

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy 2017/18

Tuesday 5th December 2017 5.45-7.30pm, Committee Room 5

The rural workforce

Minutes (approved)

Attendees:

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| John Scott MSP | Scottish Parliament (CPG co-convener, meeting chair) |
| Graeme Dey MSP | Scottish Parliament (CPG co-convener) |
| Emma Harper MSP | Scottish Parliament |
| Michelle Ballantyne MSP | Scottish Parliament |
| Steven Thomson (speaker) | SRUC |
| Rebecca Kay (speaker) | University of Glasgow |
| Caroline Gregory (speaker) | Lovat Hotel |
| Piotr Gudan (speaker) | Outdoor Explore |
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| Jane Atterton | SRUC |
| Frank Beattie | Scottish Enterprise |
| Joshua Bird | SRUC |
| Jackie Brierton | GrowBiz |
| Paul Brown | Anderson Strathern |
| David Campbell | Scottish Government |
| Emma Cooper | Scottish Rural Action |
| Odile Evans | Farmers Journal Scotland |
| Nadezhda Filipova | Scottish Rural Action |
| Chelsea Fletcher | University of Edinburgh |
| Mags Granger | RSPB |
| Fraser Grieve | SCDI |
| Angela Hallam | Scottish Government |
| Alistair Hamilton | SRUC |
| Richard Haw | Scottish Government |
| Andrew Heald | CONFOR |
| Jim Hume | National Rural Mental Health Forum |
| Estelle Jones | Marine Scotland |
| Eva Kleinert | Scottish Government |

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| Peter Logie | NFUS |
| Ian Macdonald | |
| Michele Macdonald | |
| Ann MacSween | Historic Environment Scotland |
| Marianna Markantoni | SRUC |
| Tom Maxwell | SRUC |
| John McGregor | Kettle Produce |
| Susie McIntyre | Kettle Produce |
| Ross McLaren | SCRG |
| Richard McLeod | Marine Scotland |
| Rob McMorran | SRUC |
| Iain Millar | Scottish Bee Company |
| George Milne | National Sheep Association |
| Scott Murray | SRUC |
| James Ogilvie | Forestry Commission |
| James Orr | Milton of Blebo |
| Linda Orr | Milton of Blebo |
| Ann Packard | |
| Eugenio Perez Certucha | University of Edinburgh |
| Wayne Powell | SRUC |
| Sigrid Robinson | Scottish Parliament |
| Peter Ross | Dumfries and Galloway LEADER |
| Eric Samuel | Big Lottery Fund |
| Douglas Scott | Scottish Borders Council |
| Sarah Skerratt | SRUC |
| Jamie Stewart | Scottish Countryside Alliance |
| Alistair Stott | SRUC |
| Catriona Maclean | Scottish Government |
| Alun Thomas | Anderson Strathern |
| Stewart Tidy | Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority |
| David Walls | Lothian Broadband |
| David Whiteford | NHI |
| Mike Wijnberg | SRUC |
| Caroline Winchester | European Commission |

Apologies:

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| Mark Aitken | SEPA |
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| Di Alexander | |
| Rebecca Audsley | SAC Consulting |
| Graeme Beale | Scottish Government |
| Michael Bonaventura | |
| Anna Brand | RSPB |
| Helen Chambers | Inspiring Scotland |
| Kris Chapman | Youth Borders |
| Nina Clancy | RSABI |
| Neil Cummings | Horticultural Trades Association |
| Neil Davidson | Scottish Government |
| Clare De Bolle | Youth Borders |
| Karen Dobbie | SEPA |
| Harriet Donald | Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Nat'l Park |
| Hew Edgar | RICS |
| David Gass | Upper Quartile |
| Jayne Glass | UHI |
| Sharon Glendinning | |
| Stephen Graham | Highland Council |
| Gill Hartley | SASA |
| Richard Heggie | Urban Animation |
| David Henderson-Howat | |
| Davy McCracken | SRUC |
| Martin Meteyard | |
| David Miller | James Hutton Institute |
| Sarah-Anne Munoz | UHI |
| Gillian Newman | Highland Children's Forum |
| Christina Noble | Here We Are |
| Lorna Philip | University of Aberdeen |
| Chloe Purves | Scottish Enterprise |
| Wendy Reid | DTA Scotland |
| Clare Slipper | NFUS |
| Geoff Simm | University of Edinburgh |
| Frances Simpson | Support in Mind Scotland |
| Robert Smith | University of the West of Scotland |
| Ninian Stewart | Centre for Stewardship |
| Pip Tabor | The Southern Uplands Partnership |
| Emma Patterson Taylor | SAOS |
| Roger Turner | |
| John Watt | |
| David Watts | University of Aberdeen |
| Mary Williams-Edgar | Scottish Rural Action |

