



# **Crofters & Smallholders Skills Boost 2016 - 2019 Final Report**

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## SKILLSBOOST 2016 – 2019 KTIF Final Report

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- 1. Project Title:** 2016 – 2019 Crofters and Smallholder Skills Boost  
**Applicant:** Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF)

- 2. Executive Summary**

The 2016 – 2019 Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost training project, managed by the Scottish Crofting Federation, addressed a profound lack of non-accredited vocational training in the Highlands and Islands. It was aimed at increasing primary agriculture skills for 1200 participants – existing and incoming crofters and smallholders over 1260 training days. Its intention was to increase skill and improve viability of crofting agriculture providing associated economic, social and environmental benefits to rural communities.

The project comprised 3 elements – 15 x Access to Crofting Tool Kit (ACT) courses which offered an introduction to Scottish agriculture directly related to crofters and smallholders; 79 x Bitesize Skills courses – practical, one day, vocational training courses in primary agriculture; 12 x Woodland courses in association with the Woodland Trust Scotland and 18 x Township Training events which focused on co-operation and the development of knowledge transfer amongst crofters and smallholders.

The project cost £428,400 in total with a contribution from KTIF of £267,618, (75% intervention) the balance being met by HIE, Woodland Trust Scotland, SCVO, SNH and participant income. Overall, the project established 3 full-time posts employed 180 tutors and 102 local courses directors on a sessional basis, hired 170 venues and 15 local caterers. The economic and social capital arising from the project increased the social and economic capacity Highland and Island crofting communities.

Project aims and objectives were fulfilled within budget and all milestones and outputs achieved, some being higher than anticipated. The project reached a significantly higher number of participants than the anticipated 1200 attendees. Instead reaching a total of 1646 over 1792 training days. Other unexpected outcomes showed a greater engagement with young crofters aged under 40 and a greater percentage of women attendees than anticipated. In addition a specific demand for women-only training courses which aligned with recent findings illuminated by Scottish Government research in terms of Women living and working in the agriculture sector.

Participant data indicates that of the 1646 trainees who attended 56% were female and 44% were male, 61% were aged 41 and over, 39% were aged 40 or under. Feedback from evaluation forms showed that 98% of participants found that courses either met with or exceeded their expectations. Qualitative data exemplifies how social, economic and environment outcomes were achieved. Project evaluation highlights challenges and lessons learnt in terms of human resource management and operational challenges in terms of delivering some courses. Steps to mitigate these challenges are identified in terms of future recommendations.

### 3. Project Description

The project was aimed at increasing primary agriculture skills for 1200 participants - existing and in-coming crofters and smallholders – over 1260 training days. Its intention was to increase skills and improve viability of crofting agriculture providing associated economic, social and environmental benefits to rural communities.

The project cost £428,400 in total with a contribution from KTIF of £267,618 representing a 75% intervention rate, the balance being met by HIE, Woodland Trust Scotland, SCVO, SNH and participant income. The project addressed a profound lack of non-accredited vocational training for crofters and smallholders in the Highlands and Islands.

Managed by the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), a non-profit stakeholder-led organisation recognised as the representative of crofters and crofting. SCF has considerable experience in the successful delivery of this type of project. A collaborative Project Advisory Committee comprising The Crofting Commission; Forestry and Land Scotland; LANTRA; SNH; SAC; Woodland Trust Scotland; and HIE agreed to oversee the project through quarterly meetings.

### 4. Finance

#### 4.1 Sum awarded by Scottish Government

£267.618

#### 4.2 Detail of Spend

Table 1: Skillsboost 2016 – 2019 KTIF Project Budget

<b><i>Budget Heading</i></b>	<b><i>Approved Budget</i></b>	<b><i>Total Spend to Date As at 30 June 2019</i></b>
Project Development	£29,647.88	£29,647.88
Project Management	£70,703.25	£70,703.25
Trainer Fees	£100,941.46	£100,941.46
Trainer T&S	£16881.05	£16881.05
Venue	£32,296.57	£32,296.57
Materials	£6,053.26	£6,053.26
Publicity	£11,094.53	£11,094.53
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267,618.00</b>	<b>267,618.00</b>

### 4.3 Cost of Courses

Table 2 details the match sources of funding and their contribution together with a breakdown of the actual contribution to costs in terms of participants and training days held. In total the Scottish Government KTIF fund contributed £267,618 to the project, which represents a cost of £149 per training day based on 1792 training days which took place. This intervention helped to significantly reduce overall costs to trainees most of whom are living in remote and rural areas of Scotland and would otherwise be unable to attend a course far away from home.

