

**CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS
15 MARCH 2021**

(Paper 2)

EXTENSIVE OUTCOMES FROM PREVIOUS CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS MEETINGS

OUTCOMES FROM THE CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS – INVERNESS – 28 OCTOBER 2019

<p>Update on COHI 2020 Projects (spotlight on skills)</p> <p>COHI members welcomed the progress emerging from the ongoing work of the Senior Officers Group. They endorsed the importance of the existing range of projects but with a greater focus on maximising the connections between areas in order to retain and attract young people and drive up working age population. The opportunities driven by digital as an underpinning for providing greater educational opportunity were particularly highlighted.</p> <p>COHI members asked for projects to be reframed to deliver integrated action in the context of a post-2020 timeframe factoring in themes including climate change and repopulation.</p>	<p>Lead</p> <p>Joe Brown</p>	<p>Updated March 2021</p> <p>SOG members have produced revised projects plans for reframed projects, building in initial content relating to climate change and repopulation. That work is ongoing and a formal update will be provided as part of the annual report during the October COHI.</p> <p>A cross-cutting quality assurance review process was agreed at the last SOG meeting to confirm or enhance that we are indeed maximising connections between areas. While that will be completed by June 2021 emerging findings suggest COVID pressures have slowed project delivery and cross-fertilisation.</p> <p>A paper prepared for the October 2020 meeting confirmed that the review process is ongoing, and the meeting's focus on COVID impacts and recovery planning will help calibrate new challenges faced by the Highlands and Islands and Scotland as a whole.</p>
<p>Population and productivity</p> <p>COHI members endorsed the aim of the Government's population programme and made the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of depopulation, repopulation and population profile will be a focus for COHI's future work programme; 	<p>Lead</p> <p>Liam Kearney/ Cameron Anson</p>	<p>Updated March 2021</p> <p>Building on work carried out in 2018 looking into Scottish Government job dispersal, talent attraction and retention officials are engaging with internal and external stakeholders and learning from Scottish Government location policies, past and present, to clearly articulate the evidence of the benefits of workforce dispersal and to explore options for the future. The Scottish Government will be engaging with members of the COHI Senior Officers Group as part of this process.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To deliver analytical work on the impact of public sector job dispersal; and,• To engage with Scottish Government as it gathers intelligence and develops interventions to address Scotland's population challenges particularly impacting on rural and island communities, working together to co-produce solutions. This includes a shared willingness to explore transformational options across key issues such as public and private sector jobs and housing provision.	<p>Progress on this work was temporarily deferred as a number of staff were redeployed to support emerging priorities in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This is now being picked up through the Scottish Government's People Directorate.</p> <p>On Scotland's population challenges:</p> <p>On 10 March 2020, the Scottish Government's Rural and Islands Communities Team, with support from Scottish Rural Network, held a Repopulation Workshop with stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors to collaborate on potential pilot repopulation initiatives.</p> <p>These initiatives were developed on using the six key elements for a successful repopulation intervention as highlighted by the Scottish Rural College's <i>Case studies of Island Repopulation Initiatives</i>. The proposals sought to address key issues such as housing, and remote and home working.</p> <p>Suggested pilot ideas included: remote and/or dispersed working; an extension of the woodland croft initiative to facilitate further access to land, crofting and forestry; delivering small-scale mixed housing and business unit developments to support population and entrepreneurialism and home working; and two proposals that provided a 'framework' for developing repopulation interventions.</p> <p>We are currently working across policy areas to further develop these small-scale pilot proposals, with a view to having them implemented by March 2021. The short, medium and long-term evaluation of these pilot interventions will provide crucial learning in developing our repopulation action plan.</p> <p>Our Rural and Islands Communities Team remains engaged with colleagues involved in the Scottish Government's Population Taskforce to better understand the current population landscape, and the specific challenges now facing our rural and island populations as a result of COVID-19."</p>
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		In addition a paper will be submitted to the March 2021 COHI meeting.
Global Climate Emergency	Lead Sarah Hart	Updated March 2021 In December, the Scottish Government updated its Climate Change Plan with over 100 new policies, setting out a pathway to meet its emissions targets over the period to 2032 and helping to achieve a just transition to net zero by 2045. The updated climate change plans is underlined by a commitment to working closely with those communities and organisations in areas that need change, are undergoing change or are affected by change. Now that the updated plan and budget have been published, SG will arrange to follow up with SOG on proposed collaborative strategic plan previously committed to.
COHI members agreed the Global Climate Emergency (GCE) would be an overarching priority for future work, pulling together the different parts of the COHI work programme. While recognising both challenges and opportunities, members highlighted the unique assets of the Highlands and Islands region, alongside the willingness to collaborate, which will enable action at scale and pace to tackle GCE. In the run up to COP26 COHI members will work together to maximise this opportunity to showcase the region and what it can do on a global stage, and secure investment. COHI members agreed to develop their own plans for decarbonisation. COHI members commissioned the Senior Officer's Group to work with the Scottish Government to map and add value to individual organisations' climate change actions, when identified, and report back with an integrated and collaborative strategic plan for the Highlands and Islands. This includes identifying key areas such as land use, energy, nature-based solutions and opportunities from low carbon tourism. SNH agreed to also act as a critical friend to ensure scale and pace are optimised.		
Regional Transformational Opportunities	Lead Joe Brown/ Lorna Gregson- MacLeod	Updated October 2020 Following the October 2019 COHI meeting, the RTO report was finalised in late February 2020 and issued for consideration to COHI in March 2020 (which was cancelled). The report outlined next steps that could be taken along with a mapping of current strategic projects within growth deal
The purpose of the work is to develop a list of proactive, clear, strategic projects as agreed by CoHI members to be taken forward by organisations around the table which are compatible with CoHI's ambitions including		

