

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy

Wednesday 3rd December 2014, 5.45 – 7.30pm, Committee Room 4

Employment, employability and skills in rural Scotland – is provision fit-for-purpose?

Minutes (Approved)

Present

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| Claire Baker | MSP (Chair and co-convenor) |
| Jim Hume | MSP (Co-convenor) |
| Alex Fergusson | MSP (Co-convenor) |
| Graeme Dey | MSP (Co-convenor) |
| Christian Allard | MSP |
| Jean Urquhart | MSP |
| John Scott | MSP |
| Dawn Redpath | Dumfries and Galloway Council (Speaker) |
| Steve Wright | Connect Berwickshire Youth Project (Speaker) |
| James Bream | Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (Speaker) |
| Andrew Prendergast | Plunkett Foundation Scotland |
| Anne-Michelle Ketteridge | Forth Valley & Lomond LEADER |
| Brian Williams | SRUC |
| Bridie Ashrowan | YouthBorders |
| David Cameron | Community Land Scotland |
| David Clelland | Crichton Institute |
| David Green | SRUC Board Member |
| Douglas Scott | Scottish Borders Council |
| Eric Samuel | BIG Lottery |
| Frank Beattie | Scottish Enterprise |
| Gary White | Peebles CAN |
| Gina Wilson | Carnegie UK Trust |
| Iain Bolland | Highlands and Islands Enterprise |
| Ian Macdonald | Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability |
| Jackie Brierton | Women's Enterprise Scotland |
| Jamie Stewart | Scottish Countryside Alliance |
| Jane Atterton | SRUC |
| Jane Smernicki | SRUC |
| Johnny Hamilton | Scottish Association of Young Farmers |
| Kirsten Leask | Soil Association Scotland (Food for Life Scotland) |
| Mike Strachan | Forestry Commission Scotland |
| Neil Cummings | The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) |
| Peter Ross | Dumfries and Galloway LEADER |

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| Rebecca Campbell | University of Stirling |
| Ross McLaren | Scottish Churches Rural Group |
| Ruth Boyle | Skills Development Scotland |
| Sarah Bowyer | University of the Highlands and Islands |
| Sarah Skerratt | SRUC |
| Scott Petrie | Scottish Land & Estates |
| Siân Ringrose | SRUC |
| Sophia Nicholson | Peebles CAN |

Apologies

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| Jackie Baillie | MSP |
| Nigel Don | MSP |
| Rhoda Grant | MSP |
| Jamie McGrigor | MSP |
| Annabelle Ewing | MSP |
| Anne McGuire | Heather Cassidy, Diary Secretary to Anne McGuire MP |
| Alistair Stott | SRUC |
| Andrew Brough | Buccleuch Estates |
| Andrew Stevenson | Scottish Government |
| Ann MacSween | Historic Scotland |
| Archie Stewart | Cliftonhill Farm |
| Bruce Wilson | Scottish Wildlife Trust |
| Bryan McGrath | Scottish Borders Council |
| Clare Slipper | NFUS |
| Chris Harris | Argentix Ltd |
| Christina Noble | Here We Are Project |
| Christopher Bathgate | Scottish Government |
| Clare Hall | SRUC |
| David Gass | Upper Quartile |
| David Lamb | SAC Consulting |
| David Watts | Aberdeen University |
| Derek Logie | Rural Housing Service |
| Deborah Mays | DCM Heritage |
| Dugald MacGilp | Keep Scotland Beautiful |
| Ellie Brodie | SRUC |
| Eva Milroy | Crichton Institute |
| Ewan Green | Dumfries and Galloway Council |
| Geoff Fagan | CADISPA |
| Graham Blythe | European Commission Office in Scotland |
| Jamie Dent | D&G Small Communities Housing Trust |
| Jan Noble | Lamanca Community Association |
| James Ogilvie | Forestry Commission |
| Jayne Glass | University of the Highlands and Islands |
| John Farrington | Aberdeen University |