<b>Table 2: Costs per course, per participant and per training day</b>				
Sources	Contribution	Cost per course	Cost per participant	cost per training day
Scottish Government	267618	2158	163	149
Other Public	101206	816	61	56
Participant Income	44100	356	27	25
Other Private	15475	125	9	9
Total	428399	3455	260	239
Public	368824	2974	224	206

*The preceding information has been extracted from the final external evaluation of the project undertaken by Dr D Heaney, Rossal Research and Consultancy.*

The project created: -

- 3 full-time posts over the 3-year period.
- Employed 180 sessional tutors.
- Employed 102 sessional Local Courses Directors.
- Hired 170 venues and 15 local caterers.

This investment in local crofting communities was noted by Dr David Heaney within the project evaluation as having an estimated multiplier effect of 3-4 in remote and rural areas of Scotland.

## 5. Project Aims and Objectives

Overall project aims were to deliver a suite of vocational training courses, to enhance skills development and knowledge transfer for crofters and smallholders living in the Highlands and Islands. Aims and objectives were aligned to overall policy aims within the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP).

The project comprised of 3 components:

Component 1. "Access to Crofting Tool Kit" 15 two day courses were held. Training offered an introduction to Scottish agriculture directly related to crofters and smallholders. Anticipated costs being £32,775.

- Delivery - 2 days blended learning course through use of written material delivered via flipped classroom hosted on cloud and face to face delivery.

Content - 3 learning themes:

1. Primary agricultural production and improving food chain organization: practices in soil and land management; animal nutrition, production and welfare;
2. Strengthening the agri-business competitiveness of small units of production (less than 30ha in size): an introduction to agricultural economics and how crofting activity sits with local, national and European policy; and
3. Increasing environmental sustainability of crofting ecosystems, best practice land management and GAEC and increased resource efficiency to reduce carbon footprints.

Supplementary to this there was a dedicated online forum hosted via Facebook and Twitter, "#croftcraic" to support course participants, moderated by SCF throughout the project to facilitate a peer-led knowledge share for new entrants to crofting both pre- and post- training.

The outcomes assigned to ACT were that participants would understand the role of crofting and its context within rural policy; the role of primary production within crofting; and the role of crofting ecosystems. Qualitative and data in annexe 2 indicates that this was achieved and the Access to Crofting Toolkit 98% of participants found the training course useful to support early stage decision making and to support a start into crofting.

Component 2. “Bitesize Skills”. 79 Practical, one day, vocational training courses in primary agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of goods within the food chain. It was anticipated that training would cost of £100,975.

- Delivery: 1 day vocational skills training to support agricultural competitiveness for crofters and smallholders, upskill primary productions methods, enhance land management skills and support resource efficiency. These courses were designed to attract participants who were looking to up-skill in a particular aspect of agricultural knowledge.
  - Content: 3 learning themes: would be explored technical issues and management techniques in an informal classroom setting followed by a practical outdoors session where trainees would get the opportunity to learn a new skill within a situated environment by using a working croft or small farm as a training venue. This authentic learning experience would give trainees confidence to use the skills gained within their own enterprise.
1. Small scale production: livestock and cropping. e.g.: animal husbandry, animal handling, nutrition and finishing. Crop rotations, extending horticultural production in polytunnels, permanent pasture management and grazing.
  2. Land management for primary production: soil, drainage and boundary management. e.g. no till and undersowing, improving soil organic matter and composting, drainage and wetland management, fencing, walling and hedgerow creation
  3. Greening and agro-ecology production systems. Exploring the nature and structure of crofting landscapes to help maintain crofting practices to meet environmental/climate goals within a production system. e.g.: organic production systems, conserving soil carbon and grassland habitats, identifying key species within a croft enterprise.

The outcomes assigned to the bitesize training courses were to deliver a range of hands-on practical, vocational skills training courses according to demand, aligned to primary agricultural production. 95% of participants learned a new skill and 94% built on previous skills. Further to this knowledge transfer between peers was highlighted as a benefit of the courses by 96% of attendees.

Component 3. “Township Training” 18 events. Focusing on cooperation and the development of knowledge transfer in rural areas amongst crofters and smallholders. This element of the project was intended to engender collaboration and best practice via the introduction of network meetings, demonstration activities and visits to crofts and smallholdings. It was anticipated that training would cost of £9,090.

