Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland 2022-27

Island and Communities Impact Assessment

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Island Communities Impact Assessment : Adult Learning Strategy

This Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) has been undertaken to consider whether the Adult Learning Strategy is likely to have any effect on island communities that is significantly different to its effect on other communities (including other island communities).

1.   Introduction

1.1   The Islands (Scotland) Act 20181 provides for a duty on the Scottish Ministers and other relevant public bodies that they must have regard to island communities in exercising their functions and in the development of legislation.

1.2   Section 13 of the 2018 Act 2 obliges the Scottish Ministers to prepare an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) in relation to legislation which, in their opinion, is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities in Scotland.

1.3   The Islands Act3 identifies 6 local authorities representing island communities in Part 4 of the Act (Section 20 (2), which are Argyll and Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar/Western Isles, Highland Council, North Ayrshire Council, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council. Amongst them, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles are entirely island authorities, while Highland, Argyll and Bute and North Ayrshire local authorities cover island regions as well as mainland regions.

2.   Executive Summary

2.1.1   This ICIA has considered the potential effects of the Adult Learning Strategy and how it impacts on people living in island communities. The findings here are based on desk research, feedback from adult learners living in island communities and engagement with key stakeholders. These stakeholders include Community Learning and Development teams in the six local authorities with islands and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. The Adult Learning Strategic Forum was set up to develop the Adult Learning Strategy. Its membership also consists of a number of national public sector and third sector organisations through which island communities adult learners can have their voices heard. The full membership is:

- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
- City of Glasgow College
- CLD Managers Scotland – Adult Learning
- CLD Standards Council
- College Development Network
- Colleges Scotland
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
- Education Scotland
- Inverness College

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[1] Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (legislation.gov.uk)
[2] Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (legislation.gov.uk)
[3] Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (legislation.gov.uk)

- LEAD Scotland
- Learning Link Scotland
- Newbattle Abbey College
- NHS Education for Scotland
- Open University
- Robertson Trust
- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig
- Scottish Community Development Centre
- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
- Scottish Funding Council
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Libraries
- Scottish Prison Service
- Scottish Union Learning
- Skills Development Scotland
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Scotland)
- Universities Scotland
- Volunteer Scotland
- Workers Education Association

2.1.2   We have concluded that there will not be any unique impacts on island communities and that a full ICIA is not required at this stage of the strategy's delivery.

2.1.3   Central to the aims of the Adult Learning Strategy is a focus on removing barriers to learning and increasing opportunities for all adult learners, irrespective of where they live and learn. The strategy is therefore likely to have a positive impact on island communities. Specific policy interventions that may emerge as part of the strategy's dynamic action plan may have a different impact on island communities and ICIAs will be conducted accordingly.

3.   The Adult Learning Strategy

3.1.1   The purpose of creating the Adult Learning Strategy is to remove barriers to learning for the most marginalised people within society. The strategy's vision is that that adult learning in Scotland will develop better skilled, educated, confident and empowered people contributing to connected and inclusive communities. Its aim is to create the conditions for connected adult learning opportunities that link Scotland's communities, local authorities, third sector organisations, colleges and universities around an offer of learning for adults, particularly those furthest from inclusion and experiencing disadvantage.

3.1.2   The strategy aims to bring about systemic change to how learners can access and progress through learning to reach their goals. Intended impacts and outcomes are that the strategy will:

- deliver better outcomes for learners and make a positive impact to adult learners' lives and their life chances.
- remove the barriers that prevent adults participating in learning or that adversely affect their levels of participation.
- aim specifically to support those who are not engaging in learning and create clear accessible first steps that enable the most marginalised and excluded adults to begin their learning journey.
- clarify and simplify how learners who have taken their first steps into or back into learning can progress.
- ensure that all learning is recognised and is given the due credit and recognition that the learners' efforts deserve.
- ensure that those furthest from formal mainstream education have parity of learning opportunities.

3.1.3   There are four outcomes in particular within the National Performance Framework that are fundamental to the strategy's ambition to create new and increased positive pathways in collaboration with adult learners. These focus on education, tackling poverty, health and the importance of inclusive communities.

- We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society
- We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally
- We are healthy and active
- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe

3.1.4   A strategic action plan will set out important next steps in creating the conditions for connected adult learning opportunities. The plan will be dynamic, actions will be refreshed as we work towards removing barriers to learning. A framework will be developed to monitor performance against each of the actions in the strategic action plan.