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| John Watt | Chair, Scottish Land Fund |
| Julian Pace | Scottish Enterprise |
| Karen Dobbie | Scottish Environment Protection Agency |
| Kyrsten Black | SRUC |
| Liz Hawkins | Scottish Government |
| Lorna Philip | Aberdeen University |
| Madhu Satsangi | Stirling University |
| Mark Aitken | SEPA |
| Martin Price | University of the Highlands & Islands |
| Nicola Hill | Dumfries and Galloway LEADER |
| Pam Rodway | Crofting Connections |
| Pat Neeson | |
| Peter Misselbrook | Shepherd and Wedderburn LLP |
| Pip Tabor | Southern Uplands Partnership |
| Priscilla Gordon-Duff | Moray LEADER |
| Rebecca Marek | Scottish Youth Parliament |
| Robin Haig | Observer |
| Roy McLachlan | RPID, Scottish Government |
| Sally Thomas | Scottish Government |
| Stephen Graham | Highland Council |
| Tanya Castell | Soirbeas Ltd |
| Tom Campbell | The North Highland Initiative |
| Tony Huggins-Haig | Arthouse Galleries |

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Claire Baker MSP (Chair) apologised for the slightly late start to the meeting. This was due to MSPs being involved in a briefing on CAP by Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead.

No participants objected to an audio recording of the meeting being taken.

The high turnout meant that it was not possible for everyone in the room to introduce themselves, but Claire Baker MSP noted that everyone should sign the sign-in sheet which was being passed around. Anyone wishing to ask a question should introduce themselves and note the organisation that they represent (if applicable) at the start of their question.

The apologies received would be noted in the meeting minute which will be circulated as soon as possible after the meeting.

2. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting (7th October – Young People and Rural Scotland)

Jane Atterton noted that the unapproved minutes from the October meeting were circulated to all attendees on 25th November 2014 and no edits were received. They were circulated again to

all members with the confirmation email relating to this meeting. Ross McLaren proposed the minutes as a true record of the meeting and this was seconded by Ian Macdonald. The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting. SRUC will post the approved minutes to the [webpage for the October meeting](#) asap after the meeting.

Jane Atterton briefly reported on actions noted in the minutes of the last meeting in October. Participants were reminded of the offers made by the Scottish Youth Parliament and Youth Scotland to assist organisations in engaging with young people. Jane also reported that several youth organisations were now represented on the mailing list for this Group, including Scottish Youth Parliament, Youth Scotland, Young Farmers, Youth Borders, etc.

Jane Smernicki (SRUC Head of Communications) noted that the SRUC Communications team would be happy to work with presenters at Group meetings to raise media awareness of the showcased projects. The Secretariat will continue to liaise with the Communications team in SRUC to identify opportunities to raise the profile of the Group and projects, activities etc. that are featured.

3. 8-10 Minute Presentations (followed by discussion):

- a. ***Dawn Redpath (Chair of the Rural Employability Group and Employability and Skills Manager at Dumfries and Galloway Council): “More Jobs and Sustainable Growth in a Rural Economy: What’s the Difference?”*** Dawn’s presentation can be accessed [here](#).

Dawn noted that the Scottish Government’s aim of sustainable economic growth is founded on having highly skilled people and high levels of employability across the workforce, including in rural Scotland. Employability refers to the supply of and demand for people in the labour force but demand (i.e. recruitment) and supply needs can differ in both rural and urban areas.

In terms of demand, the importance of small and micro businesses in rural areas often requires a different approach which is bespoke to the needs of these businesses, which often employ people on a seasonal or temporary basis or on low wages, and often do not have clear job descriptions for employees, no formal contracts, etc. Therefore, often these businesses require targeted and more intensive support to grow through taking on more employees, but this is resource intensive.

In some rural areas it is harder to attract high value jobs (e.g. professional, scientific and technical jobs) and therefore there is a need to recognise the importance of indigenous sectors (including agriculture, forestry and fishing) and focus on growing employment opportunities in these sectors – and growing awareness of these opportunities - as well as diversifying from these activities.

