

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy

Tuesday 6th October 2015, 5.45 – 7.30pm, Committee Room 4

Empowering young rural decision makers

Minutes (Approved)

Present

Aileen McLeod MSP	Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform
Jim Hume	MSP (Chair and Co-convenor)
Alex Fergusson	MSP (Co-convenor)
Graeme Dey	MSP (Co-convenor)
Claudia Beamish	MSP
Cian Gullen	MSYP for Ettrick, Roxburgh & MYP for South Scotland (speaker)
Zoe Daniel	Youth Chex, Scottish Borders (Speaker)
Sarah Allison	Scottish Association of Young Farmers (Speaker) Scottish Rural Action Director/ Scottish Association of Young Farmers (Speaker)
Rebecca Dawes	MSYP
Euan Greenwood	SNH
Alan Hampson	Scottish Government
Alistair Prior	The Moray Youth Council
Andrew Hanton	Historic Scotland
Ann MacSween	Forth Valley & Lomond LEADER
Anne-Michelle Ketteridge	Scottish Borders Council
Ceri Hunter	SCFYC
Cheryl McIntyre	Scottish Enterprise
Chloe Purves	University of Edinburgh
Christiane Valluri-Nitsch	Scottish Government
Christopher Bathgate	SRUC
Claire Gordon	YouthBorders
Clare De Bolle	James Hutton Institute
David Miller	DCM Heritage
Deborah Mays	SRUC
Ellie Brodie	Crichton Carbon Centre
Emma Platt	Young Scot
Ettie Shattock	Crichton Institute
Eva Milroy	SCVO
Felix Spittal	Argyll and Bute Council
Fergus Murray	Scottish Enterprise
Frank Beattie	Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability
Ian Macdonald	NFUS
Kerry Barr	Youth Borders
Kris Chapman	

Maddy Norval	SCFYC
Michael Moore	The Young Stove, The Stove Network
Mike Strachan	Forestry Commission Scotland
Nancy Woodhead	Transport Scotland
Peter Ross	Dumfries and Galloway LEADER
Sarah Beattie-Smith	Citizens Advice Scotland
Sarah Hunter-Argyle	SRUC
Sarah Skerratt	SRUC
Sarah-Jane Laing	Scottish Land and Estates
Scott Somerville	SAYFC
Scott Wilson	SAYFC
Sian Ringrose	SRUC

Apologies

Sarah Boyack	MSP
Jamie McGrigor	MSP
Nigel Don	MSP
Alan Laidlaw	The Crown Estate
Alistair Hamilton	SRUC
Andrew Brough	Buccleuch Estates
Andrew Copus	The James Hutton Institute
Brian Williams	SRUC
Bryan McGrath	Scottish Borders Council
Clare Magill	Scottish Government
Clare Slipper	NFU Scotland
Dame Barbara Kelly	Group
David Gass	Upper Quartile
Gemma Hopkinson	GWCT
Grant Moir	CNPA
James Ogilvie	Forestry Commission Scotland
Jamie Stewart	Scottish Countryside Alliance
John MacDonald	Community Transport Association
Kyle Michie	Scottish Youth Parliament
Maggie Gordon	Scottish Rural Action
Marianna Markantoni	SRUC
Mr Lorne MacLeod	Community Land Scotland
Nick Bland	University of Edinburgh
Pat Neeson	
Patrick Hogan	Bellenden (Independent Communications Agency)
Penny Montgomerie	SAYFC
Richard Heggie	Urban Animation
Rob McMorran	SRUC
Rob Smith	University of West of Scotland

Ross McLaren	Scottish Churches Rural Group
Stephen Young	SAOS
Tony Huggins-Haig	Arthouse Galleries
Tracey Forbes	University of Aberdeen
Vivian Montgomery	SCFYC

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Jim Hume MSP (chair and co-convenor) opened the evening meeting by checking that no participants objected to an audio recording of the meeting being taken. It was noted that several people were tweeting from the meeting using #RuralCPG.

The high turnout meant that it was not possible for everyone in the room to introduce themselves, but Jim Hume 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 at the start of the question.

Apologies were given for Nigel Don MSP.

2. Annual General Meeting – Re-registration and election of office-bearers for the Group

Jim Hume MSP (chair and co-convenor) invited Sarah Skerratt (SRUC) to nominate the co-convenors. Three of the Group's MSP co-convenors confirmed they were pleased to continue in their role for another year. As Sarah Boyack MSP was standing down, Alex Fergusson MSP nominated Claudia Beamish MSP to stand as co-convenor and was seconded by Graeme Dey MSP. The four co-convenors were proposed on block by Alex Fergusson with Jim Hume seconding this proposal. The four convenors were therefore re-elected to continue.

