

Introduction

A piece of work to estimate an apparent increase in young returners to Uist was undertaken to try and quantify those who had returned, stayed and come to live in Uist.

Anecdotal evidence seemed to indicate the tide turning, with young people undertaking and creating business opportunities such as Coral Box in Berneray (finalist in the 2018 Scottish Rural Awards Business Start-up Category), Berneray Bikes and Berneray Bistro, to the number of new skilled jobs in organisations such as Cothrom, Ceolas, Stòras Uibhist and CnES apprenticeships.

Other evidence includes:

- The two mother and tots groups in North Uist “has now doubled in number” with around 20 ‘tots’, likewise another dozen or so meet in Benbecula.
- The Agricultural Committees age profile for both North Uist and South Uist is now a generation younger than a decade ago
- The local midwives cited 13 births in December alone.

Research methodology

The survey followed the principles of participatory rural appraisal, which emerged in developing countries in the late 1970s in response to the problems and biases of structured surveys, and is now widely practised across the globe. The techniques involved are based on the principle that local people “can and should be enabled to analyse their own reality” (Robert Chambers).

The survey was a cross-sectional study of young people residing on Uist conducted from August 2017 to March 2018. The researchers, all themselves local residents, drew on their own knowledge and asked other residents about the people they knew who had stayed, returned or settled in their area. This quickly led to a list of over 350 young people currently residing here, which island they lived on, what jobs they had and how many children they had. A facebook post then generated 146 responses, which added a further 100 young people to the sample.

The work was undertaken by **CODEL**, Community Development Lens. The researchers were Theona Morrison, Thomas Fisher and Gemma Steele, herself a young returner.

“I finished high school and wanted to get as far away from here as possible. I wanted to see the big bad world. I went to Kenya to work with orphaned children and then to Glasgow, to study occupational therapy. After seven years, I was desperate to come home.” **Gemma Steele, returner**

“It feels part of our culture and heritage, there’s a big interest in Gaelic and it’s something I would like to keep up with the children learning too.” **Calum Fraser, teacher training to deliver GME, newcomer with young family**

“Just listened to the piece on Radio Scotland. Excellent! Myth busting is the way that new ideas get picked up in academic literature. This is much more important though – it’s really important that rural policy is not based upon what one economist called “stylised fallacies”. I’m currently trying to write a working paper about foresight scenarios for the SPA – your work is very inspiring and encouraging. Thanks!” **Dr Andrew Copus, Research scientist at the James Hutton Institute**

Demographic profile of cohort

469 young people in sample. Of these 455 have been identified as returners, newcomers or stayers.

These are economically active young people, post school, often with young families. Cannot define by age but estimate from local knowledge that cohort weighted to those from post-school into early 20s and early 30s. We have endeavoured to exclude any we thought were 40 or over (sensitive to be precise!).

Returners

Out of the 469 young people, 138 are returners, 225 have stayed, and 92 are new to the community (the remaining 14 could not be allocated to these categories).

Three out of 10 of the young people identified in the cohort are returners.

And the returners are responsible for bringing an additional 22 (out of 92) newcomers to the islands as their partners. Returnees to the islands and their partners who are newcomers make up 35% of the young people identified in the study.

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“... gone are the days when it was just Carinish Hall on a Friday night. There’s more cultural things going on, there’s kick boxing now, there’s yoga.” **Uist vet Ealasaid Dick who has returned to her roots after studying in Edinburgh.**

“Social life here on Uist is so much better than in Glasgow. In Glasgow we just went to the local pub, here we end up going to ceilidhs and community events, and get involved in helping out in these activities.” **Participants at a meeting of young returners in autumn 2017**

“There is a safe feeling here that you don't get elsewhere. You can't get takeaways and cinema all the time, so when you do have them, they're more enjoyable.” **Gemma Steele**

“Oh very interesting Theona, thanks very much. I'm going to share it with some cousins who were at home over the holiday and asking lots of questions. Thanks.” **Angus MacLennan, Senior Charge Nurse, Uist and Barra Hospital (returnee to Loch Portain). Has one cousin who is also a returnee who presents programmes on Radio nan Gaidheal daily – from Uist.**