Focusing on the supply side, there are challenges for the workforce in rural areas in terms of poor transport infrastructure, the costs of travel, limited broadband, etc. If services are developed on an outcome-based model of funding, then rural areas will be placed at an

immediate disadvantage, as the 'impact' may not be as great as in urban areas. The clients that are the easiest to help will tend to be the ones on which the focus is placed, while the hardest to deal with/most in need will be left behind. In rural areas, delivering employment and skills provision is often limited to only one or two providers, resulting in limited choice for rural people.

However, there are many positives about rural areas, including a strong sense of entrepreneurship and self-help and high levels of self-employment (this may be indicative of an entrepreneurial spirit, but it may also indicate a lack of alternative employment opportunities). It is important that resources are localised and devolved as far as possible to the local level, especially in rural areas, to take account of these characteristics, and the additional challenges mentioned above (plus the additional challenge of demographic ageing). Partnership-working is essential whereby public, private and third sector organisations are working together to 'translate' national policies and initiatives to local circumstances. The role of local authorities is central, including as providers of infrastructure that might be available through other means in urban areas. They are facilitators, enablers, direct deliverers, commissioners of services, and significant employers themselves. Opportunities need to be grasped to better understand and grow the positive roles that local authorities can play.

- b. **James Bream (Research and Policy Director, Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce): “*The North East of Scotland: Same or Different?*”** James' presentation can be accessed [here](#).

James started his presentation by noting that rural can mean many different things to different people and he discussed four 'levels of rurality'. He discussed the relationships between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire ('the shire') in terms of employment, noting that many people who live in the shire do not work in the shire (32% of shire residents are out-commuters). However, this is not necessarily a bad thing as it simply reflects labour supply and demand, but understanding travel to work patterns is important (including distances travelled, modes of travel, etc). For him, employability relates to the question of whether the people available have the skills to do the jobs available.

In terms of employment and employability, the North East of Scotland picture is relatively positive, with the region outperforming Scotland as a whole on many of the measures (e.g. unemployment claimant count). The North East economy is complex as it includes both SMEs and large, globally-focused employers. It is clear that even the large companies can survive well in the rural setting of Aberdeenshire. A key challenge, however, is securing adequate, sustainable wage rates in rural locations. Aberdeen city wages are higher than the Scottish average but the same is not true of the shire where jobs are relatively low paid.

Skills provision in the North East is apparently generally working well, with people finding jobs, despite the fact that providing appropriate training can be difficult where population density is low, and take-up of courses is often low and costs are high. Regional Investment Plans have been written recently and are helpful in taking a regional approach to thinking about skills supply

and demand, but we need to make sure we continue to think about rural Travel to Work Areas, not just areas within city-region boundaries.

James concluded that the employability picture in the North East is generally good. He noted that local employment is vital for cultural authenticity, but that, despite the overall positive picture, rural jobs in the North East tend not to be well paid (but that does not mean that they are necessarily undesirable). He noted that many challenges/advantages are the same across rural and urban areas; critical issues include: connectivity; competition for labour; supporting infrastructure; and the need for future proofing current initiatives to ensure that if there are changes in the oil and gas sector in particular, the region is ready to deal with them.

- c. **Steve Wright (Manager, Connect Berwickshire Youth Project): *The Good Hope Project: Younger and Older People Working Together***. Steve's video can be accessed [here](#).

Steve outlined the background to, and achievements of, the Good Hope project in Eyemouth in the Scottish Borders. The project started with a conversation between himself and the retired harbour master, who had a vision of young and older people working together. The aim was that older people could pass on their boat building and boat restoration skills to help young people get into employment, particularly those who had left school with limited/no qualifications. At the same time, a business in the Scottish Borders (Drysdale's) was also seeking to support and employ local young people. A local couple bought a vessel in need of restoration and the local business, Skills Development Scotland and Apex provided support for the project.

Seven young people were involved, working with older people aged from 64 to 83 years old. The young people were identified through discussions with the local high school to ascertain who might benefit most from the opportunity. To attend Further Education college from Eyemouth would involve travel of more than two hours by public transport in each direction.