3.1.5   Intended impacts and outcomes of the strategy are the same for island and mainland communities. However, interventions needed to achieve these outcomes and impact may vary, particularly in relation to barriers that adult learners in island communities may face in accessing learning and progressing into further learning opportunities. These barriers may include challenges with transport links within islands, between islands or off-island in order to enter into adult learning and/or access further learning opportunities. Digital connectivity may also provide an additional barrier to adult learners in island communities or form part of a blended learning approach requiring a mix or digital and face-to-face engagement.

4.   Population Data

4.1.1   Community Learning and Development (CLD) includes the provision of youth work, adult learning, (including generic community based learning, adult literacies and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and support for communities to improve the equality of opportunity. National data on CLD provision is not currently collected. Unpublished research conducted by CLD Managers Scotland suggests that 91,710 adults were engaged in CLD activity across all thirty-two local authorities

during 2019/20. This number does not include adult learners who accessed third sector provision, or the specific number of adults engaged in CLD adult learning in island communities.

4.1.2   Early engagement in the development of the strategy highlighted the lack of data collected for adult learning. A strategic action to develop coherent and consistent data and measurements based on methods used across Scotland was developed as a result. Island communities will be an integral part of research to determine data for key indicators for adult learning as the strategy is delivered.

4.1.3   The 2011 Census shows the percentages of people aged 16-64 years old in each local authority area with inhabited islands:[4]

Table 1: Percentage of people aged 16-64 in local authority areas with inhabited islands

Local Authority	%
Argyll and Bute	61.7
Highland	63.6
Na h-Eileanan Siar	61.5
North Ayrshire	63.5
Orkney	63.3
Shetland	64.4

4.1.4   This data shows there is not a significant difference in the proportion of adults across islands communities who could potentially benefit from the increased adult learning opportunities that the strategy aims to deliver. There is also no significant difference in the percentage of the population aged 16-64 years old across Scotland (65.9%)[5] compared to island communities. The adult learning strategy aims to drive to bring about systemic change and drive improvements in the learning experience for adults in all of Scotland's communities.

4.1.5   A key strategic action is to increase access to and support for accredited learning, so that more opportunities are created and available for adult learners with few or no qualifications.

4.1.6   Scottish Government data shows the percentage of adults with qualifications below NVQ2 in each local authority area with inhabited islands:[6]

Table 2: Percentage of adults with qualifications below NVQ2 in local authority areas with inhabited islands

Local Authority	%
Argyll and Bute	14.86
Highland	15.1

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[4] Scotland's Census 2011
[5] Scotland's Census 2011
[6] Annual Population Survey 2019

Na h-Eileanan Siar	12.69
North Ayrshire	19.08
Orkney	15.57
Shetland	14.62

4.1.7   This data shows that there is not a significant difference in the proportion of adults with qualifications below NVQ2 on island communities. The same data set shows that 18.61% of Scotland's population have qualifications below NVQ2. It is worth noting that only a small percentage of Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire are on, as both tables 1 and 2 show, the percentage of adults ages 16-64 and the proportion of those adults with qualifications below NVQ2 does not vary significantly between exclusively island based local authorities, mainland local authorities, and those authorities with a mix of both island and mainland populations.

5.   Barriers to Learning

5.1   The National Islands Plan Survey found that 69% of islanders agree that they could do a college qualification in a subject of their choice while living on the islands, either online or in person. Islands groups with population centres reported higher levels of agreement, including Orkney Mainland (77%), Lewis and Harris (75%), and Shetland Mainland (74%).[7]

5.2   Just over half of all respondents to the National Islands Plan Survey agreed that, if they wanted to, they could do a university degree in a subject of their choice while living on the islands (online or in person).[8] Again, highest agreement was found among island groups with population centres, including Lewis and Harris (62%) and Orkney Mainland (59%).

5.3   No national data is available on whether adult learners agree that they can access a community-based adult learning opportunity of their choice and if their community-based learning provides strong progression routes into college courses. Community-based adult learning is often the first step back into education for many adult learners and offers pathways to Scotland's further and higher education system. To strengthen and develop these pathways, the strategy will focus on building better connections between community-based adult learning and mainstream education. A deeper and more nuanced understanding of progression routes within island communities is needed to enable this for adult learners in island communities during the implementation of the strategy.