“We are used to people coming back for a long time, but they would do so after retiring. Then, about 20 years ago, folk would be moving back in their 40s. But now they are coming back in their 20s and up to 30. The youth sees the way of life and all that is linked to it as something far more important, and sees value in their heritage, and they are coming back for that.” **Pàdruig Morrison**

“Hi Thomas, Theona and Gemma. Many thanks for sharing this encouraging information. If the word ‘sustainable’ is to mean anything in relation to our island and remote communities it will rely on population growth. For so many reasons, familial and cultural links, it’s particularly pleasing to read the information regarding ‘returners’. Taing mhòr.” **John Finnie MSP**

“Real change happens in places led by people, not at government level. The tide is turning because the jobs that kept people in the 10th floor of expensive flats in cities do not now require to be city-based.” **Chair of the OECD Working Party on Rural Policy**

“What is happening here is part of a global trend. The Economist itself picked up on this in Japan, and in Britain there is a new organisation, with more than 300,000 members, which helps people ‘escape the city’. Young people no longer need to leave remoter areas to be connected into the modern world – through social media, you can now be linked to people across the globe, whether to family and friends, movements, superstars, the latest trends, etc. We only need a tiny part of this global trend to make a huge difference to our islands and their sustainability.”

Thomas Fisher

Children

The cohort of 469 young people have 215 children (primarily pre and primary school age) and 38 babies (the latter almost equates to the 37 registered births for 2017).

Note that returners are parents of 106 children and babies, in other words of 42% of the children and babies identified.

Of these 106 children and babies, some (23) are children of couples where one has stayed and one has returned. However, there are also 20 children from couples where both partners are new to the islands, and a further 25 where one partner is new and one has stayed.

This means that children of parents who are exclusively returnees or newcomers (no stayers) make up 41% of all the children and babies identified.

This would explain what many people in the community have noticed anecdotally – there seem to be more children in play groups and schools.

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*“We are very excited to be part of this upward trend and we are looking forward to putting down roots properly soon.” **Newcomer, married to a returner, with a young family of two. Bought a house in Lochport, North Uist.** Lochport has in recent years experienced a rise from just 2 children to 15!*

*“My child has made more progress in the first few months in school here than in a whole year in Glasgow”. “School children now have a huge choice of affordable activities and clubs outside school: football, athletics, swimming and kickboxing, music and instrumental classes, Highland and Irish dancing, drama ...” **Two parents, both newcomers.***

*“Comparing the data on registered births with current school enrolment on Uist in the 8 years from P1 to S1, the number of children in each year is always higher than the registered births for that year group, 24 percent higher on average (ranging from 7 per cent higher for the current P3 to 77% for the current P6). The data therefore suggests that each year there is an inflow of children from parents returning or settling on Uist.” **Thomas Fisher***

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In-Migration

Returners and all the newcomers make up half the young people identified in the survey.

All the children and babies of returners and newcomers (including those who are partners of parents who have stayed) total 151, in other words 6 out of 10 of all the children and babies identified.

In-migration (returners and newcomers) is making a significant contribution to the young adult population (half of our cohort of young people) and is responsible for between 40 and 60 per cent of all the children and babies identified (depending on whether we include, or not, those children and babies who have one parent who has stayed).

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*“... and It’s all worked out, swapped a three hour commute every day for a ten minute a day commute. It’s just brilliant.” “We feel very settled and this whole experience [of meeting with the BBC journalists] has made us realise how much we love it here.” **Alex and Emilie Drueie who moved with their young family from Manchester after Alex found a job as an architect on Uist.***

“I saw the article yesterday and found it so encouraging! I absolutely love it out here.” **Ellis O’Connor, artist, photographer, writer, and partner of young returner**

“You can't watch YouTube because it drains the internet. I can't Skype my parents in Rhode Island. But you get acclimatised. It's like 'Oh well, I'll not be watching Netflix, so I might as well go and speak to the neighbours.” **Liam Crouse, Gaelic media and communications officer, Ceolas**