Central to the success of the project was the involvement of a youth worker who provided a pastoral role and offered a trusted and consistent 'friend' to the young people. Steve had tracked down most of the young people involved to find out what they were now doing: three are undertaking apprenticeships or are in further/higher education, one is employed in farming full-time, and two are working locally at Drysdale's (all of the young people involved and who were recommended were offered jobs at the company after Good Hope was restored).

Steve showed a video to complete his presentation visually showing the Good Hope restoration project.

David Clelland from the Crichton Institute (CI) then summarised the key messages arising from a CI organised panel discussion on 19th Nov in Sanquhar. The CI now holds these events approximately two weeks in advance of the CPG meetings to discuss regional perspectives on

the topic for reporting at national level. For more information about these events, and to access the briefings produced please visit the [Publications area of the Crichton Institute](#) website.

Key discussion points from the CI organised event included:

- The importance of providing work placement or work experience opportunities for young people but the recognition that these are resource-intensive in terms of the demands they place on employers
- Employers are however becoming more receptive and open to working with education system to provide placement opportunities.
- It is important that skills and training provision meets the needs of local sectors
- The need to challenge negative perceptions and poor awareness about the job opportunities in rural areas – there are many hidden opportunities.
- The need to raise aspirations among rural young people so that they aim higher, while still maintaining expectations
- The need to change perceptions so that a higher value is placed on vocational training opportunities and they are not seen as a poor second best option to HE/academic subjects.
- Providing support of various kinds to small businesses to help them grow (some is already available through the Federation of Small Businesses and Chambers of Commerce for example), especially if they are making the first step to taking on an employee

Jane Atterton noted that PRIME (the Prince's Initiative for Mature Enterprise) had also been invited to attend the meeting to introduce their recent report on employment challenges for the over-50s. Unfortunately PRIME were unable to attend but had provided some hard copies of their report (available at the back of the room). If anyone did not manage to pick up a copy of their report but would like one, it can be downloaded from their website [here](#), or you can contact: Jessica Stone, Director of Policy (Tel: 0207 566 8759; E: Jessica.stone@bitc.org.uk) for a hard copy.

Key issues raised in the discussion included:

- **Rural locations for business:** Many businesses can serve their (often international) markets from rural locations as a result of improved broadband, plus often they can secure labour at more competitive rates than in urban locations. Having good transport links between cities and their hinterlands and a coherent regional offer are important for local businesses, as well as for visitors to an area. The latter may require organisations (such as local authorities) to work together across administrative boundaries.

- **Engage young people...:** The Good Hope project in Eyemouth is a great example of young and older people working together and sharing skills and knowledge – the boat was the vehicle for this to happen. The most important outcome was getting young people on the employment ladder. Engaging the private sector is important. Energy companies may be a future source of funding for local employment and skills related projects in rural communities.
- **...But also recognise the importance of the growing older population:** While providing opportunities for young people is critical, we also need to recognise that there are older people who may want to continue working beyond retirement age, and there may be older people coming out of a long-term job looking for work who will need different kinds of support. We should not simply assume that those over 40 have confidence, readily transferable skills and are aware of the opportunities available to them. Providers need to ensure that their schemes are adaptable to the changing characteristics of the workforce.
- **Stimulate demand for apprenticeships:** Apprenticeships need to be employer-led, so there is a need to stimulate demand from employers. At the same time, there are also several examples of local authorities supporting apprenticeships schemes and other employability related initiatives (such as the [Total Access Point in Dumfries and Galloway](#)).
- **Tailor schemes to sector needs:** Several examples were noted of well tailored schemes, including the [Dairy Skills Initiative](#) involving SRUC, Dumfries and Galloway Council and NFUS, and supported by Skills Development Scotland. This model involves young people spending time in college and gaining work experience on farm so that they learn both theoretical and practical skills. The food and drink sector was also mentioned as one where more work is being done to match young people and the opportunities available. This is being done by ensuring that people are aware of, and are interested in, available opportunities across the supply chain and that they have the skills that will meet that demands of employers (including e.g. food hygiene, food safety and food technology) so that they no longer need to recruit overseas. The Scottish Food and Drink Federation national programme '[A Future in Food](#)' was mentioned which facilitates partnerships between school and industry to help deliver the curriculum by using food as a context for learning. Scottish Land and Estate's Rural Skills Learning Ladder was also mentioned which involves a range of partners, including estates and rural colleges and training providers, and is aimed at bringing new people into the sector, but also upskilling those already involved. The [Deeside Initiative](#) is one specific project. Broadly speaking, it was recognised that small companies may need more support to enable them to engage in such initiatives due to their limited capacity and resource base and the cost implications of getting involved.
- **Recognise the good quality, often hidden, employment opportunities in rural Scotland:** There are often well paid jobs in rural locations which young people often do not hear about at school. Employers and employment support providers need to be better at sharing information on the range of local opportunities available to raise awareness. At the same time, managing expectations is critical and it is important not to raise the bar too high.