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<p>repopulation, climate change, economic development and supporting the skills base.</p> <p>COHI supported the broad themes of the regional transformational projects paper (with an additional theme on culture and heritage), and commissioned further work led by HIE, with the Senior Officer's Group as informed by discussions with CoHI members, to develop a focused and inclusive list of transformational projects. This would be discussed at the next COHI in March 2020.</p>		<p>proposals and from initial project identification work to illustrate the strong alignment between planned investments and the RTOs across the region.</p> <p>An <i>Update on CoHI and Transformational Projects (Spotlight: Digital)</i> agenda item was discussed at the October 2020 meeting.</p> <p>No further update will be provided for this outcome.</p>
<p>Maximising the Marine Economy of the Highlands and Islands</p>	<p>Policy Lead</p>	<p>Updated March 2021</p>
<p>MAXIMAR work needs to continue/maintain leadership in this area, building on the unified acceptance of CoHI members of the importance of the marine economy.</p> <p>Need to ensure that there is a proper focus across all three sectors by increasing the intensity of effort in marine biotechnology and aquaculture.</p> <p>The MAXIMAR focus, and HIE's effort, needs to strengthen the fundamental importance of the grid connection as underpinning infrastructure and recognise wider challenges in the region around, for example migration and housing.</p> <p>HIE to work closely with local authorities and other partners to support the development of regional growth deals through the MAXIMAR findings and to encourage a wider culture of innovation.</p>	<p>Ian Davies/ Morven Cameron HIE</p>	<p>MAXiMAR work is now subsumed into the wider Blue Economy agenda. HIE is developing a set of actions linked to growing the marine economy in the region and, together with other stakeholders including local authorities, will be contributing to the developing Blue Economy Action Plan being led by Marine Scotland.</p> <p>No further update will be provided for this outcome.</p>

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Brexit Impacts and Strategic Priorities for the H & I including the Shared Prosperity Fund from 2021	Policy Lead	Updated March 2021
<p>CoHI members restated that EU funding is fundamental to life in the Highlands and Islands. It underpins measures to address poverty, education and rural development across the region as well as being vital to supporting crofting and hill farmers. The anticipated adverse economic and population impacts of Brexit in the Highlands and Islands must be addressed through a strong, single voice on the design and reach of the Shared Prosperity Fund. CoHI members agreed that the Shared Prosperity Fund must maintain the momentum of existing funding, be predicated on local decision making and complementarity with local policies and initiatives. The broad character for the fund should recognise rural fragility and address depopulation.</p> <p>The Scottish Government will work with CoHI partners to map the range, value and impacts of existing EU funding and use that to foster opportunities to collectively shape the character and quantum of the Fund.</p>	<p>Fiona Loynd/Sean Davidson</p>	<p>The Scottish Government published plans for a Scottish Shared Prosperity fund on 19 November 2020. The paper sets out an ask for £183m per annum, or £1.283bn for a full 7 year replacement programme to replace the Structural Funds, ETC and LEADER in Scotland.</p> <p>The Scottish programme aims to address and reduce economic and social disparities within and between places and people in Scotland. Responsibility for the majority of funding and project management will be devolved to regional partnerships.</p> <p>The key aim of the programme will be to focus on addressing and reducing economic and social disparities within and between places and people in Scotland. The themes will be Empowering Places, Reducing Poverty, Increasing Skills and Growing Business and Jobs to aid a just and green recovery from the COVID pandemic. Enhancing wellbeing and responding to the Climate change emergency will be the underpinning principles of the programme.</p> <p>The policy area currently supported by LEADER will be considered as part of the Scottish programme, subject to funds being made available by UKG.</p> <p>On 25 November 2020, as part of the Spending Review, the UK Government published plans for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It won't be operational until FY 2022/23 and will eventually be worth up to £1.5 billion per annum across the UK. To bridge the gap a one year additional funding programme – the Community Renewal Fund – will operate from April 2021. This is worth £220m for one year across the whole of the UK and the prospectus for this will be published in March.</p> <p>The SPF will be split into 2 funds: a fund to target places most in need across the UK (broadly the ERDF replacement) and a fund to support people most in need (broadly the ESF replacement). REPs are likely to be the vehicle to</p>