Jim Hume MSP resumed chairing duties and proposed that SRUC continue as Secretariat for the Group in 2015-16. This was seconded by Ian MacDonald who also wished to acknowledge his thanks to the Secretariat for doing a fantastic job. SRUC will continue as Secretariat in 2015-16.

Thanks were noted to Gillian Gillies (in Alex Fergusson MSP's office) who helps support the Group in terms of booking rooms and catering and escorting attendees to the meeting room by Graeme Dey MSP.

Jim Hume also wished to thank Claire Baker for her involvement with the Cross Party Group as a co-convenor for several years.

3. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting (20th May – What should rural Scotland look like in 2035?)

The minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated at the end of the 2014/15 season and with the invitation for this meeting. No objections were raised to the minutes being an accurate record and as such they were marked as approved by Jim Hume.

4. 8-10 Minute Presentations (followed by discussion):

a. *Cian Gullen, MSYP for Ettrick, Roxburgh and MYP for South Scotland “The Scottish Youth Parliament – Being an MSYP”.*

Cian introduced the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) and explained what it meant to her as a young person and why she got involved. The SYP represents young people in Scotland aged between 12-25 and has around 200 Ministers of Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP).

One of the benefits of being involved in the SYP are the opportunities the organisation offers for young people to campaign on topics and issues that are important to young people at national as well as local levels. Being an MSYP has the benefits of being able to make a difference for young people, to challenging stereotypes and influence the decision makers - proving that young people do have a say.

The SYP have been collecting ideas and contributions from Scotland's young people for their 2016 – 2021 Youth Manifesto, ‘Lead the Way’. Their manifesto outlines what issues matter to young people in their local areas. Cian highlighted some of the challenges of being a MSYP: being able to reach a wide range of young people, dealing with a wide age group and engaging with schools. Cian noted that the age range from 12 to 25 years old caused particular challenges for effectively communicating the key issues and how young people will be affected. It is a skill to be able to communicate in an understandable manner without being patronising as this will just put young people off from engaging.

Cian is now working with the UK Youth Parliament as an MYP. She stated that social media was the best tool for engaging, and consulting with the young people in her area and she is now working to encourage student councils to engage in debates and discussions important to students within schools to improve engagement.

Cian’s Top tip for how to get young people engaged in decision making at their local areas would be through the use of social media, meeting regularly face-to-face and avoiding jargon – keeping things simple but not patronising.

b. *Rebecca Dawes, Director, Scottish Rural Action “An overview of Scottish Rural Action”.*

Rebecca Dawes works for the Scottish Association for Young Farmers which is a member-led organisation with over 3500 members, and 87 clubs across Scotland with young people aged between 14 to 30 years of age. Through this role she was invited to be a Director of Scottish Rural Action, the membership body that runs the Scottish Rural Parliament.

The purpose of the SRA is to support the development of a rural movement within Scotland through the Rural Parliament event and other actions. They work to encourage and empower young rural communities to develop a coherent voice to take to decision makers. SRA have found that this has led to a more effective and efficient way of engaging with the Scottish Parliament on topics that are vital to the sustainability of Scotland's rural sector.

Youth organisations such as SRA continue to look for a range of channels for members to engage with them on any subject. SRA see young people as a crucial part of the Rural Parliament and want to hear their views on any subject with no topic being off limits or taboo. It is very important to the SRA that no view point should be deemed as wrong or unworthy.

Three examples were presented where young people have developed their own ideas and engaged with wider systems and processes regardless of their age.

- Facebook was created by a 19 year old, Mark Zuckerberg, and has revolutionised the way in which we communicate, helping to reduce rural isolation and reduce costs for promoting events or businesses etc. with an estimated 1 in 3 children using Facebook
- A 20 year old is helping to shape policy as an MP in Westminster and is the youngest member of the House of Commons since 1832.
- A young 16 year old launched the very first business in the Virgin group which now has over 400 companies, two of which he developed before he was 28.

These individuals had to make decisions and did this because of their enthusiasm and ambition. However, the support from organisations allowed them to have a voice.

The greatest challenge in giving young people the opportunity to voice their opinion is that it is often difficult to get young people to speak up because they're fearful of being wrong or are intimidated by their peers. Inviting young people to events in more adult/formal surroundings is very a daunting prospect. Young people need to be given a safe and friendly environment for voicing opinions.

SRA provides an opportunity for consulting with young people and has conducted anonymous surveys, hosted roadshow events, welcomes written as well as verbal input and hosts a monthly Twitter debate to enable quick interaction. Alongside this SRA has instigated innovative awards to praise and support individuals and their projects.

