

- autistic young people and young people with additional support needs felt that there was a biased view of their capabilities and that their potential contributions were not valued
- deaf and hard of hearing people also described how expectations of them meant that self employment opportunities, for example, were never discussed with them
- LGBTQI plus young people described how perceptions of them made it difficult to access employment - fear of discrimination was common



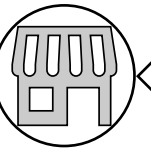
Communication:

- the lack of BSL interpreters within the region is a significant constraint for deaf and hard of hearing people, and poor connectivity restricts the ability for online communication (i.e. high speed internet connections are needed to ensure accurate use of sign language).
- for minority ethnic groups, where English may not be their first language, all interactions are challenging. These can be compounded by cultural differences.



Mental wellbeing:

- for many participants, the barriers faced and the impact of stigma and discrimination meant that they lacked confidence and self-esteem which in turn acted as a barrier in its own right
- some participants also described how their mental health prevented them from realising their potential.



Lack of amenities:

- all groups felt that there was a general lack of things to do in the area and although this affected everyone's experiences of living in the region, it acted as a barrier to some groups
- a lack of a 'gay' scene made socialising difficult for LGBTQI plus young people
- for ethnic minorities, a social life that wasn't based around pubs was missing
- for young people, there was a perceived need for more shops, restaurants, entertainment, youth groups and places for young people to meet (especially in rural areas)

4.3 Recommendations

This consultation was undertaken by SOSE as part of their commitment to have an equality lens on the services that they offer and their delivery. How the agency then responds to these findings is critical in ensuring it fulfils this. Although the findings provide valuable understanding of lived experiences in the South of Scotland, many of the points discussed here go beyond SOSE's remit. Therefore, we have identified where SOSE could consider action by and within the agency but also where SOSE could drive positive change through the organisations it engages with.

- **Business Support**

As shown in Figure 2, knowing how to start up a business and where to go for help was a key theme across the different groups engaged in the consultation. Consideration should therefore be given to the package of support available for start up and business growth in the region. Participants in the consultation called for 'how to' information as well as start-up grants, business incubators, mentoring and networking opportunities. Several groups called specifically for assistance for over 25-year-olds to ensure that they were able to transition, for example, from the armed forces to a civilian career. Financially excluded participants also emphasised the multiple barriers created by deprivation and therefore additional support would be required to ensure that they had equal opportunities to starting a business. Other groups including deaf and hard of hearing people and people from ethnic minority groups also indicated that more targeted support may be useful, not least to overcome communication barriers.

- **Employability**

Acquiring the required skills, knowledge and experience for employment were key barriers experienced by many of the groups and SOSE should consider how its current activity is contributing to the removal of these barriers and what more could be done. For example, participants described how the region's geography and transport infrastructure made accessing available training opportunities difficult. For others, help was requested with job searches. Where specialist support was needed (e.g. a translator or BSL interpreter), these issues were compounded.

Grants, paid internships, placements, apprenticeships, broader opportunities to gain experience, job coaches, interview training, support for CV writing, mentoring partnerships, a job match service for young people with additional needs and simply advertising available opportunities were all suggested as actions to address this.

For young people, free driving lessons were identified as a means through which they could become better connected to the available opportunities. This group also emphasised the need for flexible learning opportunities that were inclusive of different learning styles. Enabling third sector organisations, such as the Better Lives Partnership or the Usual Place, to provide such training was suggested as a means to achieve this.

Similarly, other groups called for training and support which is 'sensitive' to the needs of equality groups; for example, minority ethnic groups called for mentors from a BME background.

- **Raise Awareness and Change Perceptions**

Many of the groups engaged here described their fear of discrimination or unwelcome behaviours/ attitudes more generally, in community settings, places of education and workplaces. More broadly, there was a frustration that their value was not recognised nor harnessed. Several of the groups therefore called for awareness raising, training and the promotion of role models to shift perceptions and promote the benefits of diverse communities and workplaces, and of the potential of people from protected characteristic and other marginalised groups.

Consideration should therefore be given to how best to challenge perceptions and promote inclusive workplaces and services across the region. There was also specific feedback from the different groups consulted:

