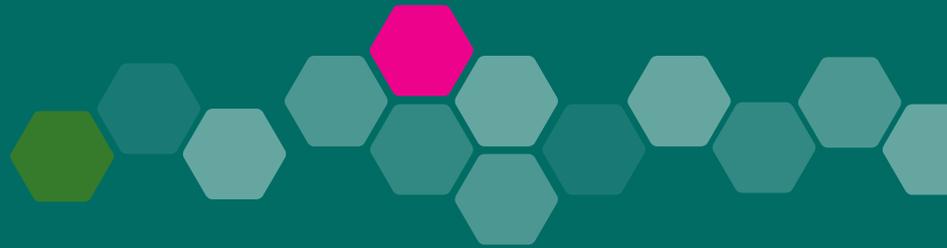




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Women in Agriculture Research Progress Report, 2020-21



AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE



Women in Agriculture Research Progress Report, 2020-21



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Acronyms

AGM	Annual general meeting
BYBS	Be Your Best Self
JHI	James Hutton Institute
WIA	Women in Agriculture
WiADP	Women in Agriculture Development Programme
RAG	Research Advisory Group
RESAS	Rural Environment Science and Analytical Services
SG	Scottish Government
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

Women in Agriculture Research - Highlights

This report provides a progress update on research conducted as part of the Women in Agriculture (WIA) programme between 2020 and 2021, and presents overall findings. The report also outlines current and future research planned for 2021-2022.

Research background

Research commissioned by Scottish Government in 2017 identified a range of issues that impact women in agriculture and limit their participation in the industry. The Women in Agriculture Taskforce published its Final Report in 2019, which outlined a series of recommendations in order to progress women's role within the industry.

Summary of findings

A range of research has been conducted between 2020 and 2021, including: research into the challenges of rural childcare and the needs of agricultural families, a review of an Unconscious Bias pilot and a consultation on the training needs of women in agriculture on islands. An evaluation of the 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot (2020-21) and research into women's leadership programmes are currently being carried out.

Research findings

Overall, the research points to a number of wider findings including:

- positive changes for women in agriculture, including the success of training pilots in building women's skills, confidence and connections with each other
- the benefits of these connections between women in agriculture, from practical advice and support to strengthening their identities and future plans
- the impact of training pilots, such as participants feeling more optimistic about their future and wider discussions about unconscious bias and diversity
- the childcare needs of agricultural families, and connections between challenges experienced by women in agriculture and wider rural issues
- challenges for women in agriculture, from lack of confidence or progression in their jobs, to cultural attitudes that continue to impact their roles on family farms

Future research

During 2021-22, we plan to evaluate the impact of further WIA-funded training pilots, including 'Be Your Best Self' (2021-22) and 'Knowing your Business' (2022). We are also commissioning new research into evidence-based approaches to implementing equality commitments in organisations to inform our work within Scottish agriculture.

Executive summary

Introduction

Women are an integral part of Scottish agriculture. They make an essential contribution to the industry, whether working on farms, crofts and small holdings; supporting their families; or through being involved in the wider rural economy.

The Scottish Agricultural Census 2021 shows that 40% of all working occupiers and spouses on Scottish farms are female, and 60% are male.¹

The Women in Agriculture Taskforce was established by the Scottish Government in 2017, following research which showed that women face cultural barriers in the industry. The research suggested that this can lead to their work being undervalued and prevent their full participation. The Taskforce published its final report in 2019, which identified practical solutions to these issues and made a series of recommendations.²

This report provides a progress update on research conducted as part of the Women in Agriculture (WIA) programme between 2020 and 2021. The report sets out the context for this work, and presents a summary of completed, current and future research.

Methods

The research outlined in this report draws on a range of methods, including literature reviews, interviews, focus groups and surveys. The projects include commissioned work and research completed by analysts in the Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) division of the Scottish Government. The projects have included a range of different participants, including women in island communities, rural childcare providers and women in mid-level or leadership positions in Scottish agriculture.

Overall findings

A range of research has been planned, carried out and commissioned as part of the Women in Agriculture programme during 2020-21. A timetable can be found on page 15.

A short summary of overall findings from across the research carried out between 2020 and 2021 is presented below. These findings are discussed in more detail on pages 12-14 and specific findings for each project can be found in Sections 1, 2 and 3.

¹ [Results from the Scottish Agricultural Census: June 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2021/06/Results-from-the-Scottish-Agricultural-Census-June-2021.pdf)

² [Women in Agriculture Taskforce: final report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2019/09/Women-in-Agriculture-Taskforce-final-report.pdf)

1. The changing role of women in agriculture

The research points to positive changes for women in agriculture, including increased awareness of the role of women within the industry and the success of WIA training pilots in building connections between women in agriculture and developing their skills.

2. Connections between women in agriculture

The WIA programme has led to new connections between women in the industry, with pilots such as the 'Be Your Best Self' course enabling participants to create new support networks. Through these networks, women gain practical advice and encouragement.

3. The impact of training

Training delivered during 2020-2021 has had a range of positive impacts for women in agriculture, from participants feeling more optimistic about their future in the industry, to organisations learning about the benefits of diversity. Research to evaluate the 'Be Your Best Self' pilot has provided evidence of its long-term impact. Future training programmes will provide women in agriculture with further skills and opportunities.

4. Conversations around diversity

The research indicates the potential for wider discussions around diversity and inclusivity within Scottish agriculture. Wider research shows the intersections between gender and other aspects of identity, including race, class and disability. This will inform our approach to future work, including the development of a WIA leadership programme.

5. Challenges for women in agriculture

This research points to a range of challenges for women in agriculture, including cultural barriers and attitudes within the industry. This is also shaped by place, from a lack of training opportunities on islands to a shortage of flexible childcare in rural Scotland.

6. The impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted women in agriculture in both positive and negative ways. For example, whilst it has led to increased demand for rural childcare services, the move to online training and events has improved accessibility for women across Scotland.

7. The future

The research conducted during 2020-2021 points to opportunities to bring about further positive changes for women in agriculture at a number of levels, from providing training to individuals to practical actions for organisations within the industry. This will be taken forward through future training programmes and new commissioned research.

and childcare in rural areas. The report sets out the context for this work, and presents a summary of completed, current and future research between 2020 and 2022.

The projects include research conducted to inform the planning and evaluation of training pilots delivered through the Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP).

