

McCracken, D. 2019 New bid to grow pupils' interest in rural careers. *Press & Journal*, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2019. <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-press-and-journal-inverness-highlands-and-islands/20190520/282179357544676>

### **New bid to grow pupils' interest in rural careers**

A large proportion of Scotland's remote, rural areas are sparsely populated. Research by colleagues in the James Hutton Institute has also indicated that across many of these areas – but particularly in Argyll & Bute and the north-west Highlands – the population is predicted to decline markedly over the next 40 years.



If this happens, the social structure and resilience of these rural communities will be impacted severely. So too will be the ability to maintain farming and forestry in these areas or conduct the environmental management needed to address Scotland's biodiversity and climate change challenges.

It will therefore be important to reverse these population declines by encouraging more young people to either stay or move into these areas.

There are many different factors – such as availability of affordable housing and access to education and health services – which will need to be addressed to achieve this. But ensuring that young people see working in rural areas as being attractive will also be key.

The Developing the Young Workforce Initiative is a Scottish Government supported programme which aims to bridge the gap between education and employers by providing young people with the right education, training and experience to get into fulfilling jobs and careers.

The Initiative has identified that neither secondary school pupils nor their teachers realise what wide range of careers are available in rural areas nor how technical many of the jobs in land-based industries have become.

To help address these gaps in understanding, we have organised a Rural Skills Day on the farms at the end of the month. Colleagues in the Developing the Young Workforce Initiative have encouraged and supported around 100 secondary school pupils from across Perth & Kinross, Forth Valley, Lochaber and Argyll & Bute to attend.

In addition to input from farm and research staff from Kirkton & Auchtertyre, we will also have demonstrations from colleagues from across SRUC and partners such as the Moredun Research Institute, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Forestry and Geo Geo (a Scottish technology company which supports and advocates the widespread adoption of state-of-the-art mapping tools).

The intent is to highlight that there are a wide range of jobs available in rural areas which involve the application of different types of technology. We will also help the school pupils realise what skills and qualifications they need if they were interested in pursuing any of the careers demonstrated and discussed during the day.

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