“On my way in to work this morning, I was pleased to listen to an article on BBC Radio Scotland about the population boost in Uist. My colleague Theona Morrison has tirelessly promoted the importance of this – and regularly informs me of babies born and new families arriving. It's great to hear, and the optimist in me hopes we may be turning a corner in terms of halting the depopulation of the islands. To my mind, this is the most urgent issue we face as a community. As the authors of the report argue, ‘strategic plans for service delivery are being framed in a time of austerity for such areas as Health and Social Care, but it is vital that the young economically active who have made Uist their home are counted and planned for, rather than simply aligning services against the trend of an ageing population. It is the young economically active that are the key to the sustainability of Uist.’ **Dr Ron Culley, Chief Officer Health and Social Care, 112th weekly newsletter/blog**

Employment Trends

Our analysis adds some additional interest because of the different distribution within sectors for jobs done by returners, newcomers and stayers. For example,

Five sectors in the **PRIVATE SECTOR** are particularly important for creating/sustaining jobs for young people:

- Marine based jobs on the islands, as well as jobs in construction and in hospitality & retail, create the most jobs identified in the survey. These three sectors are particularly important for allowing young people to stay on the islands: almost 7 out of 10 of the jobs identified in these three sectors were employing young people who stayed.
- Within transport and utilities & services (now all privatised), the proportion of young people who have stayed is also high (30 out of 40 jobs identified).
- In fact young stayers working in the private sector (in these five sectors plus those running their own business) account for 7 out of 10 of the jobs for stayers that the survey identified.

The **PUBLIC SECTOR** is also important for creating/sustaining jobs for young people

The public sector, especially health but also education, delivers significant jobs for young people. In contrast to the private sector, the public sector is more prominent in attracting returners: half of these public sector jobs identified have gone to returnees, with a further 22% to newcomers.

The **COMMUNITY SECTOR**

- The community sector is particularly important for the local island economies in Uist. In 2013 the sector generated almost 12% of the jobs outside of the public sector. This is borne out by this survey. Indeed it suggests that the community sector generates 10% of all the jobs for young people (in all three sectors: public, private and third). The survey suggests that the sector attracts returners, newcomers and stayers in equal measure, with slightly more jobs taken up by returnees.

LAND-BASED JOBS

- The 10 young people whom the survey identified as engaged in crofting is likely to be a significant undercount, as most young crofters in our survey will have been identified by their paid job, and not as crofters. Note again that the age profile for both the agricultural committees for North Uist and South Uist is now a generation younger than a decade ago. Others who work 'on the land' include the essential vets, the Agricultural College and game-keeping.
- Those working in such land-based jobs are primarily young people who have returned or stayed, with less newcomers finding jobs in this sector.

Many young people create their own jobs by setting up **MICRO-BUSINESSES** and being **SELF-EMPLOYED**

- The survey identified at least 37 young people who have set up in business – over 8% of young people in the survey. If we add crofters, then well over 10% of the young people run their own businesses. And the proportion of businesses set up by returners, newcomers and those who have stayed is roughly equal (14, 10 and 13 respectively)
- The type of businesses set up by these young people is varied: builders and trades; hairdressers and beauticians; landscape gardening and grass cutting; cafe and pub; architects; gift shop; IT based services (4 newcomers and 1 returnee); dog grooming; craft businesses and knitwear; photography and music; bike hire; childminding; and a planned distillery.

*Annex 1 has a table showing the employment trends

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“There is a growth in terms of businesses and community groups in Uist just now.” Pàdruig Morrison

“We wanted to re-establish the pub, we have knitting groups, we sell fishing permits, we have meetings here, quizzes, music nights. I grew up spending lots of time surfing, boogie boarding and talking with friends around bonfires. Helping with the crofts, thrashing and bailing. It's a different life from Glasgow, and a totally different pace of life.” Eilidh Murray, who returned with her husband and their child to run the Westford Inn on North Uist, after 14 years of working for Lloyds in Glasgow. The pub has become the heart of a vibrant young community.