The Women in Agriculture Development Programme

One of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce's central recommendations was that the Scottish Government develop a Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP).⁵ This programme has been designed to deliver training and mentoring to support women in agriculture to build their confidence, enhance their business skills and develop their leadership abilities. It is being delivered through three specific but independent courses: personal development training, knowing your business, and leadership development. The pilot aims are as follows:

- 'Be Your Best Self' will help women to build more confidence, explore new possibilities and opportunities, and make new connections
- 'Knowing your Business' aims to help women involved in agriculture to increase their knowledge, skills, tools and confidence to help improve business performance
- The 'Women in Agriculture Leadership Development Programme' will enable and empower more women living or working in agriculture to develop their abilities, and take up leadership positions within their communities and across the industry

Methods

The research outlined in this report draws on a range of methods, including literature reviews, interviews, focus groups and surveys. In many cases, these methods have been adapted due to restrictions during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The projects include both commissioned work and research completed by analysts in the Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) division of Scottish Government.

This research has so far involved over 40 participants, including women with a range of roles in farming and agriculture, who live or work on crofts, farms and smallholdings. Respondents have different roles and skills, including:

- Administration, for example business accounts, sales, contracts
- Household management, for example cleaning, meals, childcare
- Livestock management, for example lambing, milking, rearing calves
- Crop management, for example ploughing, harvesting, transport
- Other activities, for example agri-tourism, farm shops

⁵ [Women in Agriculture Taskforce: final report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/wiadt-report-2022/pages/100/index.aspx)

The research findings give an insight into the experiences of women in agriculture who are of different ages, backgrounds and stages in their lives and careers. They also provide evidence of the impact of Women in Agriculture programmes and events.

Overall findings

A range of research has been planned, carried out and commissioned as part of the Women in Agriculture programme during 2020-21. This section includes a summary of the scope of the research and summarises overall findings by theme.

A range of research has been planned, carried out and commissioned as part of the Women in Agriculture programme during 2020-21. A timetable can be found on page 15.

The research builds on previous work exploring the role of women in Scottish agriculture, and demonstrates the impact of Women in Agriculture training programmes in developing women's skills, confidence and connections to other women in agriculture. It indicates how the experiences of women in Scottish agriculture are shaped by different factors, from their age, background or location to their role on a croft, farm, smallholding or in an agricultural business. The research has included women living and working in agriculture across different areas of Scotland, from islands such as Mull, Orkney and Skye, to Aberdeenshire, Highland and the Scottish Borders.

The research projects have focused on a range of topics, from rural childcare and the needs of agricultural families (see page 19), to the accessibility of training for women on islands (see page 27), and the impact of the 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot (see page 29). This research has provided evidence on specific topics, and also points to shared themes in women's experiences in Scottish agriculture, building on previous research conducted for Scottish Government (see Section 1).

Whilst recent work has focused on evaluating the impact of training for individual women who have taken part, or understanding challenges faced by families with parents working in agriculture, future research will broaden this scope by exploring how to bring about greater gender equality within Scottish agricultural organisations (see page 34).

The following section summarises overall findings from across the different research projects. More detailed findings for each project are set out in Sections 1, 2 and 3.

1. The changing role of women in agriculture

The research points to positive changes for women in agriculture. Findings suggest that there is an increased awareness of the role of women within the industry and the benefits of diversity for agricultural businesses and organisations. The research has also highlighted the success of Women in Agriculture training pilots in building connections between women in agriculture and giving them the skills and confidence to develop their roles on the farm or in the organisations they work for.

2. Connections between women in agriculture

The Women in Agriculture programme has led to new connections between women in the industry, which research suggests is vital in enabling them to access new opportunities and realise their potential. Whilst most 'Be Your Best Self' training sessions were held online, the women who took part were still able to build friendships and a support network (see page 29).

Respondents felt more connected to other women in agriculture after taking part in the course. This has a range of benefits, from practical advice when trying new things on the farm, to encouraging them to follow their career goals, for example by applying for board positions. It has also strengthened their identities, for example one participant described 'feeling stronger' about being a woman in agriculture.

3. The impact of training

Training delivered during 2020-2021 has had a range of positive impacts for women in agriculture, from participants feeling more optimistic about their future in the industry, to businesses and organisations taking part in discussions about unconscious bias and learning about the benefits of diversity (see page 22).

'Be Your Best Self' participants valued the opportunity to meet women with different roles in farming, and to learn from each other's experiences. They had clearer ideas about their future in agriculture after completing the course, and felt more confident about signing up for further training, and attending agricultural events or meetings. Those who have taken part in follow-up interviews have spoken about the long-term impact of the pilot, from shaping their career aspirations to developing their roles on the family farm.

Research into the training needs of women on islands suggests that practical, technical and business skills training would further benefit women in agriculture (see page 27). Future training programmes such as a Women in Agriculture Leadership course will address this and equip more women to take up leadership roles in agricultural organisations, and the rural and island communities they live in.

4. Conversations around diversity

The research indicates the potential for wider discussions around diversity and inclusivity within Scottish agriculture, going beyond gender to consider age, race, disability and other factors. Recent work also points to opportunities to share best practice. For example, following the Unconscious Bias training pilot, respondents stated that they would like more advice on practical steps to address bias, and case studies or examples from other agricultural organisations. Several highlighted their willingness to publicise what they are doing to increase diversity on their own boards (see page 22).

The development of future training pilots and research into equality initiatives will provide further opportunities for agricultural organisations to show their commitment to gender equality within the industry. Conversations around diversity should also be broadened to address wider barriers to participation for different groups. For example, during research conducted as part of an Equality Charter pilot, participants emphasised the wider meaning of equality, and the importance of ensuring equality of opportunity for people of every gender, race, religion, and ability (see page 25).

As a range of wider research shows, there is an intersection between gender and other aspects of identity, including race, class, sexual orientation, disability and religion. This can lead to different kinds of barriers, forms of discrimination or privilege.

This intersection between gender and other identity categories is something we aim to explore in future work. For example, a leadership programme for women in agriculture may give participants an opportunity to explore how their approaches to leadership are shaped by different aspects of their identity (see page 31).

This intersectional approach should take place alongside the collection of robust equalities data on protected characteristics such as age, sex, gender identity or trans status, religion and ethnic group to support equality of opportunity within agriculture.

5. Challenges for women in agriculture

Previous research has highlighted a range of challenges for women in agriculture, including cultural barriers and attitudes, and these remain significant.⁶ Research shows that women in agriculture face different barriers, and that this is shaped by factors such as their age, background and levels of confidence.

Challenges are also shaped by place – for example travel distances and time constraints prevent women on islands participating in training (see page 29). These challenges raise

⁶ [Women in farming and the agriculture sector: research report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2022/04/Women_in_farming_and_the_agriculture_sector_research_report.pdf)

different questions, and require different solutions, from personal development courses to wider initiatives across the agricultural industry.

