

Post-school education, research and skills: Purpose and Principles

Screening Island Communities Impact Assessment

Name of Policy, Strategy or Service

Post-school education, research and skills: Purpose and Principles

Step One – Develop a Clear Understanding of your Objectives

What are the objectives of the policy, strategy or service?

The Purpose and Principles for post-school education, research and skills sets out our long term aim and strategic policy narrative for the system to meet its future challenges. It will form the decision making framework on which future reform of the system is based.

Scotland's post-school education, research and skills system sits at a crossroads. In terms of educational outcomes, quality of research, growth in apprenticeships and globally recognised institutions there is a strong story to tell. Yet we know that a confluence of social and economic factors such as an ageing workforce, increasing globalisation, the climate emergency, financial pressures, pace of technological change and pandemic response are challenging both the expectations of learners and employers and the traditional assumptions, structures and modes of delivery for skills, education and research. These drivers mean that we must now reimagine and reform our post-school education, skills and research landscape to deliver for learners, employers and for Scotland as a whole.

In June 2021, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) published its review *Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research*. Through this, the SFC recommended that the Scottish Government should set out more clearly its overall strategic intent for tertiary education and research. This recommendation was accepted by the Scottish Government. The development of the Purpose and Principles for Post-school Education, Research and Skills (Purpose and Principles) will also fulfil this recommendation.

We need the ability to provide more flexible opportunities for more people to access the right learning at the right time, to attract and retain talent, and to support our teaching and research base in their own right as well as in their role as international assets. We also need the ability to improve opportunities and outcomes for the more disadvantaged in society.

Do you need to consult?

Post-school education, research and skills is relevant to everyone throughout the whole of Scotland. However, we recognise that there are unique challenges facing island communities and we have actively engaged with a range of stakeholders about these issues. Stakeholders that we have engaged with during the development of the Purpose and Principles which have specifically provided views from a rural and island

perspective include Developing the Young Workforce, Inspiring Young Voices and the University of the Highlands and Islands. We have also spoken to some students and learners to understand the different barriers and enablers in island areas.

We have also involved and sense checked the Purpose and Principles throughout their development with other Scottish Government officials. This was undertaken through policy workshops and regular communication. We are aligned with other areas of wider education reform and meet fortnightly.

The Purpose and Principles will provide the framework for reform. As individual policy decisions are made further consideration would be given to the most appropriate form of consultation.

How are islands identified for the purpose of the policy, strategy or service?

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 defines an island as a naturally formed area of land which is surrounded on all sides by the sea (ignoring artificial structures such as bridges), and above water at high tide. An inhabited island means an island permanently inhabited by at least one individual. An island community is defined as a community which consists of two or more individuals, all of whom permanently inhabit an island (whether or not the same island), and is based on common interest, identity or geography (including in relation to any uninhabited islands whose natural environment and terrestrial, marine and associated ecosystems contribute to the natural or cultural heritage or economy of an inhabited island).

What are the intended impacts/outcomes and how do these potentially differ in the islands?

The Scottish Government believes that the Purpose and Principles, published on 28 June 2023, must guide our decision making in the face of a challenging set of imperatives for reform. The Purpose and Principles, along with supporting documents which include initial priorities will provide a framework to drive reform and are part of a wider education reform programme.

The objectives for the Purpose and Principles are set in Question a. While we would expect all outcomes to have a positive impact on the island communities, it is not possible to identify specific impacts at this stage. As future specific policy decisions are made additional impact assessments will be conducted where relevant to identify the impact and outcomes on island communities and how these potentially differ in the islands.

Is the policy, strategy or service new?

The Purpose and Principles is a new strategy that will drive education reform within the Post-school education, research and skills system as part of a wider programme of reform.

Step Two – Gather your data and identify your stakeholders:

What data is available about the current situation in the islands?

Data is only available for the three separate local authority island groupings of Shetland, Orkney and Eilian Siar. Many other islands are part of larger local authorities such as Skye in Highland; Arran in North Ayrshire and the inner Hebrides in Argyll and Bute. Since most part of the Argyll and Bute falls within the islands and highlands, the data from this region is also included.

Data is available on annual participation measure for 16-19 year olds for the island groups¹ (based on the total number of people in education; employment and training and development), but it is not possible to get further breakdowns on disability, age and SIMD. This may be because the number of people is too low to be included or data is not available.