5.4   The National Islands Plan Survey data revealed that in addition to a lack of higher education opportunities that respondents felt that there were a lack of childcare options to fit with residents' working patterns. [9] 30% of island residents agreed that parents have access to childcare services that suit their work hours. Argyll Islands (9%) and Orkney Outer Isles (9%) have especially low levels of agreement. It should be noted that island communities were asked if access suited

[7] National Islands Plan Survey: final report
[8] National Islands Plan Survey: final report
[9] National Islands Plan Survey: final report

work hours and not learning opportunities. However, challenges in accessing high quality and affordable childcare can act as a barrier for parents, particularly women, taking up learning opportunities.

5.5   Less frequent and more expensive public transport options, combined with greater distances to childcare, can be a barrier to learning opportunities. The 2011 Census[10] showed that bus travel was the most common mode of transport used to travel to study by people living in the three island authorities (Orkney, 36.8%, Shetlands 39.3%, Na h-Eileanan Siar 49.3%). It should be noted that this data includes all people aged over four and studying and not specifically adult learners. The National Islands Plan Survey[11] found that 69% of islanders agree that their local bus connects to essential services, with significant differences between Orkney Mainland (81%) and Orkney Outer Isles (25%), and between Shetland Mainland (74%) and Shetland Outer Isles (33%).

5.6   Digital connectivity can also provide an additional barrier to island communities, both in terms of accessing services and accessing learning. No specific data is available in relation to digital learning, however, The National Islands Plan Survey[12] reported that 96% of island households have access to the internet from home. It found that 65% of island residents agree that their internet connection at home is fast enough to do what they want online. Only 27% of Shetland Outer Isles residents agreed with this statement compared to 66% of Shetland Mainland residents. A significant difference was also noted between the Orkney Outer Isles (45%) and Orkney Mainland (70%). 62% of island residents agree that their internet connection at home is reliable, with significantly lower agreement in Shetland Outer Isles (30%) and Orkney Outer Isles (35%).

6.   Strategy Development and Feedback from Adult Learners

6.1   Consultation on the strategy began in May 2019 at the Adult Learning Conference where adult learning practitioners across Scotland and national organisations were asked for their views on themes established by the Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland and for their ideas on what the strategy could focus on.

6.2   Thematic workshops on how each theme should be presented and progressed within the new strategy took place between October to November 2019. These workshops included feedback from island representatives through local authorities and national third sector organisations who have a reach into island communities.

6.3   Feedback was sought from adult learners across Scotland alongside the delivery of the thematic workshops. Adult learners were asked what they hoped to achieve in their learning, what barriers they faced and what their progression goals were. Questions were translated into Gaelic for adult learners in Gaelic speaking island communities.

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[10] Scotland's Census 2011
[11] National Islands Plan Survey: final report
[12] National Islands Plan Survey: final report

6.4   Feedback from the thematic workshops and adult learners were synthesised and presented to the Adult Learning Strategic Forum in December 2019. A series of engagement events were planned for further consultation, however, most of these were cancelled due to the pandemic and work on the strategy was paused throughout most of 2020. Work was resumed in early 2021 and two online consultations were delivered. These events and online consultations included feedback from island representatives through local authorities and national third sector organisations who have a reach into island communities.

6.5   The findings of all consultation exercises were used to develop a consultation draft of the Adult Learning Strategy which was circulated to members of the Adult Learning Strategic Forum for Scotland for feedback in May 2021. The views of island communities were represented via feedback from Sabhal Mòr Ostaig ,CLD Managers Scotland, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Adult Literacy and ESOL Networks and national organisations who have a reach into island communities.

7.   Removing Barriers to Learning

7.1   A number of barriers were identified by stakeholders and adult learners;

• The costs associated with learning, including transport costs.
• Difficulties in travelling to learning opportunities. Representatives from Na h-Eileanan Siar highlighted that due to their geographical location, provision on outlying islands can be difficult due to relying on ferries to engage with potential learners.
• A lack of awareness of what learning opportunities are available.
• A lack of provision in their area
• Challenges with accessing and paying for childcare
• A lack of confidence and nervousness

7.2   These barriers were not unique to island communities with engagement showing that adult learners across Scotland face the same significant barriers in their learning.

7.3   The Adult Learning Strategy will focus on removing barriers to learning for all adult learners, irrespective of where they live and learn. It is, therefore, likely to have a positive impact on island communities.

7.4   A strategic action plan will underpin the delivery and implementation of the strategy. Its actions have been developed and refined throughout the strategy's development. Policy interventions that focus on the removal of specific barriers are not yet detailed to allow for further work to be conducted into how systemic change can be brought about to how adult learners can access and progress through learning.

7.5   A high-level strategic action is "to collaborate with adult learners and equality groups to explore, define and remove barriers to learning". This will entail working with adult learners in island communities to explore how barriers can be removed.