“The trend of young people returning appears to continue. The Politician pub on Eriskay has just been bought by three young people who grew up on Eriskay and are now returning from Glasgow. This means that the Berneray Shop and Bistro, the Westford Inn on North Uist, Kildonan Cafe on South Uist and the Politician have all been taken over by returners. This demonstrates the optimism about Uist's future among young people here on the islands” Gemma Steele

MORE RESPONSES TO THE RESEARCH

“It's a fantastic thing you are doing and hopefully it will help encourage others to come back home or move in.”

“Just wanted to say congratulations ☐ ☐ It must be so nice to see Uist on the big screen again and all from your hard work and passion! Granny said it was lovely to hear a positive story in the morning ☐ ☐ Ealasaid Dick - Vet

"Brilliant research you carried out!" **Newcomer working for RSPB**

"There's an anecdote about the poet Duncan Ban MacIntyre. He wrote a love song to his wife, and one guy who had heard it stopped him and his wife in the street. He said, 'She's not as pretty as you say.' MacIntyre replied, 'Ah, but you've not seen her with my eyes.'" **Liam Crouse, who admits some will always struggle to see why a younger person would opt for such a remote life!**

"Clearly young people and young families want to settle on Uist. And the reasons in all the surveys are the same: because of the environment, safety, peace and quiet, and strong sense of community." **Thomas Fisher**

"We're at a critical time where we need to see the right support and initiatives taken forward for young people to be able to return or move to rural areas. It's encouraging to see the actions you've been taking having such an impact and as you say, the actions of others elsewhere too." **Emma Cooper, CEO, Scottish Rural Action (Scottish Rural Parliament)**

"Thanks for your e-mail. It was most interesting to note the potential to undertake further research looking at the possible influence of community land buyouts on population growth." **Lorne MacLeod, Scottish Land Commission**

"It was great to meet you too and thanks so much for the exciting news about the increase in life in the Uists! The question that immediately pops into my head, is why?! Sounds like follow up research needed. Have you read any James Hunter, like his millenium history of the Highlands and Islands? He points towards the Highlands and especially the Islands being most successful when power is devolved to the greatest possible extent. I'm not sure if that is happening politically, but perhaps in practical and economic terms people in the Uists are finding themselves able to wrest back control of their own destinies and communities?" **Andrew Donaldson, Comrie Croft, working on regenerating the area, bringing young people back, building affordable housing.**

"Thank you so much for sending this on. I also will pass it on to colleagues involved in influencing services and supporting Uist activities as this does show a change and therefore an evolution of service planning required. Leis gach deagh dhùrachd/ thank you and best wishes" **Mairi Buchanan, Senior Development Manager, HIE , Stornoway**

*Annex 1.

| Sector | Including ... | Total no. | Returners | Newcomers | Stayers |
|------------------------------|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Fishing & marine | Fishing, diving, fishfarms, fish processing | 47 | 10 | 4 | 33 |
| Construction | Building companies, builders, tradesman | 39 | 8 | 1 | 30 |
| Hospitality & retail | Hotels, shops, coop | 39 | 9 | 7 | 23 |
| Community sector | Community orgs and social enterprises | 38 | 16 | 11 | 11 |
| Business | Self-employed, small business | 37 | 14 | 10 | 13 |
| Health & social care | Care, hospital, medical practices, dentistry | 34 | 12 | 10 | 12 |
| Education | Schools, sports, childcare | 25 | 18 | 1 | 6 |
| <i>other public services</i> | <i>CnES, Police, Fire, HIE</i> | 14 | 6 | 5 | 3 |
| Transport | Airport, lorries, buses, garages | 25 | 6 | 1 | 18 |
| Croft/land based | crofting, landscaping, vets | 19 | 8 | 1 | 10 |
| Ferries & off-shore | Calmac, oil, etc. | 18 | 12 | 0 | 6 |
| Utilities & services | BT, SSE, Water, Post, Banks | 15 | 1 | 2 | 12 |
| Arts & crafts | Photography, musicians, film | 15 | 7 | 3 | 5 |
| Other | IT-based (6); BBC (2); Architects (2) and other | 17 | 4 | 10 | 3 |
| Unemployed | | 8 | | 1 | 7 |