The view of young people will vary depending on their location and individual circumstances. The way we interact with our future generations, and how we hear their views, is the more important aspect to consider. Moving forward we need the support of the youth sector to encourage young speakers and staff that young people can relate to and be inspired and captivated by them.

Events and decisions need to be proofed with young people in mind. The Rural Parliament needs to plan for the future and understand how decisions may affect young people. SRA welcome the opportunity to attend events, or act as a conduit for gathering young peoples' views to assist in young people proofing ideas or initiatives.

By allowing young people to take the lead, we are empowering them at an early age, but with the reassurance that there is support there if they need. Rebecca stressed the need for decision makers to increase their involvement with young people by attending young peoples' events rather than always expecting them to come to older peoples' events.

c. ***Sarah Allison, Agriculture and Rural Affairs Chair, Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC): "Having A Voice In Rural Scotland; why, how, and encouraging others - A young persons story"***

Sarah Allison introduced herself firstly as the daughter of a farmer and secondly as the SAYFC Agri and Rural Affairs Chairman 2015-2017. She comes from a politically motivated family, with 3-4 generations of the family being involved in rural affairs and family members being part of the National Farmers Union Scotland as well as local government.

Sarah got engaged with SAYFC aged 14. She highlighted the reasons why it is important for young people to be involved in rural decision making, the key aspect being that the numbers of young people are declining in rural areas. Reasons for this decline are primarily due to lack of job opportunities. However, the agricultural sector currently is experiencing a recruitment crisis, with employers unable to get young people to fill jobs be it on farms, agricultural accountants, agricultural consultants etc. etc. The image of these occupations is poor with young people perceiving them to be an unattractive, low paid, hard lifestyle choice.

A key limitation to engagement is the cost, with the cost of fuel being the biggest barrier. Many of the initiatives to encourage young people to get involved in decision making processes are voluntary and are done in young peoples own time and at their own expense. Most young people are on low/starter incomes and have little disposable income to spend on additional fuel costs to travel to get to meetings.

Sarah gave an example of her involvement in the Scottish Government's New Entrants Group which is a key committee for identifying how to attract young/new entrants into the industry. Participating in this committee requires four days of her time which is the equivalent of a quarter of her annual leave. Due to the schedule of the meetings scattered throughout the year this also causes problems with employers in trying to get the time off as it can be harder for SME's/micro businesses to arrange cover for one day as opposed to a block of leave.

A lot of young people living in rural areas also work in industries where they may have opposing views on how things should be run. This may result in them worrying about that voicing their opinion in case this cause them difficulty in their working environment/future careers.

To save on fuel and travel costs internet and conference calls could provide the answer, however, the public transport service and broadband access in most rural areas is so poor that it is often easier to travel the 50 miles to make a meeting rather than try to use the technology in areas where provision is limited.

Sarah stressed that working and living in rural areas can be hugely rewarding and that she believes the agricultural industry wants to hear young peoples voices and is willing to engage with more young people.

A key goal for improving the attractiveness of living and working in the agricultural and rural sectors is educating the general public and politicians about what it is like living and working in rural Scotland. Getting involved in youth initiatives opens up opportunities for young people to meet new people, network and improve career opportunities. There is a huge gap in the market currently in agricultural sector that if capitalised on and advertised correctly could offer up new and exciting career opportunities for young people.

Rural life in Scotland is essential to the bottom line of the country, as Scotland is primarily a rural nation. Young people have an important place and role to play for the prosperity of Scotland moving forward. It is highly rewarding for young people to get involved with initiatives such as SAYFC, SRA, YSP etc. as young people will see the results of the decisions and actions that they take now 10, 20, or even 50 years into the future.

d. ***Zoe Daniel, Youth Chex, Scottish Borders Council “Rural Grant-Making: Young People”***

Zoe introduced Youth Chex, a Youth-led organisation for community improvement, which received grant money from the Scottish Borders council of £10,000 per year to assess and score applications for projects aimed at enabling young people to have a voice and engage in new activities.

Zoe got involved with Youth Chex looking for something that was engaging, would give her access to other young people in the area and access to leaders in her rural area. Zoe also engaged in Youth Chex in order to have the opportunity to give back to her community, gain new skills and have fun.

Access to transport is a key challenge to being involved in initiatives like Youth Chex assessment panels because it requires grading proposals and involves sensitive information which requires all members to meet face to face. It is also hard to convey what Youth Chex is through social media – fact-to-face meetings are the only effective communication route.