Further research highlights connections between the challenges experienced by women in agriculture and wider rural issues, such as the availability of flexible childcare (page 20). These issues cause barriers to employment opportunities for women in rural Scotland, including those living and working in agriculture.

6. The impact of COVID-19

The research demonstrates both the positive and negative impacts of COVID-19 on women in agriculture, from increased demand for rural childcare services to the move to online training. Whilst home-schooling has impacted on some participants' ability to work, including on farms, it has raised questions around gender roles more widely. Further, the accessibility of online training and events has encouraged women to attend and enabled them to meet and seek advice from women living in other parts of the country, for example through the 'Be Your Best Self' training. COVID-19 may also lead to more flexible working options for women in agricultural businesses and organisations.

7. The future

Research participants have described a range of future plans, including applying for further training or new jobs, gaining board roles, supporting or mentoring other women and developing their family farms (see page 29).

The research conducted during 2020-2021 points to opportunities to bring about further positive changes for women in agriculture. This will be taken forward through future training programmes focusing on leadership and business skills, and commissioned research to inform work on an Equality Charter for Scottish agriculture.

This progress report indicates the scope of this work, from enabling individual women to feel confident enough to raise concerns about the way the business is run, to connecting women in agriculture across Scotland, to asking larger organisations to take practical actions toward gender equality. Each of these will lead to positive changes for women in Scottish agriculture.

Table 1. Timetable of research projects

Research title	Summary	Project dates
The challenges of rural childcare	Research into the challenges of rural childcare provision, innovative models and the needs of agricultural families.	September-December 2020
Unconscious Bias review	A review of an Unconscious Bias training pilot delivered to agricultural organisations and businesses.	September 2020-September 2021
Equality Charter pilot	Research to inform the development of an Equality Charter for Scottish agriculture.	December 2019 - March 2020
Islands consultation	Research into accessibility and barriers in accessing training for women in island communities who live or work in Scottish agriculture.	September-December 2020
'Be Your Best Self' Evaluation	Follow-up research with participants as part of an evaluation of the 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot.	January-December 2021
Leadership programme research	An evidence review of leadership programmes and interviews with women in leadership roles to inform the development of a WIA leadership programme.	May-November 2021
Evidence-based approaches to implementing equality commitments in organisations	A research project comprising an evidence review and research exploring effective ways of bringing about greater gender equality within Scottish agricultural organisations.	November 2021-April 2022
'Knowing your Business' evaluation	Follow-up research with participants as part of an evaluation of the 'Knowing your Business' training pilot.	2022 - dates tbc.

1. Research context

The research outlined in this progress report builds on research previously commissioned by Scottish Government in 2016. This section outlines the findings of this previous research and follow-up research conducted in 2021.

1.1. Women in farming and the agriculture sector

In 2016, the Scottish Government's Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS) commissioned research on 'Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector'. The overall purpose of this research was to establish a baseline position on women in farming and the agriculture sector, to inform future policies to enhance the role of women in these sectors.

The specific aim of this research was to investigate the role of women in farming and the agriculture sector in Scotland under five headings: daily life, aspirations, career paths, leadership and comparative analysis with women in other family businesses. During the research, the importance of inheritance, training and farm safety also emerged as important issues.

The research comprised of a literature review, nine focus groups, 30 interviews and two online surveys with women who live and/or work on farms in Scotland, and women who are current students or alumnae of agricultural courses at colleges and universities. In total, over 1300 women and 12 men from across Scotland participated. The research was undertaken from June 2016 to March 2017.

Research findings

The research findings were outlined in full in a report (Scottish Government, 2017)⁷ and included the following:

- Women play a major role in Scottish agriculture, participating in the full range of farming activities;
- The cultural practice of passing on large farms intact to one son is the single biggest barrier to women's entry into agriculture;
- Women are very under-represented amongst the elected leadership of national-level farming organisations;
- Lack of time is a major barrier to progressing women's roles on-farm and in farming organisations, and to accessing training (including continuing professional development, knowledge sharing, farm visits and industry events). Women in

⁷ [Women in farming and the agriculture sector: research report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Research/Research-reports/2017/01)

agriculture are very busy, juggling family responsibilities, farm work, housework, off-farm employment and volunteer work;

- There is a clear need for more access to, and uptake of, vocational, practical training for women entering agriculture, across a range of topics;
- Enabling new entrants to establish farms also enables more egalitarian gender relations;
- Women in family businesses outside of agriculture face far fewer barriers to business involvement and leadership.

1.2. The impact of the ‘Women in Agriculture’ movement in Scotland: 2016-2021

This project, carried out by researchers at the James Hutton Institute (JHI), aimed to understand the impact of the recommendations of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce and other initiatives on women’s experiences in Scottish agriculture, 2016-21.

This project follows on from the research outlined above, with a series of focus groups organised with participants who had taken part in the previous study. The focus groups were held online in March 2021 and involved women and men farmers, crofters, and other representatives of the agricultural industry.

Research findings

The research findings are outlined in the report ‘The Changing Role of Women in Farming, Crofting, and the Agricultural Industry: 2016-2021’.⁸ The findings include:

- Participants stated that perceptions of the role of women in farming and the agricultural sector are changing - there are more young women participating in agriculture, running farming businesses and becoming ‘independent’ farmers/crofters;
- There has been a significant amount of publicity about women farmers and crofters in mainstream and social media, and the increasing visibility of women in agriculture is viewed positively, however challenges remain, as do concerns around inclusivity and diversity;
- Whilst succession remains an issue, it does not affect women as much as it once did, and there has been a positive change over time - generational changes, and changing attitudes across generations, are evident;

⁸ The full report can be accessed here: [New research illustrates impact of Covid-19 pandemic on women in agriculture | The James Hutton Institute](#)