There is a good level of apprenticeship data for the three local authority island groupings.² This data shows that disabled people are well represented on both apprenticeship frameworks and employability funds when compared with the rest of Scotland. There is also a higher percentage of registered disabled people at the University of the Highland and Islands (UHI) (31% compared to 15% for Scotland as a whole).³ This may be partially related to the age profile with prevalence of disability increasing with age.

There are less students in post-graduate and first degree programs at UHI than the mainland universities and there are a significant number of students in other undergraduate programs such as HND which is comparatively higher than mainland universities. While 37% of the students are male at UHI, 62.4% of the students are female. Students tend to be older with 42% above 30.⁴

Islands tend to have ageing populations with high dependency ratios. A drop in migration has resulted in acute labour shortages. Regional skills profiles suggest that long term growth is predicted in Wholesale and retail trade, Accommodation and Food Service, Human Health and social Work and Transport and Storage.⁵ According to the projected requirement of jobs in highlands and islands, education could play a crucial role. 67% of the projected employment will require a qualification of SCQF Level 6 and above.

Scottish Government plays an active role to support and promote Gaelic medium education at all levels.⁶

¹ [Annual Participation Measure | Skills Development Scotland](#)

² [Statistics | Skills Development Scotland](#) – See Modern Apprenticeships Supplementary Tables

³ HESA data – bespoke analysis

⁴ HESA data

⁵ [Regional Skills Assessments | Skills Development Scotland](#)

⁶ [Advice on Gaelic Education | Self-evaluation | National Improvement Hub](#)

Do you need to consult?

We have engaged with island community representative stakeholders in developing the Purpose and Principles as outlined in Step One of this Impact Assessment. As future policy decisions arise resulting from the Purpose and Principles implementation and overall programme of reform, we will carry out further, relevant engagement on how to ensure the policy could best meet the needs of different island communities and further, more detailed Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs) should be considered.

How does any existing data differ between islands?

The National Islands Plan Survey (July 2021) 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

Just over half of all respondents 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%). It should be noted that this is based on survey views and may or may not reflect knowledge of what is available at local colleges.

The annual participation measure (based on the total number of people in education and employment and training) of the local authorities of islands and highlands (Average: 95.1%) is higher than the National average of 92.4%.⁹ However, the participation in education is higher for the whole of Scotland (73%) compared to the local authorities of islands and highlands (average: 67.9%) but there are more people in employment (24%, Orkney, 28% Shetland, 32% Eilean Siar, 24.2%) than the rest of Scotland (17.5%). Also, annual participation measures show that young people in education, employment or personal development varies depending on the island context. While 97% of young people in Shetland and 96% in Eilean Siar are in positive destinations, this drops to 93.4% for Orkney and 93.9% for Argyll and Bute.

There is good take up of Modern Apprenticeships (MA) on the Islands and their nature varies depending on the island's industrial context. The MA achievement rate in Orkney (80.6%) and Shetland (81%) is comparatively higher than the national average (72.4%). However, Eilean Siar (74.6%) and Argyll and Bute (72.4%) are closer to the national average. In Orkney they tend to be at a lower skills and training level than the mainland which is 60% SCQF level 6 or higher compared to 81.4% of all MA starts in Scotland. In Shetland, the MA starts with SCQF level 6 or higher is 67.1%. But in Eilean

⁷ [National Islands Plan Survey: final report](#)

⁸ [National Islands Plan Survey: final report](#)

⁹ [Annual Participation Measure | Skills Development Scotland](#)

Siar (79.5%) and Argyll and Bute (81.7%) the MA starts with SCQF level 6 or higher qualification is nearly equal to the national average.¹⁰

There is also a mixed picture around gender equality. While on Orkney young men are more likely to be in positive destinations and more likely to be in MA roles than women, on Eilean Siar and Shetland women are more likely to be in positive destinations although still less likely to be on MA frameworks. This is probably because the key apprenticeship frameworks tend to be for sectors that are male dominated (aquaculture, construction, agriculture, maritime), although Shetland also has a range of female dominated MAs in social services, health care, hospitality and retail. The MA starts in STEM frameworks are predominantly male in all island local authorities and in non-stem frameworks, there is no significant gender disparity.