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

John Scott MSP (chair and Group co-convenor) welcomed everyone to the meeting, and extended a special greeting to Prof Wayne Powell of SRUC. He thanked SRUC for its ongoing work in supporting this CPG as Secretariat. He noted that there were several MSPs in attendance including Graeme Dey, Emma Harper and Michelle Ballantyne.

2. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (diverse rural economies, held on 4 October 2017)

The unapproved minutes of the October meeting on diverse rural economies were circulated by SRUC in November. No comments/edits were submitted. The minutes were approved by Jim Hume and seconded by Iain Macdonald and accepted as a true record of the meeting. They can be found online [here](#).

As the action point from the last meeting, John Scott MSP noted that a letter had been sent to Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity, Fergus Ewing MSP, on 22nd November from the four co-convenors summarising the main points of the meeting. A response is expected from the Cabinet Secretary in due course. The letter has been posted by SRUC on the webpage for the October CPG meeting [here](#).

3. Presentations (circa 10 minutes each)

Each of the presenters gave a brief introduction to their topic. Their presentations are available to download via the CPG web page [here](#), but short summaries are provided below:

• Steven Thomson (SRUC)

- Steven presented the interim results from a Scottish Government-funded project looking at seasonal migrant labour in Scottish agriculture. This project focuses on exploring the numbers of workers employed and their living and working conditions, using a variety of methods, including surveys with farmers and workers, and in-depth follow-up workers interviews.
- The project has found that the majority of seasonal workers in Scottish agriculture are from Bulgaria, Romania and Poland. Some farmers reported trying to employ local workers but this was unsuccessful often due to their poor work ethic and lack of appropriate skills.
- Returnee workers from abroad are core to the industry, and businesses actively recruit abroad. Word of mouth and recommendations from family members are important in terms of recruitment. Most workers are employed in the horticulture sector (which makes up 10% of Scottish agriculture) and there is a spike in the summer months in terms of numbers of people and working hours. The Agriculture Census includes an estimate of work days but it is not known how many workers are transient and employed on multiple farms per year.
- The project asked farmers to indicate what they would do without migrant labour and a large number indicated that they would downscale their operations or change their business structure. For most businesses taking part in the survey, removing migrant labour will have a detrimental impact on their business.
- There seems to be a core of workers who are very experienced, and return to work on the same farms year on year. In general this workforce is highly

educated and they have made the choice to work in Scotland, often to generate income to enable them to become 'better established' in their home countries. So, the primary motivation for many workers is pay and it is apparent that the gap in pay is growing between the UK and migrants' home countries, even accounting for the cost of living when they are here.