A current concern of Youth Chex is the possibility of funding cuts, and it is therefore important that Youth Chex can demonstrate the value local councils get from supporting youth led initiatives within rural areas.

Zoe highlighted that there are a number of rewards to being engaged with Youth Chex and other similar initiatives. A big part is being able to engage with young people in rural and urban areas from all over Scotland; being able to have fun whilst doing something for the community is also hugely rewarding; as well as feeling as though your views as a young person are heard, respected and acted upon.

Working with organisations such as Youth Chex gives young people the opportunities to discuss issues faced by young people from across Scotland at their National forum. These national

forums are attended by a number of local councillors which is a great way for young people to engage and discuss their issues with their councillors in an alternative setting to that of normal engagement routes.

A small level of initial engagement leads to subsequent engagement with young people across Scotland and globally. Zoe highlighted that she had the opportunity to participate at a global event which was very enlightening to hear about the issues other young people face in countries such as Greece.

Top tips for engaging with young people are:

Relate: Communication needs to be done in a way in which young people can relate to, using platforms such as social media and language that young people can understand. This is key to being able to build connections with young people to encourage them to get involved.

Respect: Sometime engagement by local decision makers can be done in a patronising manner or is conducted in a controlled environment which inhibits dialogue and is a disincentive for free speech. Showing a peer-to-peer respect for young people will make them feel more capable of speaking up and engaging with the local decision makers on the issues that matter to them.

Reward: It is essential to reward young people when they speak up, or to acknowledge that their points are good or valid. This reinforcement that the young persons view is valid, relevant and important will encourage them to speak up more in the future.

Eva Milroy (Crichton Institute Development Officer) reported the key messages from a Crichton Institute (CI) event held in Dumfries and Galloway (D&G) on 29th September to discuss engaging young decision makers. She noted that these local 'pre-CPG' events will be organised by the CI on an ongoing basis in order to feed information from D&G into each CPG meeting. Eva reported that the D&G event covered many of the same issues that were raised by the speakers with the main issues being young people's confidence to speak up at events or forums, and accessing young people who are 'hard to reach'.

The Chair then invited attendees at the CPG to comment and raise questions. Key issues raised in the discussion included:

- **Getting young people to engage:** Many young people are often daunted by the prospect of public speaking or asking a question that may seem "stupid". The key in getting young people to engage in discussion forums at school level or local authority level is to get them involved at a young age and work with them to build a relationship of trust with their local decision makers or representatives of youth organisations who act as knowledge brokers between young people and local decision makers.
- **Socialisation and networking:** Many people who live in rural areas are often geographically isolated from each other. This can result in young people being very shy which can inhibit their ability to engage in public forums. Youth organisations such as Young Farmers can help provide a support and social network which can help young

people develop social skills and confidence in presenting/discussing their thoughts in public. These skills can enable young people to capitalise on potential work opportunities (e.g. through networking and the support of trusted peers providing encouragement) that they might otherwise be too afraid to apply for.

- **Combination of communication channels:** Communication with young people is key to getting them involved and engaged with youth initiatives. To build up a relationship and trust between any organisation/authority figures with a young person/people, initial contact should be face-to-face informal communication. Once this relationship is developed, more communication routes can be used such as social media for advertising opportunities, meetings and creating dialogue between groups.
- **Clear understandable communication:** The way in which topics are raised and discussed with young people needs to be considered. Subjects need to be clearly communicated in simple language in a way that makes the issue relevant to the individual. Communicating effectively with a 12 year olds needs to be approached in a different manner to communicating with a 25 year old.
- **Peer to peer engagement:** People are often more likely to engage in a new initiative or movement if their peers are also involved – this is the same, if not more so for young people who may not have the confidence to embark on a new opportunity by themselves. Empowering young people to take the lead in encouraging peer-to-peer engagement is therefore, the best way to develop an organic sustainable engagement system with young people.
- **Lowering the cost of transportation:** Young people, particularly those still in school, often have no income or are on low wages. Therefore to enable young people to engage in decision making processes and forums there is a need for better transport connections/timetabling (sympathetic to a young age group), discounted public travel, better/more community transport initiatives or young person fuel discounts to enable young people to travel the distances they need in order to engage with decision forums.
- **Improving educators' knowledge of job opportunities and skills:** The education system has an important role to play in bring to life the opportunities that rural life can offer. More positive descriptions of rural career opportunities are needed to encourage young people to stay in their rural areas and engage in a skilled workforce such as engineers/ accountants/ land managers etc. This requires those working in career advisory services at schools to be more educated or involved with the rural job sector.

5. AOB

No items of AOB were discussed.

6. Date of next meeting (Tuesday 8th December 2015: Rural Health)

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