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		<p>deliver most of the SPF with DWP set to deliver the ESF replacement funding.</p> <p>On 15 January, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Steve Barclay, wrote to Kate Forbes, confirming that the UK Government will deliver the UKSPF directly to Stakeholders in Scotland, bypassing the Scottish Government. It is unlikely that the Scottish Government will receive any of the funding to deliver our plans. We are also unclear if or how the Scottish Government will be engaged in the development of the programme.</p> <p><u>Levelling Up Fund</u></p> <p>As part of the November 2020 Spending Review, the UKG announced its plans for a Levelling up Fund for England only. The Fund will invest in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery.• A broad range of high value local projects up to £20 million, or more by exception, including bypasses and other local road schemes, bus lanes, railway station upgrades, regenerating eyesores, upgrading town centres and community infrastructure, and local arts and culture. <p>On 24 February 2021 the UKG announced that the ‘Levelling Up’ Fund will be increased to £4.8 billion and with funding provided on UK basis. This decision comes after the Internal Market Act 2020 came into effect at the end of last year which granted the UKG new spending powers to intervene in areas that are otherwise devolved, such as economic development, culture and education.</p> <p>A prospectus with more detail on the Fund is expected to be published by the UKG as part of the UK Budget on 3 March 2021.</p>
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OUTCOMES FROM THE CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS – 22 OCTOBER 2018 – ELGIN

Daylight Savings	Policy Lead	Updated March 2021
<p>COHI members raised considerable concerns about the European Commission’s proposed Directive to end seasonal clock changes in the EU in 2019. The Scottish Government will ensure these are reflected in ongoing discussions with the UK Government.</p>	<p>Joe Brown</p>	<p>COHI’s agreed position was conveyed to UK Government by the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy on 23rd October 2018. In November 2018 the UK Parliament issued a Reasoned Opinion that the proposal is inconsistent with the principle of subsidiarity (which is that the EU should only act where there is clear added value and similar benefits cannot be achieved by Member States acting at a national, regional or local level). A number of other member states have also returned similar opinions. The Commission, Council, and Parliament are considering that response, which effectively means that it remains unclear whether, how and when the proposed Directive will be progressed.</p> <p>In February 2020, the House of Lords EU Internal Market Sub-Committee completed an inquiry into the implications for the UK of the European Commission’s proposal that would discontinue seasonal changes of time in the EU. The Scottish Government had submitted evidence in August set firmly in the context of the Scottish Government’s established position that there is no substantive economic or social case for any change to existing arrangements, or for different time-zones within the UK. The Committee recommended that the UK Government considers the options for a possible future impact assessment and consultation with stakeholders, through preparatory work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review the research landscape, including any research carried out where non-alignment on clock changes exists, either within or between countries, and develop an evidence-based approach to the broader question of whether the UK should retain seasonal changes of time; and • To carry out further work to identify the possible implications of a change to our time arrangements for business, nationally and

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		<p>internationally, working with the devolved authorities to better map and understand distinct regional issues.</p> <p>In the absence of current developments COHI will close this action and no further update will be provided, although officials will continue to liaise with UK Government and raise the issue with COHI if appropriate.</p>
Talent Attraction	Policy Lead	Updated March 2021
<p>A commitment to a compelling, inclusive, all embracing campaign to attract people to each area of the region and each economic growth area along the model of Scotland is Now, including a commitment by public bodies to work together to have shared recruitment campaigns.</p>	Carron Flockhart	<p>The Population Strategy highlights talent attraction as being central to addressing Scotland’s population challenges.</p> <p>In 2021, the Scottish Government will work with the enterprise and skills agencies and local government to take forward plans for a Talent Attraction and Retention Service for Scotland.</p> <p>Learning from migration statistics, international best practice, marketing and insight research and our network of talent ambassadors, the Talent Attraction Service will take a holistic approach to supporting the attraction, recruitment, welcoming and retention of working age people and their families.</p> <p>The service is being developed around four pillars: Attraction, Reception, Integration and Reputation and will deliver a one-stop-shop recruitment and relocation support service for workers and their families before and after moving to Scotland, including mapping and extending spousal support interventions. It will build on existing resources and produce a practical, easy-to-use, web based resource which will meet the needs of users from a broad audience; from the rest of the UK, Europe and the wider international community.</p> <p>Currently developing a student attraction and retention project plan and Business Case. We hope to present this to the Population Task Force before summer recess.</p>