- The project is producing a typology of seasonal workers which includes 'keystone workers' who come for 7-11 months per year and are consistent returnees. They undertake a range of activities alongside picking, including maintenance to extend their working season. Most of these returning workers have very good relationships with the farmers and well established working patterns and they tend to like the working arrangements in Scotland and are committed to being here.
 - Alongside this core there are (usually younger) workers who come for shorter periods. For these workers, making money to send home is often more important, and many do seek to return home in future. The value of the GBP is critical for these workers and uncertainty has a negative impact. Some workers reported some experiences of not being made to feel welcome (usually in their wider communities rather than on farm).
 - Farmers in this project emphasised how important it is for action to be taken sooner rather than later to ensure that migrant workers continue to come before there are more serious negative impacts on the industry.
- **Rebecca Kay (University of Glasgow)**
 - Rebecca outlined an ESRC-funded project that they are undertaking, which is looking at the settlement patterns in both rural and urban areas for migrants that have been in Scotland between one and seven years. It is a highly qualitative project, with 220 participants, 145 of which are in Aberdeenshire and Angus.
 - Many of these people are working in agriculture and food processing, including fisheries, potato sorting, hospitality and catering, and some are self-employed.
 - Many workers have taken the decision to settle in Scotland long-term, moving out of seasonal/temporary employment to take on year-long employment. In this project, some workers reported feeling isolated and lonely and struggling to integrate. Language is a major factor in this but this may be hard to improve for a variety of reasons. People are often working and being housed with other migrants from central and eastern Europe, leading them to learning each others' language rather than English.
 - The project has also involved participatory action research in Peterhead and Arbroath. There is a need for more community spaces and better opportunities to socialise and exchange languages and cultures in more informal ways which suit childcare and work obligations. The project has been involved in setting up a 'Language Café' in Peterhead, which has weekly meetings that alternated between day and evening, and brings together a range of nationalities for language exchange, arts and crafts, excursions, etc. It is not a replacement for formal language training but it is a complementary way to share languages, cultures and traditions. The partnership with a childcare service provider has been key to the development of the café.
 - A second language café in Arbroath has been more difficult to get off the ground due to a variety of reasons, including lack of financial support and limited local partnership working.

- **Caroline Gregory (Lovat Hotel)**
 - Caroline discussed how Fort Augustus, where her business is located, is heavily reliant on tourism. There are 32 businesses in the town and the Lovat Hotel is one of the top 5 employers with 37 staff at the height of the season. There are peaks and troughs in the business, and seasonality is a key factor in shaping the success (or otherwise) of tourism businesses.
 - Many rural areas continue to see an out-migration of young people to spend their most productive years in cities. Caroline spoke about the duty of rural employers to show them the opportunities available in the countryside. Alongside this, a supply of affordable homes is critical so that young people can afford to live locally in places where there may be many wealthy in-migrants and/or second home owners. The hotel itself provides some accommodation for its workforce, but there is a lack of affordable accommodation available locally. For those who live some distance from the hotel, they are either reliant on having their own car or on (usually limited) local public transport.
 - In Caroline's experience, overseas workers provide flexibility which is not always available from local workers. Over 40% of small businesses employ EU nationals (on a permanent basis or as returnees), and without this labour pool, their business would not be viable. Most businesses recruit on the basis of ability rather than targeting overseas staff. Some businesses would like to recruit on a worldwide basis but the costs are often prohibitive.
 - In the UK, hospitality tends not to be seen as a skilled and/or well paid profession; there is a stigma attached to working in the sector. The industry itself needs to be better at demonstrating the opportunities available.
 - Caroline explained how the hotel works on a system of 'banking' hours. Staff can take a full month off due to the hours they accumulate over the busy summer which helps to retain staff. During the quieter months, staff can take holidays and/or focus on training and development, and other tasks such as painting. The overseas workers at the hotel are dedicated, productive and efficient.
 - The Lovat Hotel expanded from 6 employees in 2007 (all British, 5 Scottish) to 26 today – 10 UK nationals and 16 from overseas. The latter group includes their sales and marketing manager, supervisor and head housekeeper. There is some uncertainty about the future amongst these workers.
 - Caroline discussed a small survey that she had conducted on the rural workforce, rural businesses and employers in advance of this meeting. She found that those currently employed do not seem worried about future, but businesses are wondering how roles will be filled especially if access to labour is removed. Customers are most concerned with the potential absence of overseas workers, and worry about service quality, diversity and costs – the latter point is especially important because the additional costs of hiring native workers will likely be passed to the consumer.
 - Overall, the removal of overseas staff will hurt but the sector is resilient. They want the chance to protect the high quality offer that they have created in the tourism industry in Scotland.