- There has been a 'change in the right direction' regarding the level of recruitment and the role of women in agricultural leadership, however many barriers remain (for example, time commitment, women's lack of confidence, cultural attitudes);
- There has been an increase in the uptake of agricultural training by women, with many online meetings and training opportunities appearing to be women-led - WIA training pilots such as the 'Be Your Best Self' course are viewed positively;
- Whilst women remain the core providers of childcare on farms and crofts, organisations are more aware of the options to support women's participation in agriculture, for example, meeting online or at alternative times;
- Participants felt that female role models who have families are important as they demonstrate the potential for women's role in agriculture;
- In terms of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, home-schooling has impacted on women's ability to work and participate in on-farm activities, tying into wider concerns about the impact of the pandemic on gender roles;
- The pandemic has led to lost income where farms and crofts have diversified into holiday accommodation.
- Despite this, female participants who typically work off-farm, and children of all ages, have become more 'connected' and involved with farm activities due to lockdown, and virtual meetings and events have improved accessibility for women in agriculture;
- Whilst mental health is now being discussed more openly, further attention is needed to mental health and causes of stress within agriculture;
- A shift towards gender equality in agriculture is progressing with generational change; younger men and women appear 'much more confident', informed and active in developing agricultural businesses;
- However, younger generations find it difficult to see or understand the bias against women in agriculture that has affected their mothers, and many younger men do not see barriers to women's participation;
- In terms of the future, female participants described a range of plans, for example, taking part in training, marketing and diversification activities, gaining board and strategic roles in agricultural organisations, mentoring young people and supporting new entrants, expanding farms and developing land management strategies;
- Female participants also aspired to provide capable women with a higher profile in the agricultural industry, to drive positive change;
- The perspective was shared that women and young people have an important role to play in increasing diversity in agriculture, overcoming resistance to change, and promoting sustainable innovations;
- The main barriers to women in agriculture remain access to land for new entrants and the costs of starting new farming/crofting businesses.

2. Completed research

This section outlines research completed as part of the Women in Agriculture programme 2020-21, including projects focusing on rural childcare and the accessibility of training for women living or working in agriculture on islands.

2.1. The challenges of rural childcare

Access to childcare represents a significant barrier for women's participation in the agricultural industry,⁹ and this research contributed to the Women in Agriculture programme by investigating new or flexible models of childcare that could benefit agricultural families in rural and remote areas. The research aimed to provide:

- a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in rural childcare and their relevance to women living and working in the agriculture sector;
- evidence to support the development of a rural childcare pilot.¹⁰

Research summary

This research examined how financial and practical challenges impact the sustainability of rural childcare services; the childcare needs of agricultural families; and the opportunities provided by innovative models.

The research showed that there are a number of wider challenges in rural childcare provision, including: fewer services, resulting in pressure on existing providers; sustaining provision in more remote settings with lower numbers of staff and children; a shortage of transport provision, including drop-off services and public transport; a shortage of suitable venues; and difficulties recruiting staff, particularly for senior roles. These findings are summarised in more detail below.

Whilst many providers stated that additional funding would have a positive impact, this report highlights wider challenges around the sustainability of rural childcare services, many of which are connected to longstanding issues in rural areas, from employment to transport and broadband. It is clear that a shortage of suitable childcare remains a barrier to employment opportunities in rural Scotland, particularly for women.

The research highlighted a need for both standard and innovative models of childcare provision in rural areas in order to improve sustainability and better meet the needs of families with a range of working patterns, including those working in agriculture. The final

⁹ [Women in Agriculture Taskforce: final report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2021/04/Women_in_Agriculture_Taskforce_final_report.pdf)

¹⁰ [Funding for Childcare and Well Being | Mull and Iona Community Trust \(mict.co.uk\)](https://mict.co.uk/funding-for-childcare-and-well-being/)

report was published in March 2021¹¹ and a one-page summary of the findings was shared with providers who took part (Annex 1).

Research methods

A total of nine telephone interviews were conducted with childcare providers, the majority of whom are using new and innovative models. The interviews focused on issues including facilities, transport and staffing. Those interviewed worked in a range of settings, in both accessible rural and remote areas, including in the local authorities of Argyll and Bute, Highland, Moray and the Scottish Borders.

Research findings

‘We already have the option for families to book [...] extra sessions at different times of the year, that flexibility where we have space, is very useful to farming and agricultural families [...] at the times where they need the extra childcare.’ (Outdoor provider, Interview 3)

- Providers highlighted a lack of choice in rural areas, and a shortage of early years provision (ages 0 to 3) and childminders. Whilst many struggle due to low numbers, others have long waiting lists due to a shortage of other provision. Many successful services are run collaboratively for example with parents, third-sector providers or the council.
- Flexible providers can offer parents extra sessions and extend their hours if required. In smaller, remote settings this was often not an option due to limited capacity. Providers stated that longer days to fit around working hours would benefit rural parents. Transport and funding was seen as essential to the success of additional provision.
- Childcare requirements are affected by parents’ working patterns throughout the week and year. This varies in different areas, from shift work in retail or the care sector to tourism and agricultural jobs. Several providers stated that it is women who transport children, and are limited to part-time and low-paid work as a result. They also raised issues around the affordability of childcare, particularly in smaller settings.
- Many providers observed that agricultural families have busier and quieter times of the year, including lambing. These families benefit from being able to book further sessions when needed, longer opening hours, after-school clubs and drop-off services at busier points in the year.

¹¹ [Rural childcare provision, innovative models and the needs of agricultural families: research - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

- Many of the more remote providers, for example in villages in the Highlands, are based in community halls they share with other groups, and noted the high cost of renting the buildings, inability to make changes, and tension with local residents. This also creates additional work for staff in setting up and cleaning after sessions. Other providers face practical challenges, for example outdoor nurseries discussed closures due to bad weather.
- Most children are driven to rural childcare services, with journeys varying from 15 minutes to an hour. In many cases, public transport was not seen as adequate, although a small number of children and staff were lift-sharing, or travelling to settings by bus, bike and ferry. For those in more remote sites, this causes issues in the winter. Providers also felt that this has an impact on the accessibility of services for families on lower incomes.
- The majority of providers had experienced problems with staffing, particularly for more senior roles. Those following innovative models had experienced fewer problems with recruitment. Access to training is an issue for many, due to the costs of travel and accommodation and reduced availability in rural areas. The transition to online training has been mostly beneficial.
- Innovative models also lead to further opportunities, with multi-partnership models such as intergenerational projects and shared management across settings making use of the available resources in rural areas. Outdoor nurseries tend to attract children from a wider area, and in several cases, children were travelling further to attend them due to parental choice.
- Providers raised concerns around financial sustainability, for example the number of staff required to meet guidance, the cost of renting shared buildings. The financial viability of services was affected by lower numbers of children and changes in demand. There was a perception that many of the smaller services in rural areas have closed due to these issues. Several providers had received additional funding or grants, for example from the Inclusion Fund, or benefit from fundraising and volunteer support.
- Providers discussed ways of supporting rural childcare services, including start-up grants, top-up fees for settings with a small number of children, additional funding for staff wages and transport. If setting up a new rural service providers stated the main things required would be: qualified staff, a suitable and affordable building, and transport options for parents, for example car parking, a drop-off service.
- The research also indicated the impact of COVID-19 on rural childcare providers, including the financial costs of additional cleaning, temporary closures and limits on numbers. In several cases, this has led to reduced flexibility for parents.