- Autistic young people and young people with additional support needs called for recognition of the value of neurodiversity and for their needs to be accommodated through, for example, offering quiet rooms, breaks to destress or the promotion of home working. Training on neurodiversity would help to understand how these changes could make a difference;
 - Similarly, people living with a chronic condition wanted employers to recognise the difficulties they faced trying to manage fluctuating symptoms; flexible working conditions were identified as one way to better support this;
 - Women also called for flexible working conditions to ensure that they could manage both work and childcare commitments;
 - People from an ethnic minority wanted unconscious bias training to be provided to ensure equal opportunities, as well as a general promotion of understanding of cultural differences so that they are not excluded;
 - Young LGBTQI plus people felt that they had to compromise their identity to avoid exclusion from workplaces – changing perceptions could therefore create more inclusive environments. The promotion of LGBTQI plus charter marks or standards were identified as a more specific action that could be taken to support this. Best practice standards as a way of supporting equality and inclusion were also suggested for other protected characteristic groups, however, this is currently a gap;
 - People with a history of offending felt that they were labelled by their past mistakes and unable to find an opportunity – work to tackle stigma and discrimination for this group could help with that;
 - Similarly, people with mental health issues felt a general lack of awareness amongst employers and services and experienced stigma and discrimination – work to raise awareness of mental health issues to ensure that people are not discriminated because of their illness was suggested;
 - Several of the groups required specific aids and adaptations to enable them to thrive in the workplace –practical support for employers around aids and adaptations is required; and
 - Deaf and hard of hearing people felt it was vitally important to have access to BSL interpreters and to communicate responsibilities to employers for providing BSL interpreters.
- **Economic development**

More jobs, better jobs and higher paid jobs was a common theme across all groups. An improved transport infrastructure and affordable housing were perceived as an important part of achieving this (and for improving life in the region more generally). Sustainable economic development is at the core of SOSE's activities and therefore the agency has already invested, and will continue to invest, in projects to promote this. SOSE should consider if and how the findings presented here complement their existing evidence base.
 - **Recognise the value of third sector organisations**

Targeted third sector organisations such as the Dumfries and Galloway Multicultural Association, the Usual Place and Better Lives Partnership emerged as critical to seldom heard groups. They offer a range of support to members and act as a gateway to help individuals access and navigate other

services. Perhaps more fundamentally, particularly given the rurality of the region, they provide people with a place to go and sense of community.

They were also identified as key in facilitating public sector engagement with these groups and where groups were missing (e.g. for deaf and hard of hearing people) or where the infrastructure of these groups was less developed, engagement was far less and isolation more pronounced. SOSE should seek to build productive and supportive relationships with these groups and should work with partners to consider how equalities infrastructure across the South of Scotland can be developed, supported and enhanced.

- **Awareness of SOSE**

Awareness of SOSE was generally low and the seldom heard groups commonly suggested that the agency should continue to engage with them to address this. In addition to further consultations, it was felt that SOSE should adopt an outreach approach, developing a 'personal' rather than corporate presence within local geographic communities and communities of interest through attendance at events and meetings.

There was an emphasis on establishing a genuine dialogue where views were sought before decisions were made and outcomes fed back. Establishing mechanisms for ongoing interaction will enable relationships to be developed and genuine, meaningful engagement to take place.

- **Becoming an equality and diversity champion**

Progressing equality and celebrating diversity across the South of Scotland cannot just be the job of protected characteristic groups but is the responsibility of everyone. Public agencies such as SOSE have a key role to play in ensuring that all people across the South of Scotland have equality of opportunity and the chance to thrive and with their position, have a unique opportunity to drive up standards of inclusion across the region.

To establish itself as a champion, participants felt SOSE should firstly demonstrate equality and diversity within the agency but also advocate for it more widely.

Internally, SOSE should ensure that it adopts best practice standards for equality and inclusion:

- Robust leadership around equality and diversity, both at Board level, but also ensuring that there is the right knowledge, skills, experience and capacity within the team;
- Meeting (and exceeding where possible) its duties under the Equality Act 2010;
- Ensuring it is aware of who is missing from the agency, and encouraging and supporting diversity within its Board and staff team,
- Mainstreaming equality throughout all its policies and practices; and
- Becoming accredited through schemes like the LGBT Charter Mark or other best practice mainstreaming tools.

The consultation also provided insight into how SOSE might become a champion for specific equality groups and proper consideration should be given to each of the suggested actions within this report to ensure that it is sensitive to and inclusive of their needs. For example:

- Outreach work with seldom heard women;
- Offer financial incentives to employers to take on people with additional needs;
- Organise or support international events and festivals so that different cultures can be celebrated; and
- Ensure contractors and funded organisations meet LGBTQI plus inclusive standards.

To achieve this, it is recommended that SOSE consider developing a group of its own equality and diversity champions to consider how best to take forward these findings. These champions should also link with local protected characteristic and other seldom heard groups.

For champions to succeed, position and job role is less important than a commitment and passion to drive change. Importantly, the champions must be integrated within SOSE's organisational and governance structure to ensure that they are appropriately supported to fulfil their role and wherever possible, representative of the groups they are advocating for. Developing job specification for the champions would be an important first step here.

Representation on regional equality and diversity structures, such as Dumfries and Galloway's Community Planning Equality and Diversity Working Group, will ensure that SOSE is connected to wider activity and can advocate for change.