- **Piotr Gudan (Outdoor Explore)**
 - Piotr described the variety of roles he has held throughout the years, and how his residence in Scotland is a conscious choice that he has made. He was trained as a civil engineer but took up exploring as a hobby. He was a seasonal employee in England when he moved to the UK initially in his early 20s.

- He explained how finding a hobby and growing it is comparatively easy to do in the UK.
- He initially worked in a large company, but with support from GrowBiz he started his own outdoor exploring business. It has existed for 3.5 years, and he has seasonal employees, all of whom are British, and 90% of whom are Scottish (many of whom moved to rural Scotland because it is spectacular place to be). The business is based on collaboration including with other private sector businesses.
- He discusses the ambassadorial role he has assumed in the local community, and how good leadership can inspire entrepreneurship. He also describes Perthshire being an interesting place to grow a small business (and also kayak as a hobby).

4. Q&A with participants

After the presentations concluded, John Scott MSP opened to the floor to questions from attendees and requested that individuals clearly state their name and (where relevant) organisational affiliation when asking a question.

- Sarah Skerratt (SRUC) asked the speakers to offer **a single key message for policy**:
 - Steven Thomson responded that it is vital that we have a flexible and enabling system which supports effective business decisions with regard to recruiting labour. We must not put artificial or political barriers in the way.
 - Rebecca Kay responded that, whilst businesses and the economy are important, the links to broader issues relating to demography, community, and society must not be downplayed or forgotten. Being passionate about place entails taking those things together. Moreover, we must treat people as people and not just as labour and numbers.
 - Caroline Gregory remarked that it is important that rural sectors can promote both the opportunities on offer and their importance to the overall Scottish economy. We need to ensure that existing overseas workers are still valued and that new workers know that they are welcome here.
 - Piotr Gudan said that collaboration is key; this takes time, but support for fostering collaborative environments is very important.
- Andrew Heald (CONFOR) noted that **skills availability is a growing concern across the forestry/woodland sector** but especially for the tree nursery sector. Future targets for the sector are ambitious and much of the planting, machinery operation, etc. will be done by overseas workers. These workers are highly skilled and motivated and often move around jobs in different sectors.
 - Rebecca Kay noted that free movement has meant it is possible for people to move around and be flexible and not be tied to one employer. They can bring their skills to different areas/sectors.
 - Steven Thomson and Rob Mc Morran (SRUC) noted that many of the migrant workers spoken to in the project are very experienced and highly skilled, and return year after year to work in Scotland. Many have agricultural experience gathered from their home or other countries.
 - Caroline Gregory noted that flexibility between jobs is not necessarily something which is restricted to overseas workers; it is common for many people who are committed to working in rural Scotland. The provision of training and business development support is critical.