This research informed the development of a rural childcare pilot with Mull and Iona Community Trust, which is being co-funded by the Women in Agriculture programme.¹²

¹² [Funding for Childcare and Well Being | Mull and Iona Community Trust \(mict.co.uk\)](https://mict.co.uk)

2.2. Unconscious Bias review

Review of a Women in Agriculture-funded Unconscious Bias training pilot delivered to agricultural organisations and businesses. Survey findings have been used to evaluate the success of the pilot and examine what changes it has led to.

Research summary

In 2020, an Unconscious Bias Training pilot was delivered to seven agricultural organisations, following a recommendation by the WIA Taskforce (2019) that Scottish agricultural organisations and businesses undertake diversity and unconscious bias training to support cultural change and address gender imbalances in leadership groups.

The training was carried out by Changing the Chemistry,¹³ a charity that specialises in helping organisations to implement greater diversity in the boardroom. The training aimed to promote an understanding and awareness of the benefits of diversity for organisations, including improved decision-making and performance. During the sessions, members of the board or senior management teams discussed this, in addition to practical steps that can be taken to achieve a more diverse board or management team.

The pilot was completed in January 2021 and the results are currently being analysed, with six and twelve-month follow up reports due from several organisations.

Research methods

All attendees were asked to complete a questionnaire following each session and representatives of the organisations or businesses have also been asked to complete six and twelve month follow-up reports, focusing on:

- how board membership has changed since the workshop, and when they will next be recruiting new members
- what the organisation has done so far to take forward the identified actions in the workshop, and if there is a formal plan with agreed deadlines to improve the board's diversity
- what the most difficult aspects have been in seeking to improve board diversity, and what support or guidance might help

¹³ [Changing the Chemistry homepage](#)

Research findings

'As a board member I feel much more aware, and through that changes can be made going forward.' (Survey respondent)

- The sessions were successful in raising awareness of unconscious bias and its impacts, and the benefits of diversity for organisations;
- The sessions have gone well overall with high levels of engagement, with attendees valuing the chance to learn about unconscious bias and to hear from people outside the agricultural industry;
- The aspect which attendees most enjoyed was having the time to take part in open discussions on the topic and sharing their views with the facilitators, board members and their colleagues;
- Attendees at each sessions suggested a wide range of actions to take forward within their organisations, which largely focused on being more open about the work of the board and its recruitment process;
- The majority (90%) were comfortable with the proposed actions, and in many cases stated that they built on what the organisation already plans to do. In this sense, several sessions served mainly to reinforce existing aims or views;
- For others, there was a sense that enough had been done, or that things took time to implement or there were a lack of resources to do it;
- Whilst nearly half (46%) stated they were 'very' confident that the actions would be done, others were less confident (48% said 'Somewhat');
- In several cases there have been more uncomfortable discussions, due to a lack of familiarity with the topic or experience of talking about diversity;
- In addition to this, the training provider faced difficulties in getting agricultural organisations to sign-up for the training, and some issues with attendance.
- When asked what would help the delivery of the actions, respondents suggest continued engagement from the board, further time and resources, and a detailed action plan with deadlines and follow-up support;
- In terms of the workshop content, respondents stated that they would have liked more advice on practical steps to address bias, case studies or examples from other agricultural organisations, and advice tailored to their organisation;
- Respondents often highlighted their willingness to share examples of best practice with other organisations and to publicise what they are doing to increase diversity on their own board and within their membership.

Most of the organisations or businesses which took part in the training pilot have now completed six month follow-up reports. The majority stated that there is a formal plan with

agreed deadlines to improve the board's diversity. The organisations have taken forward a range of actions identified in the workshop, including:

- reviewing and making changes to board recruitment and induction processes
- updating board recruitment packs or holding events to share further information, for example, around time commitments and the benefits of being involved
- reviewing annual general meeting (AGM) invitations and organisation values, or surveying members to review board meeting times
- sharing profiles of board members, e.g. through magazines and other member communications; engaging with their members through social media, for example, blogs or videos featuring women
- developing programmes for women and younger members

The workshops have led many organisations to be more open about their boards and recruitment processes, for example by providing more information to encourage applications for roles such as trustees. It has also led several businesses to re-consider when board meetings are held, and the language used during meetings. Several expressed interest in offering unconscious bias training to further members of staff.

However, most organisations reported that they have not increased the gender diversity of their boards since taking part. In some cases, this was because new members were not due to be recruited yet, whilst COVID-19 has led to challenges in implementing changes. As one organisation put it: 'This is still a work in progress'.

Next steps

The Unconscious Bias training was well received and successful in terms of raising awareness of unconscious bias, and the benefits of diversity for organisations and businesses. Whilst many of the organisations have made positive steps in terms of making processes more transparent and open, there is limited evidence so far that the pilot has led to greater gender diversity in the boardroom, or long-term change. Most of the organisations have indicated that they would appreciate further in-depth guidance and practical suggestions for creating an action plan.

More widely, there is mixed evidence of the effectiveness of this type of training. For example, a recent UK Government review of Unconscious Bias training (2020) states that there is limited evidence of its ability to effectively change behaviour and suggests instead that organisations invest in initiatives focused around processes (e.g. recruitment and progression) and commit to long term actions in order to support behavioural change.¹⁴

¹⁴ [Unconscious bias and diversity training – what the evidence says - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/reviews/unconscious-bias-and-diversity-training-what-the-evidence-says)

2.3. Equality Charter pilot

Research to inform the development of an Equality Charter for Scottish agriculture, including pilot interviews with participants from farms and organisations.

Research summary

One of the recommendations made by the Women in Agricultural Taskforce in their final report (2019) was that an Equality Charter for Scottish Agriculture is established and mainstreamed into all Scottish Government agricultural and related policies. This will create a platform to support participating agricultural businesses and organisations in their commitment to gender equality.¹⁵ Research was completed between 2019 and 2020 to inform the development of this Charter.

The Equality Charter is a set of principles and actions developed by the Taskforce, to ensure that everyone involved in an agricultural business has access to training, resources and career progression opportunities. The Charter sets out the key ways that businesses and organisations of any size in Scottish agriculture can work towards equality. It was created in order to raise awareness of the cultural barriers experienced by women and support positive change in the industry.

Research method

Between December 2019 and March 2020 we engaged with nine farms and organisations to pilot the Charter and to gather feedback. Participants were chosen on the basis of farm type and location, to ensure we included different types of businesses (diversified business, cereal and crops, horticulture and poultry, dairy, sheep and cattle LFA, cattle and arable, family croft) that are located across Scotland.

