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YOUTH MIGRATION – HIE STUDY

By Ruth Sime

Summary

This report introduces a presentation on the outcomes of the recent study into youth migration from Highland.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Population Growth and economic success are closely linked. This was recognised by HIE, and by other partners, some years ago, leading to the aspiration of growing the region's population from less than 440,000 in 2005 to half a million by 2025.
- 1.2 In addition to overall population numbers the demographic profile of the Highlands and Islands, compared to the rest of Scotland, is older, has a trend towards an ageing population, and of particular significance, has an under-representation of young people aged 15-30. If the Highlands and Islands had the same demographic profile as the rest of Scotland there would be an additional 18,000 young people in the 15 and 30 age range within the region. (8700 for the Highland Council area)
- 1.3 Much of the reason for this demographic imbalance has been attributed to the need over time to leave the region to undertake academic study beyond school. However, few steps have been undertaken to dig deeper into this demographic issue and to seek a wider understanding that might influence policy and actions in the future. In 2008 HIE commissioned research designed to provide a better understanding of the migration choices of young people in the Highlands and Islands, highlighting sub-regional and other variations of particular pertinence and to identify appropriate interventions to support population growth.
- 1.4 The study used a mix of quantitative and qualitative research and obtained the views of almost 3,500 school pupils, students and those in employment and unemployed within the 15-30 age range across the region. It also included the opinions of individuals who are not currently living in the region, those who have left the area and may or may not consider moving back as well as those who are looking to move to the Highlands and Islands for the first time.

2. Population Context

2. In the Highlands and Islands, after a long period of decline, the population since the mid 1960s has steadily increased. Over the period 2001 to 2007 the Highlands & Islands population grew by 2.3% compared with growth of 1.6% in Scotland. Within these statistics there are clearly some local variations and growth has not been evenly spread. However, recent positive growth rates will be insufficient to realise the population growth aspirations for the region.
- 2.2 Across the Highlands and Islands over recent years there has been a net immigration in most age groups with the exception of substantial outmigration in the 16-20 age range, where around a quarter (c1560) will have left the Highlands and Islands by the age of 20. This equally means that three-quarters do not leave.
- 2.3 Two other important points are noteworthy from the data. Firstly, for the region as a whole, the net outmigration of 16-20 year olds is counter-balanced by in-migration of those in their 20s, 30s and early 40s. There is significant variation in the age at which the net outmigration of 16-20 year olds is counterbalanced. For example the Inner Moray Firth is able to attract an equivalent number of 20-somethings to the area each year as it loses from its 16-20 year old population. However in Innes Gair and Caithness and Sutherland balance isn't achieved unless all adult in-migration up to retirement age is included. Secondly, the net proportion of young people aged 16 -20 who are leaving the region has declined from over 30% in 2002 to just over 20% in 2007. The immigration of young people from the A8 countries from 2004 onwards has partially contributed to this trend.

3. Research Findings

- 3.1 Some of the key research findings are outlined below. The comments focus on the regional picture but there are significant variations across different local areas which are highlighted in the final report.
 - The Highlands and Islands is somewhere that young people are very proud to be associated with, regardless of whether or not they still live in the region (72%).
 - Young people are very positive about the social and cultural aspects of life in the Highlands and Islands, that the region is a good place to bring up a family (82%) and somewhere where they feel safe (80%).
 - More than half (52%) indicated the Highlands and Islands is somewhere that they wanted to live for the rest of their life.
 - Young people's concerns were largely around the economic opportunities that they perceived to be available (72%) and the availability of well paid jobs (56%) with 90% of leavers citing lack of career progression opportunities as a barrier to returning to the area.

- Almost half (48%) felt there were insufficient opportunities to access further and higher education in their local areas.

3.2 A detailed analysis is available in the full report at <http://www.hie.co.uk/youth-migration.htm>.

4. Recommendations for action

4.1 Recommendations for action suggested targeting those most easily influenced:

- Reluctant Leavers - currently residing in the Highlands and Islands and would prefer to stay but due to a mix of personal, training or employment circumstances feel they must leave.
- Potential Returners - left the area, but are now interested in returning.
- Potential New Residents - never lived in the region, but who are attracted by the opportunities available in the Highlands and Islands.

4.2 Policy Areas – Addressing Perceptions and Reality

- Employment - improving the perception of the employment opportunities which are available in the region and increasing the number of well-paid jobs with career prospects, particularly at graduate level.
- Education - enhancing the educational offering by UHI and associated colleges through a wider curriculum and development of a campus.
- Environment – promoting and maximising the benefits of the social and cultural aspects such as the natural environment, unique culture and strong community spirit. Other actions relate to addressing the challenge of ensuring adequate provision of affordable and appropriate housing for young people, to enhancing the region's transport and ensuring high speed connectivity in the region.
- Engagement – ensuring effective communication between key stakeholders, public, private and third sectors and with young people within and outwith the region through formal and informal mechanisms. However, the key to any action planning arising from this study is effective engagement with young people to identify the messages and communication channels which will enable successful delivery of these actions. Furthermore, the importance of addressing demographic imbalance must be recognised by all

public agencies and alignment and collaborative effort amongst public, private and third sectors is essential to ensure these challenges are addressed.

Recommendation

The Joint Committee is asked to consider and comment on the issues raised in the report.

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