- Jim Hume (National Rural Mental Health Forum) flagged up the **key issues of loneliness and isolation** highlighted in SRUC's previous research on rural mental health.
 - Rebecca Kay commented that her work did not address these issues specifically but some respondents did talk about struggling with depression at difficult times which can be compounded by isolation, being away from family and friends, etc. For some individuals, informal support is available through their networks with other workers but this may raise issues of confidentiality. The language cafes have helped people to build new links and relationships, including beyond their own nationality group.
 - Rob Mc Morran also mentioned how seasonal workers usually are not tightly integrated with local communities (due to the temporary nature of their work) but within farms they are very well-integrated.
- Jackie Brierton (GrowBiz) noted that in relation to agriculture, there **is a future 'doomsday scenario'** if a way forward is not found with respect to maintaining a supply of overseas labour. She also mentioned the challenge for local people working in these seasonal jobs as the benefits system is often not flexible enough to allow people to take on a temporary job and then return to benefits when it ends.
 - Rob Mc Morran commented that most farmers spoken to in the Scottish Government project said that they employ very few UK nationals. Overseas workers demonstrated a huge commitment to the work, often leaving behind children in their home countries on a long-term basis to take on employment and thereby provide a better future for them.
- James Orr (Milton of Blebo) provided some background information on his farm which provides **20-25% of the UK's broccoli requirements. This year they had 10-15% less people coming forward for harvest, leading to problems for the business.** He mentioned a fellow farmer who had tried to recruit local Scottish people but they were far less committed to the job (some of those recruited did not show up for work) and only picked 9 boxes of broccoli in comparison to the team of Eastern European workers who picked 85 (and yet all workers were paid the same). The farm already had to leave £30-50,000 worth of produce in the fields this season as they didn't have people to cut it so in future, the situation is potentially very critical. James suggested that, guided by the aspirations of the Good Food Nation policy, Scotland should surely be trying to encourage fruit and veg production to contribute to healthy diets. Evidence suggests that the SAWS scheme worked well and support is required from both the Scottish and Westminster Governments to create a new solution which builds on the lessons learned in this scheme. The industry also needs support from the public, politicians, etc. to lobby for an appropriate solution.
- George Milne (National Sheep Association) emphasised **the need for accurate Government understanding about the requirement for overseas labour.** He noted references made elsewhere to the need for a cheap labour supply to be maintained, but as mentioned earlier, these are highly skilled workers which are not universally available. Mechanisation/robots may replace some jobs in future, but activities across the sector will require a steady supply of skilled labour in future.
 - Rebecca Kay noted the importance of workers being able to access welfare support when necessary. Workers come to the UK to work not to claim benefits, but they may rely on benefits for short periods between jobs to enable them to stay. They are using support to be able to work, rather than to not work.
 - Steven Thomson added that this issue had been raised in the seasonal migrant workers project too where many so-called seasonal workers actually effectively

work for most of the year on a recurring basis. He also noted the Scottish Government's foresight in commissioning the project to improve our knowledge to inform appropriate policy formation in future.

- Caroline Gregory added that for some workers their initial aim had been to send money back to family in their home country, but for many who had been in Scotland for a number of years, over time there has been a shift and they are now bringing family over and establishing their home in Scotland.
- John Scott MSP asked **what can be done to make it more attractive for skilled people from the EU not just to keep coming to Scotland, but also to stay here for longer.**
 - Rebecca Kay acknowledged that her research has highlighted that for overseas workers, finding a job is not usually the main challenge – albeit perhaps not an ideal job. The critical thing is supporting people to stay and to bring their children over and to remain here, particularly in rural communities. Some overseas workers are seeing their social rights now under threat. Again it was emphasised that individuals need to be seen as people not just as numbers of workers.
 - Piotr Guidan added that in his experience finding appropriate, affordable accommodation can be a key challenge (especially for families), as is opening a bank account – getting a National Insurance number is easy, but it's the subsequent stages that are more tricky. We also need to ensure that overseas workers know that they are welcome in Scotland, and in rural Scotland particularly. Rural Scotland has the advantage of being inherently attractive as a place to live!
- John McGregor (Kettle Produce) provided some **background information about Kettle Produce which includes more than 50 growers.** They have 1200 permanent jobs over two sites based near Cupar, 50% of which are Eastern European and 86% of those are Polish, but overall there are 23 different nationalities. He questioned the appropriateness of the term 'migrant' as over 300 of their workforce have been with them for over 12 years. In general, their workers are educated, young and have good qualifications. Many have moved into management and leadership roles and got married and had children in Scotland. He noted that with Brexit, there is the potential to lose 50% of the agricultural workforce in Fife and that will not be easily replaced, especially with demographic ageing trends. He noted a challenge sometimes with workers finding temporary work during the winter months when they are not working on farm, but they are trying to work more closely with other sectors to help workers find roles.
- David Walls (Lothian Broadband) returned to the **lack of motivation of local people, particularly young people, to enter these roles, which is a major cause for concern.** We need to better understand why local people do not want to do these jobs and how they might be better encouraged to do so, where appropriate.
 - Steven Thomson reported that this issue had come up in the agriculture seasonal migrant workers project with farmers reporting a lack of commitment amongst the local workforce. He noted the wider issue of the UK population as a whole not being well informed enough and not engaging well enough with food, agriculture and land management issues (i.e. where food comes from and how it is produced). There needs to be better and more education about systems of food processing and production.
 - Piotr Guidan also noted that the education system is not well suited to the tourism sector either with most (young) people not seeing the sector in Scotland as providing good quality jobs. If they do look to work in outdoor/adventure tourism etc. they seek to move to Australia, Canada, the US, etc. (where the weather is better too!).