There is a wide range of education and skills provision across the islands through UHI which adopts a tertiary model with colleges teaching both FE and HE through to degrees.¹¹ Orkney provides 63 degrees and Shetland 64 degrees. Also, PhD courses, skills for work courses and foundation apprenticeships provided by these colleges are largely aligned with the cultural, environmental and geographical uniqueness of these regions e.g. maritime skills, coastal navigation, archeology, agronomy.

Along with UHI, the University of Aberdeen, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University and other education providers work in tandem to ensure wider educational options for the young people in the islands and Highlands.

Are there any existing design features or mitigations in place for these impacts?

It is not possible to identify relevant existing design features or mitigations at this stage. As further policy decisions are made and refined, Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs) would be considered to determine their specific impacts, and the features or mitigations required to best meet the needs of island communities.

Step Three – Consultation:

Who do you need to consult with?

We have engaged with stakeholders that represent island communities continuously and transparently as part of the development of the Interim Purpose and Principles, which were published in December 2022. We have published the interim Purpose and Principles discussion guide in Gaelic to ensure accessibility to island communities as part of engagement. We will continue to engage with stakeholders such as the university of the Highlands and Islands during their final development of the Purpose and Principles. Further engagement should continue with these stakeholders as part of the programme of reform.

¹⁰ [Modern Apprenticeships | Skills Development Scotland](#)

¹¹ [Home - UHI](#)

How will you carry out your consultation and in what?

Engagement with a range of stakeholders has taken place throughout the development of the Purpose and Principles from Spring 2022-Spring 2023 notably in the development of the Scope and Approach (May-June 2022), production of the Interim Purpose and Principles (August-November 2022) and following the publication of the Interim Purpose and Principles. Examples of stakeholders that represent island communities that have been engaged are outlined in 1b. Additionally, we have spoken to learners and students to understand the different issues faced by an island based user.

We produced a facilitation discussion guide for stakeholders to hold their own discussion on the Interim Purpose and Principles and this was published in Gaelic.

What questions will you ask when considering how to address island realities?

What are the current opportunities and barriers to engaging with the post-school education research and skills system?

What information has already been gathered through consultations and what concerns have been raised previously by island communities?

Rurality (transport links/connectivity) can be a barrier to accessing support or opportunities to proceed.

Digital access can also be a barrier due to slow broadband speeds and digital poverty.

Lack of locally available high quality opportunities in terms of learning and related work experience can also be a barrier to participation.

Is your consultation robust and meaningful and sufficient to comply with the Section 7 duty?

Section 7 Duty to have regard for island communities states:

(1)A relevant authority must have regard to island communities in carrying out its functions.

(2)In this Part, a “relevant authority” means a body, office-holder or other person listed in the schedule.

(3)The Scottish Ministers may by regulations amend the schedule by—

(a)adding an entry for any person, body or office-holder,

(b)varying the description of an entry, or

(c)removing an entry.

Our engagement with stakeholders who represent island communities is robust and meaningful and complies with the Section 7 duty.

Additional consideration for consultation with island communities will take place as more specific policy decisions arise in the future from the implementation of the Purpose and Principles which is part of the programme of reform.

Step Four – Assessment:

Does your assessment identify any unique impacts on island communities?

There are no anticipated significant differences between island communities and others. This will be considered in more detail as specific future policy decisions are refined based on the Purpose and Principles.

Does your assessment identify any potential barriers or wider impacts?

It is not possible to identify any potential barriers or wider impacts on island communities at this stage and there are no anticipated significant differences between island communities and others. This will be considered in more detail as policy decisions are refined based on the Purpose and Principles.

How will you address these?

Unique impacts on island communities, barriers and wider impacts will be considered in more detail as policy decisions are refined based on the Purpose and Principles as part of the programme of reform. Further Island Communities Impact Assessments will be considered and completed where required as future policy decisions are implemented as part of the programme of reform.

You must now determine whether in your opinion your policy, strategy or service is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities).

A full ICIA is not required at this stage of assessment. It is our intention that future policy and strategy decisions arising from the programme of reform and implementation of the Purpose and Principles would consider Island Communities, through further, detailed Island Communities Impact Assessments and relevant stakeholder engagement.

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Position: Policy Lead

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Date completed: 20 April 23

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Date approved: 4 July 23