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		<p>In 2021/22, the Scottish Government will continue to support the Skills Recognition Scotland (SRS) Project to recognise and validate the skills and qualifications gained outside the UK for people who have migrated to Scotland.</p> <p>The SRS project offers participants the opportunity to undertake a number of assessments to evidence their skills in relation to their past work experience. Assessments are then benchmarked against the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework, giving workers a better chance of overcoming significant issues of unemployment and under-employment.</p> <p>The SRS Steering Group is driving the project forward with a view to it becoming embedded in the skills system so that more workers and more employers can benefit from it. Focus in the coming months will be on engaging with industry groups.</p> <p>The Talent Attraction Network, set up to maximise the impact of current and planned recruitment activity, was deferred due to COVID-19. We plan to re-establish it.</p>
Digital	Policy Lead	Updated March 2021
<p>COHI members are still looking for information on just how far R100 will go; looking for ability to implement interim solutions and potentially invest their own resources to do so – SG will provide information once contracts have been awarded, and are happy to discuss Aligned Interventions/alternative technology solutions with local authorities.</p> <p>SG to work more closely with Ofcom to create a more effective regulatory framework.</p>	Robbie McGhee / Andy Manson	<p>An update on R100 was presented to CoHI at its meeting in October 2020 as part of the <i>Update on CoHI and Transformational Projects (Spotlight: Digital)</i> agenda item.</p> <p>Scottish Ministers and SG officials have engaged in regular discussions with Ofcom on regulatory issues relevant to Scotland. The Minister for Energy,</p>

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<p>Focus further COHI discussions on digital on the issues of benefits realisation, once infrastructure is in place</p>		<p>Connectivity and the Islands also recently provided a written response to Ofcom’s consultation on their Annual Plan for 2021-2022, highlighting ways in which Ofcom could ensure that the regulatory framework caters more directly to Scotland’s unique geographical challenges.</p> <p>This was also discussed as part of the <i>Update on CoHI and Transformational Projects (Spotlight: Digital)</i> agenda item at the meeting in October 2020.</p>
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OUTCOMES FROM THE CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS – 12 MARCH 2018 – MILLPORT

Air Traffic Control (ATC)	Policy Lead	Updated March 2021
<p>CoHI members welcomed the HIAL presentation and highlighted the importance of responding to real or perceived concerns about the centralisation, safety and resilience of the ATC modernisation proposal scheduled for implementation in 2028. HIAL provided reassurance that a new system could only be introduced with the agreement of the CAA who would require certain levels of resilience to be built in. HIAL would continue to keep local authorities informed as the modernisation programme progresses and made clear that it would be business as usual in the meantime.</p>	<p>Gary Cox</p>	<p>Work ongoing to implement modernisation programme to improve reliability and sustainability of H&I air services and ensure HIAL Airports are not left behind in the global shift to new ATC technology and procedures. Following a detailed study and consultation with staff, HIAL Board decided that the Central Surveillance Centre will be located in Inverness with an existing building secured. Decision also taken by HIAL to move Wick and Benbecula Airports to an Aerodrome Flight Information Service (as already in place at Islay, Barra, Tiree and Campbeltown) to better reflect volume and nature of flights at these airports. Although not required to produce one, HIAL have published a retrospective Island Community Impact Assessment which was written by an independent consultant.</p> <p>Engagement continues with staff, airlines, the CAA and other interests as the programme moves through procurement and other implementation stages.</p>

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Education Reform	Policy Lead	Updated March 2021
<p>Scottish Government will work with COHI partners to bring further focus to the impact of rural deprivation on educational attainment and consider what further support can be put in place.</p>	<p>Chris Gosling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative has continued to explore rural poverty and its impact on attainment, as well as considering possible alternative measures of deprivation. • Similarly, the Government’s work on potential alternative indicators of deprivation continues. The Equity Audit was published on 13 January 2021. The report includes a synthesis of key local, national and international literature, supplemented with local evidence gathered from 54 schools across all 32 LAs in Scotland. The findings help deepen our understanding of the impact the pandemic has had on children from disadvantaged backgrounds and sets clear areas of focus for accelerating recovery. It is an important part of the education recovery process and will help inform future policy and practice. • A longer term strategy will be required to help address the impact the pandemic has had on some of the most vulnerable children and families. We are working with partners, including our International Council of Education Advisors, to design the best approach to accelerating progress in closing the attainment gap, taking into account issues such as rural deprivation, through the next phase of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. • Funding to the Child Poverty Action Group has been provided to extend their work on cost of the school day projects and work to raise poverty awareness issues in schools and LAs across Scotland, with a particular focus on rural areas with £92,780 to be allocated in 2021/22. • CPAG have launched a Cost of the School Day project in Moray and are working with other Northern Alliance councils to mitigate the impact of poverty in relation to school costs.