- Caroline Gregory agreed that we need to get UK nationals more enthused about agriculture and rural sectors more broadly, and with the outdoors and the natural environment and show them that they can progress in rural careers as well as having fun!
- Wayne Powell (SRUC) agreed that we need to do more to talk up the agriculture industry. He noted SRUC's work to improve the curriculum at its regional campuses to ensure that it is more locally relevant, which also necessitates working with local schools. Everything needs to be joined up.
- Michelle Ballantyne MSP commented on how fewer children now learned 'the work ethic' from a young age. More work needs to be done with primary age children to understand about food and agriculture and to understand the impacts of current initiatives. She also noted that the usual push is for young people to go to university but that that might not be appropriate for everyone.
- James Orr agreed that agriculture does not sell itself effectively enough – people need to know that they can make a positive contribution to the Scottish economy through the agriculture sector. The latter also applies to overseas workers as we need to move away from the term migrant labour and ensure that we regard them as people who have a significant contribution to make to Scotland. We need to tell them that 'we need you and want you'.
- Caroline Gregory noted that she was not aware of any hostility experienced by people in the tourism sector nor in her local area. However, she talked about her lack of engagement with the local school on careers issues, which is a concern. She called for more integration between the tourism industry and the education system and the need to get young people excited about the opportunities available to them. Outdoor festivals, mountain biking etc. could all be used to promote rural opportunities for young people. Showing young people potential technology applications in rural areas (e.g. the use of drones) would also be valuable, to demonstrate that it is not only about getting cold and dirty but also about using your brain.
- John McGregor also emphasised the need to engage with young people and promote the opportunities available across the food and drink sector, including in food processing and manufacturing.
- Piotr Guidan emphasised the difficulty in securing school leaver apprentices and the high cost of funding apprenticeships for small and micro businesses.
- Jackie Brierton emphasised that one way to make it more attractive for overseas workers to stay is by encouraging them into self-employment/setting up their own business. This is relatively easy to do in Scotland as we have much less bureaucracy than in other countries. This could be promoted more to keep people in the UK. At the same time, business support for new and very small businesses could be improved (particularly in rural areas) and this needs to be explored further.
- Jim Hume (National Rural Mental Health Forum) noted that lots of young people from Scotland travel to New Zealand, often to work in agriculture, so **it will always be the case that people will travel for work.**
- Steven Thomson referred back to **schools career advice** in the 80s and 90s which effectively served to discourage people from going into agriculture, when in reality a career in this sector teaches you creative thinking, time management and many other transferable skills. He noted that careers advice is still regularly criticised by the agriculture industry.

John Scott MSP closed the discussion by confirming that the Secretariat would write up the minutes of the meeting and a letter would be drafted to be sent to the **Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity Fergus Ewing MSP** which highlighted salient points regarding barriers to attracting/retaining EU labour, and also the key risks that this issue poses to the industry and how to ameliorate them.

John Scott MSP thanked the speakers for their excellent contributions to the meeting and to all participants for attending. Thanks were also expressed to SRUC for their support of the CPG meetings.

5. Date of next meeting – 6th March 2018: ‘Policing in rural Scotland’

John Scott MSP confirmed that the date of the next meeting is 6th March 2018 and this will be on the subject of policing in rural Scotland. More information will be circulated by the Secretariat in due course.