Interviews were undertaken with ten participants (5 female and 5 male) from nine participating farms. The interviews aimed to: gather feedback on the Charter, examine whether the principles were clear to people working in agriculture, explore how they could implement it in their own business and discuss potential commitments that farms of different sizes could make.

Research findings

'I don't really know what else I can offer or do or add. We are mostly family, we only hire two people, we do school visits, participate in research [...]' (Interview 1)

¹⁵ [Women in Agriculture Taskforce: final report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

Research participants identified a number of manageable commitments that small farms could potentially take, including: engagement with schools and other educational activities; encouraging family members who usually do not attend NFUS meetings to attend them more frequently; and improvements to recruitment processes and internships.

The research highlighted the difference between small farms and larger farms or organisations, which hire more employees (i.e. non-family members) and have access to additional resources. The design of the Charter should take these differences into account. Commitments for large farms or organisations identified by participants included: unconscious bias training; public statements about equality, reviewing images and language in media engagement to reflect women's contribution to farming; improvements to recruitment procedures to attract more women; choosing suppliers who value equality, and providing training for staff.

Participants identified two main challenges in developing equality commitments. Firstly, the perception of many farmers that they are already doing enough in this area, and the limited capacity of small farms to meet the commitments. Secondly, the frequent staff rotation and seasonality of agricultural jobs. This means that the number of men or women working in various roles might be difficult to measure.

The pilot research also gathered participants' feedback on practical aspects of the Charter, including: advertisement and outreach, incentives and funding, and follow-up methods. The research pointed to potential challenges including: low rates of participation, how to plan follow-up research to monitor progress and how to ensure shared responsibility in meeting the commitments. Wider issues discussed with participants included: the gender diversity of agricultural boards; succession and taxation; and mental health in agriculture.

Follow-up research

In July 2020, we contacted the nine pilot participants to assess how they had progressed with their commitments. Five were available to take part in follow-up interviews. The research findings are summarised here:

- respondents stated that equality meant more than just gender. They emphasised the need to include other factors within the Charter, and to recognise that equality of opportunity should be for every race, religion, and ability
- some participants had not been able to progress with commitments due to the impact of COVID-19. Others had partially progressed, such as planning for training courses, or working towards implementing change once restrictions ended
- most respondents were unsure about what type of support they would need, in many cases due to a lack of progress and focus on COVID-19. Others stated that the level of support needed would vary depending on the size and type of farm

- when asked what the Equality Charter meant to them, respondents gave a range of answers from 'not a huge amount' to an essential building block for achieving equality. Everyone was aware of the importance of achieving equality within farms
- respondents were also aware that changing behaviours, attitudes, and traditions would take time, but that the charter would allow for more open discussion around the subjects of gender, race, and disability
- when asked if they had any recommendations for new commitments, respondents gave answers including wider inclusion of supply chain organisations, such as marts, auctioneers, and other suppliers, and a set of wider commitments suitable for smaller agricultural holdings such as crofts
- when asked if they would recommend the charter to others, all participants stated that they would do so if the charter could be improved, expanded, and appropriately linked with other policies. They saw value in its ambitions and hoped it succeeded.

Next steps

The WIA Equality Charter is currently under a new phase of development, and research planned for 2021-22 will contribute to this work (see page 34).

2.4. Islands consultation

Research to ensure that training delivered through the Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP) is accessible for women on islands. The survey received 24 responses in total and a final report was completed in December 2020.

Research summary

This research was carried out as part of an islands consultation to find out how to make the Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP) as accessible as possible for women on islands. Through a short online survey we aimed to:

- research the needs and experiences of women in Scottish island communities in accessing training opportunities
- identify and understand the main barriers that prevent women from island communities attending training
- gather their perspectives on how to make training more accessible to women from island communities

Research method

A short online survey (10-15 minutes) was shared by email and stakeholder groups in October 2020. The survey targeted women in island communities who live or work in Scottish agriculture and received 24 responses in total.

Respondents included women from ages 18 to 69 from 13 different island communities. Over half of respondents lived or worked on a croft, a third lived or worked on a farm and over a tenth lived or worked on a smallholding.

Respondents worked in a range of roles on a farm, croft or small holding. The most common were administration, for example business accounts, sales, contracts (86%), household management, such as cleaning (82%) and livestock management, for example lambing, milking, rearing calves (77%).

Research findings

The research indicated that women in island communities would find practical, technical and business skills training (for example IT, business finance, equipment training) most useful. Half of respondents (50%) thought that training in these areas would lead to more women in their island communities taking up leadership roles, including within agriculture.

Over half of respondents had previously planned to attend a training course and then been unable to. The most common issues or barriers that prevent women in island communities participating in training were identified as travel distances, time constraints, caring responsibilities, and lack of opportunities. Practical adjustments such as travel grants and online training were commonly seen as ways to increase participation.

Respondents indicated a slight preference for face to face training (42%) over online training (33%), for reasons including the accessibility and flexibility of online training, responsibilities such as childcare and health concerns due to COVID-19.

The majority of respondents (67%) stated a preference for local training. For training held in mainland Scotland locations, respondents stated that Glasgow and the Highlands, including Oban and Inverness would be most accessible.

In terms of the timing of events and training, aspects which respondents stated should be considered included farming calendars (for example lambing and harvest), weather, travel disruptions, and ferry timetables. They identified a need for further opportunities; flexibility in terms of learning, and inter-island connectivity.

3. Current research

This section outlines research currently being conducted for the Women in Agriculture programme, including the evaluation of the 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot and research into women's leadership programmes.

3.1. 'Be Your Best Self' Evaluation

An evaluation of the 'Be Your Best Self' training pilot 2020-2021, funded through the Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP) through follow-up interviews with women from cohorts 1-4, and an analysis of pre-course and post-course questionnaires sent to all attendees.

Research methods

All attendees on the 'Be Your Best Self' 2020-2021 training pilot were asked to complete a pre-course and post-course questionnaire. Follow-up interviews with 6-8 women from across cohorts 1-4 are also being conducted, 6 to 12 months after they have finished the training. The interviews focus on the long-term impact of the course on their confidence, skills they have developed, changes and/or barriers they have experienced.