- **Support small businesses:** This might be in terms of ensuring that they have the necessary legislative and other information to take on employees. Creative approaches may be required to support the smallest businesses, for example, by encouraging them to work in clusters to achieve economies of scale.
- **Ensure that the most disengaged individuals (of any age) are included:** Specific support may be required for people who have been out of work for a significant time and/or those who lack confidence and life skills (e.g. written and verbal communication) – so-called ‘soft skills’ - so that they can complete application forms well, perform better at interview and are in a position to take up an employment offer. The most in need of support may be young people who have left school and are ‘out of contact’ with mainstream support agencies. Dawn Redpath mentioned ongoing activities in Dumfries and Galloway, including a youth guarantee scheme for young people post-school, supporting people to develop softer skills, and interfacing with employers (including to implement the Wood Commission recommendations). Before each young person leaves school, a risk matrix is prepared to understand better their individual circumstances and to reduce the risk of them being left out of contact with support providers.
- **Changing attitudes in schools:** For example there are often strong, entrenched negative attitudes to work-based learning and modern apprenticeships, and to vocational skills more generally, which need to be overcome – this is changing but more needs to be done. There is a widespread held image of rural vocational jobs in particular being second class options, alongside a national emphasis on encouraging more young people to go to university. This perception is often held by young people themselves, their parents and by teachers and careers advisers. But college and university is not for everyone, not least because for rural people the distances to travel to attend may be prohibitive. There are some very good examples of schools working closely with employers (for example, the [Queensberry Initiative](#) in Dumfries and Galloway) and with young people themselves to change attitudes and raise awareness and interest in rural jobs. Information about these initiatives should be shared so that they can be ‘rolled out’ in appropriate ways elsewhere. It was noted that work experience schemes in schools are often not taken up by many students and we need more information about why this is the case. Is it connected with low expectations or with low confidence perhaps? Preparatory work may be required before people enter into work experience.
- **Understand the local context:** For all initiatives and draw on the expertise and knowledge of local partners. For example, this might include better evidence about income and unemployment levels in households and how individuals enter into/leave the labour market, better evidence of informal networks and how people use them to find employment, attitudes to entrepreneurship locally including amongst young people, quality of life and wellbeing, attitudes to work, claiming benefits, self-help, etc.

It was agreed that many useful points were raised by the presenters and during the discussion time. It was suggested that a letter to be sent to Angela Constance MSP (Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning) and Roseanna Cunningham MSP (Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training) to highlight the key issues relating to employment, employability and

skills in rural areas, as discussed at this CPG meeting. This will be sent on behalf of the CPG on Rural Policy.

Action: SRUC's Rural Policy Centre, as Secretariat for the Group, to draft a letter to be sent to Angela Constance MSP and Roseanna Cunningham MSP outlining the key issues discussed at the meeting. The letter will be circulated to the Group's four co-convenors for comment prior to sending, and will be submitted by one of the co-convenors.

4. AOB

No items of AOB were discussed.

5. Date of next meeting (Wednesday 18th February 2015: Rural Economies: Diversify or Die?)

The next meeting will be held as above and further information will be available in due course.