Recommendations will be incorporated into the action plan which will be dynamic with actions being refreshed during the lifespan of the strategy.

8.   Delivering Better Outcomes for Adult Learners

8.1.1   Engagement in the development of the strategy showed that adult learners wanted to improve their work life/ employability through their current learning and progress in their learning by taking a further qualification.

8.1.2   These goals were not unique to island communities with engagement showing that adult learners across Scotland want to progress in their learning by gaining accreditation and to improve their work life and employability.

8.1.3   A high-level action in the strategic action plan is to "connect community-based adult learning with careers and employability services to create positive pathways for learners who face significant barriers to accessing work." Initial detailed actions have been created including increasing capacity by delivering training to adult learning practitioners on careers resources and; "work to increase CLD membership on Local Employability Partnerships to align and integrate with local priorities and explore how to embed the No One Left Behind approach and emerging employability policies and practices within adult learning provision." The strategy is, therefore, likely to have a positive impact on island communities by connecting island community-based adult learners' learning to local employment priorities.

8.1.4   A high-level action in the strategic action plan is to "increase access to and support for accredited learning underpinned by the SCQF, where appropriate, for community-based adult learning to support positive pathways for adult learners". Detailed actions are to "identify gaps in and availability of provision and respond by supporting the development of new opportunities" and "support and strengthen partnership working between colleges and community-based adult learning providers to deliver accredited learning in the community." The strategy is, therefore, likely to have a positive impact on island communities by providing new opportunities to gain qualifications.

8.1.5   The strategy has a particular focus on increasing the availability of community-based learning opportunities. Following feedback on the consultation draft, an ambition of creating new and increased positive pathways in collaboration with community based adult learners was set.

8.1.6   Policy interventions defining what these positive pathways are will be detailed during the initial year of the strategy's lifespan. Positive pathways could include confidence building, improving mental wellbeing and developing relationships and networks. A lack of current baseline data relating specifically to community-based adult learning in Scotland currently makes the definition of what positive pathways are, and what their impacts are on adult learners, difficult. As this is developed, consultation with island communities will take place to ensure that the pathways identified and developed meet the needs and aspirations of adult learners in island communities.

8.1.7   Positive pathways for adult learners includes language learning. Increased references to support Gaelic learning were suggested in feedback to the consultation draft of the strategy.

8.1.8   A number of detailed actions have been included in the strategic action plan following consultation that support and promote Gaelic. These are; "support the development and promotion of SpeakGaelic resources, support the development of progression routes for Gaelic learning and promote Gaelic learning opportunities to increase the use and visibility of Gaelic."

9.   Conclusion

9.1.1   Through the work undertaken to produce this impact assessment, it is clear that living in island communities presents challenges for adult learners accessing and progressing through learning.

9.1.2   These challenges are not unique to these communities and our conclusion is that the strategy's focus on removing barriers to learning and increasing opportunities for adult learners are likely to have a positive impact on island communities.

9.1.3   At this stage of the strategy's delivery and implementation further ICIA action is not required and no mitigation measures are required.

10.   Monitoring and Review

10.1.1   The initial year of strategy implementation will be targeted at creating a baseline data set aligned to the development of a monitoring framework. This will enable a better understanding of the learning journeys that adult learners from island communities take.

10.1.2   The immediate focus of the strategy's initial stages of delivery are to engage across the sector and consult further to ensure that the views of adult learners, providers and practitioners are taken into account before further work is carried out on a number of high-level actions.

10.1.3   In March 2022 consultation began with adult learners from island communities and representatives from island authorities on how barriers to learning can be removed. This is the first piece of work conducted on the strategy's high level action *collaborate with adult learners and equality groups to explore, define and remove barriers to learning*.

10.1.4   The initial delivery of the strategy's high level actions will also focus on identifying gaps and availability in provision. This will enable a better understanding of how new approaches can be trialled and developed and will identify future policy interventions.

10.1.5   More specific policy interventions that are developed may pose island specific barriers. Policy officials will continually assess actions that may emerge as

part of the strategy's dynamic action plan that may have a different impact on island communities and will conduct ICIAs accordingly.

10.1.6   Details of investment in the strategy are still to be worked through. Intended investment and its impact on island communities will also be considered during the development of funding plans and mechanisms and ICIAs will also be conducted accordingly.

Authorisation

I confirm that the impact of the Adult Learning Strategy has been sufficiently assessed:

Craig Robertson – Interim Deputy Director, Advanced Learning & Science

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