Four interviews have been conducted so far with women from the first two cohorts. The interviews explore whether the course has achieved its intended outcomes:

- Connect - participants will connect with like-minded individuals and gain a support network of women in agriculture that is maintained after the completion of the pilot.
- Support - participants will recognise their shared experiences, and gain increased levels of optimism, self-worth and confidence in their own skills, strengths and experiences.
- Represent - participants will gain the confidence to put themselves forward for and take on further opportunities, including having a voice in decision-making on their own farm, croft or smallholding and in agricultural organisations, representing the industry at local/national level.

Research findings

The results from pre-course and post-course questionnaires demonstrate that:

- respondents felt more optimistic about their future in agriculture after completing the course, and had clearer ideas about their future in agriculture

- participants were more confident that they have useful skills, strengths and experiences after completing the course
- the majority of respondents stated that the course had a 'positive impact' on their confidence in their own skills, strengths and experiences (86%)
- after the course, the majority of respondents stated that they would feel more confident about taking part in agricultural events (78%) and signing up for further training or employment opportunities (88%)
- respondents felt more connected to other women in agriculture after taking part in the course. Whilst beforehand, nearly half were 'unsure' if they had good connections to other women in agriculture (47%), afterwards, the majority of respondents said they had good connections to other women in agriculture (90%)
- all who responded to the post-course questionnaire stated that they thought the course would be beneficial to other women in agriculture

'Now, if they're not listening, I'll sit them down and say look, you're not listening to me, I want to speak to you [...] if I've got something to say that I feel is important, I'll make sure that I do get listened to.' (Interview 1)

'Before, I would shy away from things that I hadn't done before [...] I'm more inclined to be like, right, I'll put a bale out for the cattle, I'll plough this park [...] trying to tell myself, just do it [...] try new things.' (Interview 2)

Interviews conducted with women from Cohorts 1-2 indicate that:

- the course has had a positive impact on interviewees' sense of confidence, optimism and self-worth, and has led to positive changes in terms of their own roles in farming and agriculture
- the course has led to lasting connections and the creation of a support group of women in agriculture, with participants staying in touch online and offering advice and support to each other during the past year
- those interviewed have valued the opportunity to meet women of different ages and backgrounds, from various locations and roles in farming, and to learn from each other's experiences
- the course has helped women who are at different stages of their lives, to refocus and re-prioritise
- the course has helped most interviewees to feel more optimistic about the future and confident about exploring new opportunities
- all interviewees stated that they would recommend or have recommended the course to other women

Research with BYBS participants indicates the value in building connections between women in agriculture, and the potential for a wider network:

‘It’d be great to meet up with the other cohorts as well [...] I think there is the start of a network there that could be very influential and [...] thinking about where this goes now [...] it’s a bit of a launch-pad.’ (BYBS participant)

Next steps

Following the success of the pilot and positive feedback from the women who have taken part, the Scottish Government is funding another series of ‘Be Your Best Self’ courses, which will be delivered during 2021-2022, starting in October 2021. These courses will also be evaluated through pre-course and post-course questionnaires, and follow-up interviews with participants from across different cohorts.

In addition, a short online survey will be sent to ‘Be Your Best Self’ applicants in order to collect equalities data on age, sex, gender identity or trans status, sexual orientation, health, religion and ethnic group. This data will enable Scottish Government to monitor the impact of Women in Agriculture programmes and will contribute to our work to improve the collection of equalities data and promote equality and diversity within Scottish agriculture.

3.2. Leadership programme

The Women in Agriculture leadership programme will be delivered in 2022 and will form part of the Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP). Research into leadership programmes and models suitable for women in Scottish agriculture will provide an evidence base for the development of this pilot.

Research summary

Previous research found evidence of a lack of women in leadership positions in Scottish agriculture.¹⁶ It also identified cultural barriers and significant unconscious gender bias where women are not expected to be in leadership positions.

Whilst wider research points to positive changes within agricultural businesses and organisations since this report, there are still a lack of women in leadership roles, and several barriers remain, including: cultural barriers and attitudes; women’s lack of confidence; practical issues such as time commitment or lack of training; and male-

¹⁶ [Women in farming and the agriculture sector: research report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/research/publications/women-in-farming-and-the-agriculture-sector-research-report-2020/women-in-farming-and-the-agriculture-sector-research-report-2020.pdf)

dominated organisations. Further work is needed to ensure that women are better represented in agriculture and progress to more senior roles in sector bodies.

The Women in Agriculture leadership programme will be delivered in 2022. It will be an important part of the Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP), following a recommendation by the Women in Agriculture Taskforce (2019) that the Scottish Government develop a leadership course to form a cohort of women ready to take up leadership roles in Scottish agriculture.

To plan the development of the leadership programme, ensure it is appropriately designed and successful in enabling more women to take up leadership positions within Scottish agriculture, an evidence review of leadership programmes and models suitable for women in Scottish agriculture will be conducted, alongside qualitative research.

Research methods

The research will include an evidence review of leadership programmes, and interviews with women in mid-level and leadership positions in Scottish agriculture.

The evidence review will examine a range of leadership programmes and current practice. It will look at wider literature and case studies of both rural and women's leadership programmes, across relevant sectors. Initial findings from this review are outlined below.

A series of interviews are also being conducted, focusing on participants' experiences as women in mid-level or leadership positions in different sectors; their career journeys; barriers or challenges they have faced; the skills, training and support networks that have benefitted them and their views on a leadership development programme for women in agriculture.

Research findings

The evidence review has highlighted the following:

- women and men have different experiences in the workplace, and this has an impact on women's career progression and approach to leadership, which in turn has implications for the development of women's leadership programmes
- leadership has traditionally been equated with 'masculine' behaviours and practices, and women in leadership face a number of challenges
- a range of studies point to the need for women's leadership development programmes, as traditional programmes have failed to meet their needs. Research has found that women who are given opportunities to connect with other women and gain leadership knowledge are more likely to aspire for leadership roles

- women-only leadership programmes have a range of benefits, including providing a safe environment for openness, self-reflection and learning. Participants should be given the opportunity to construct a leadership identity and practise using new skills
- women’s approaches to leadership will be shaped by multiple aspects of their identity, including class, race and disability. Leadership programmes should take participants’ diverse perspectives into account, alongside specific challenges that women face in particular organisations or sectors
- research highlights the importance of providing participants with diverse role models of women in leadership, and hearing them speak about their careers
- women’s leadership programmes should teach both practical skills and leadership theories, and lead to tangible outputs, such as mentoring relationships and networks. These programmes often use collaborative learning practices
- widely used techniques within women’s leadership courses include action learning, self-assessment tools, peer-to-peer feedback, role models and speakers, mentoring, networking, career planning exercises and leadership plans
- wider literature highlights the role that organisations can play in ensuring that women’s leadership development programmes are successful and sustainable in the long-term, and the need for wider change in addition to targeted programmes

Several women who have taken part in interviews about the ‘Be Your Best Self’ training pilot (see Section 3.1) have indicated their interest in applying for leadership programmes to gain further practical skills and develop their careers. As one stated, ‘I want to put as much into my career as I can’ and ‘be a better manager’. Another, when asked what kind of skills she felt she would gain from the course, said:

‘Confidence building, dealing with difficult conversations, staff management [...] how to put your point of view across [...] to senior management as well as staff, how to have these conversations that you need to have [...]’ (Interview 4)

Next steps

The initial research findings demonstrate the importance of women’s leadership programmes in enabling women to gain the confidence and skills they need to articulate a leadership identity and progress in their careers.

The evidence review indicates the importance of considering: who to develop the programme for; designing a monitoring and evaluation plan; outlining a shared understanding of ‘leadership’; acknowledging the barriers and challenges experienced by women in Scottish agriculture; inviting women in leadership positions to speak about their careers; and ensuring ongoing support and engagement from agricultural organisations.

Further interviews will be conducted in October-November 2021.

4. Future research

This section summarises future planned research, including commissioned research on evidence-based approaches to equality commitments in organisations and the evaluation of further Women in Agriculture training pilots.

4.1. Equality commitments

Research on evidence-based approaches to implementing equality commitments in organisations has been commissioned to explore effective ways of bringing about greater gender equality at a structural level within Scottish agricultural organisations.

Research aims

The research will gather evidence on what specific actions have been taken within other industries, such as transport, construction, fisheries and aquaculture. The project will produce case studies of relevant actions and examine ways of monitoring their impact. The final report will outline practical solutions and examples. This will inform the development of a gender equality initiative for Scottish agriculture in line with recommendations made by the WIA taskforce in their Final Report (2019).

The pilot phase of the Equality Charter indicated support for the principles of equality and diversity, however the ambition to create a Charter with commitments for businesses of all sizes proved to be difficult to implement. This suggests a two-pronged approach to creating a culture of change both within industry organisations and in individual farming businesses will be more effective. Further evidence is needed to ensure that any new gender equality initiative within Scottish agriculture is appropriately designed and implemented in order to encourage long-term change.

This research will focus on industry organisations and businesses, which have the capacity to implement structural changes, particularly at board and senior management level. A range of equality and diversity initiatives have already been developed across different industries, including: changes to recruitment practices; training and mentoring programmes; flexible working options, job-share and parental leave policies; and equal pay reviews. However, there is a lack of robust evidence about the long-term impact of these interventions, what has been successful and why.

This research will outline practical solutions and examples. It will comprise an evidence review and produce 4-6 illustrative case studies. The project will start in November 2021 and a report will be published by June 2022.

4.2. 'Knowing your Business' evaluation

The 'Knowing Your Business' training pilot will be delivered through four online courses, 2022-2023. This research will contribute to the evaluation of the pilot.

Research summary

This research will evaluate the 'Knowing Your Business: specialist training for women in agricultural businesses' training pilot, part of the Women in Agriculture Development Programme. The course will consist of high level training for women living or working in Scottish agriculture, specifically addressing business skills and knowledge.

Research methods

The evaluation will include pre-course and post-course questionnaires and follow-up research, for example interviews, case studies and site visits.

The questionnaires will be completed by all attendees. They will explore the impact of the course on attendees' levels of confidence, business knowledge and diversification plans. All applicants will also be asked to complete an Equalities monitoring form.

Follow-up research will then be conducted with a sample of participants from across the four cohorts 6-12 months after they have completed the course. The interviews will explore its long-term impact and whether it has achieved its main outcomes by:

- equipping them with knowledge, understanding and skills to develop or improve their family farm or agricultural business
- enabling them to have greater confidence in raising financial issues and taking part in financial decisions relating to the family business;
- encouraging them to implement ideas for diversifying their family business

The interviews will be semi-structured, with a focus on the skills and knowledge that participants have gained from the course, and how they are putting them into practice in their own businesses. A case study method may be used, incorporating interviews and site visits. If so, 2-3 case studies will be developed in order to explore the impact of the training on participants' businesses, for example: their diversification ideas and plans; applications for grants or funding; plans to develop their business or improve the profitability and sustainability of their farm, croft or small-holding; ability to future-proof their business, including succession plans; and their relationships with other businesses.

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Annex 1

The challenges of rural childcare provision, innovative models and the needs of agricultural families – highlights

This summary presents findings from interviews conducted in 2020 with childcare providers in rural and remote areas of Scotland, which explored issues that impact the financial sustainability of services.



There is a lack of choice for parents in rural areas. Whilst many providers struggle due to low numbers of children, others have long waiting lists. Successful services are often run collaboratively.



Parents in rural areas benefit from affordable childcare, longer days to fit around working hours, out-of-school care and additional sessions, but many rural providers lack capacity to offer this.



Parents have a range of jobs and working patterns in rural areas. It is often women who transport children to childcare settings, and this has an impact on their employability.



Agricultural families have busier and quieter times of the year, including lambing and the harvest, and would benefit from being able to book additional childcare when they need it.



There is a shortage of suitable facilities in rural areas, and sharing buildings with other groups can lead to additional costs and work for staff. Outdoor providers face further practical challenges.



Most children are driven to rural childcare services, with journeys varying from 15 minutes to an hour. In remote areas, this impacts accessibility and causes issues in the winter.



Providers face challenges in recruitment and in accessing training. Innovative childcare models, including outdoor nurseries, provide opportunities in rural areas and are popular with families.

The financial sustainability of rural childcare services is impacted by lower numbers of children and changes in demand, and challenges in childcare provision are connected to wider issues in rural areas.

COVID-19 has led to increases in demand in some rural areas due to the closure of other local settings, and additional financial costs.





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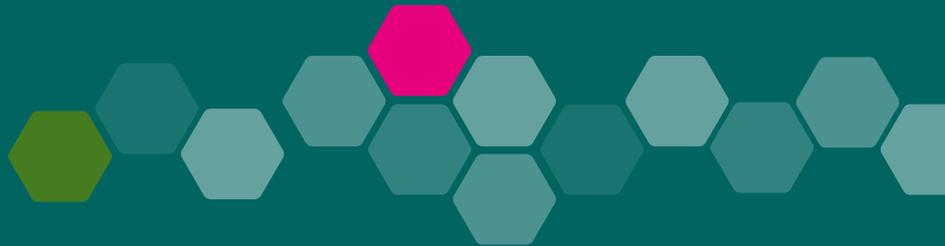
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