- Delivery: Half day training events, were to be delivered in the form of facilitated crofter network meetings, demonstration days and croft visits. The facilitation of the training was to be key to the delivery of the training which would be learner-led focusing on distinct learning outcomes (LO). This training would be accessed by collective groups

for example common grazings committees, townships, crofter's associations and producer groups.

- Content: The intention was to focus on a particular area of best practice or innovation within primary production or land management and aims to facilitate intergenerational exchange amongst participants as well as from tutors.

This aspect of training delivered events aimed at established crofters in varied range of contexts from demo days at crofting events, to croft walks and tailored training events for common grazings management. Qualitative data indicated participants were able to adapt measures to increase competitiveness, upskill and update crofting practice.

## 6. Project Outcomes

Quantitative Data: Milestones and Outputs

Milestone	Result
Appoint 3 Project Staff	All Milestones detailed within our original application were achieved.
Source appropriate office accommodation for project staff working out with SCF Head Office.	
Develop paperwork and processes to support project components.	
Develop new 4 stage evaluation process to fully monitor and evaluate outcomes and impacts.	
Refine existing administrative and financial processes to support project.	
Hold initial project training event for Local Course Directors and Support Staff.	
Run 15 Access to Crofting Took Kit events.	
Run 75 Bitesize Skills Events	
Run 12 Bitesize (Woodland Trust) Events	
Run 18 Township Training Events	
Hold 6 Project Advisory Committee Meetings	
Hold 9 Project Management Review Meetings	
Achieve training targets of 400 participants	
Hold final project evaluation event for Local Course Directors and support staff.	
Produce 3 Annual Reports Produce final Internal Evaluation of project.	
Ensure projected completed within contract period adhering to funders contracts and claims processes.	

*The preceding information has been extracted from the final external evaluation of the project undertaken by Dr D Heaney, Rossal Research and Consultancy.*



## 6.1. Numbers of courses, participants and training days

Table 3: Anticipated Outputs vs Achieved Outputs

Course Type		Anticipated Outputs	Outputs Achieved	Difference	Percent of anticipated outcome
Access to Crofting Toolkit	Participants	150	272	122	181%
	Courses	15	15	0	100%
	Training Days	300	544	244	181%
Bitesize	Participants	750	842	92	112%
	Courses	75	79	4	105%
	Training Days	750	842	92	112%
Township Training	Participants	180	252	72	140%
	Courses	18	18	0	100%
	Training Days	90	126	36	140%
Croft Woodland	Participants	120	280	160	233%
	Courses	12	12	0	100%
	Training Days	120	280	160	233%
Total Numbers	Participants	1200	1646	446	137%
	Courses	120	124	4	103%
	Training Days	1260	1792	532	142%

\* A croft woodland conference was held in year 3, with 4 courses, 173 attenders.

\*\*  $Training\ days\ Total = (ACT*2) + (BS*1) + (TT* 0.5) + (WL *1)$

Using extractions from SCF database, the table above shows the anticipated and achieved number of participants, courses and training days by type of course. The number of courses achieved was as anticipated, except for four additional Bitesize courses. In total 124 courses were delivered over three years. Courses were delivered across different crofting areas which included Skye, Gairloch, Moray, Caithness, Argyll, Easter-Ross, Wester-Ross, Lewis and Shetland.

It should be noted that, in year 3, a croft woodland conference was held, and 4 courses were held within it. 173 people attended the conference, which was organised by the Woodland Trust, and they are included in the numbers presented. In years 1 and 2 there were 8 woodland courses with 107 participants. Overall there were 1646 participants in the skills boost project over the three years.

This exceeds the anticipated number by 446, 137% of the anticipated output. Achieved numbers were higher than anticipated for each of the course types. This resulted in the number of training days exceeding Targets 1792 rather than the 1260 anticipated, a difference of 532; 142% of the anticipated output.

- Popularity and appetite for the Access to Crofting Toolkit (ACT) was exponential (181%)
- Unique training for early stage crofters was offered through the ACT aligns with Scottish Government objectives to *“bring new blood into crofting communities and ensure it can contribute to the development of a thriving rural Scotland”*
- Overall participant numbers exceeded targets and this demand continues beyond the life of the training project
- Localised, demand-led courses proved popular and there is a strong element of goodwill demonstrated by use of waiting list to fill courses within a short timeframe
- A variety of courses reached a wide number of participants over a wide ranging geographic area. This was supported by a central booking and project management team that could provide learning opportunities to participants who could engage with a suite of training opportunities for adult learners.
- SCF training has been highlighted in terms of best practice through an independent evaluation of instructor networks across Scotland carried out by Ian Pearce for LANTRA Scotland.

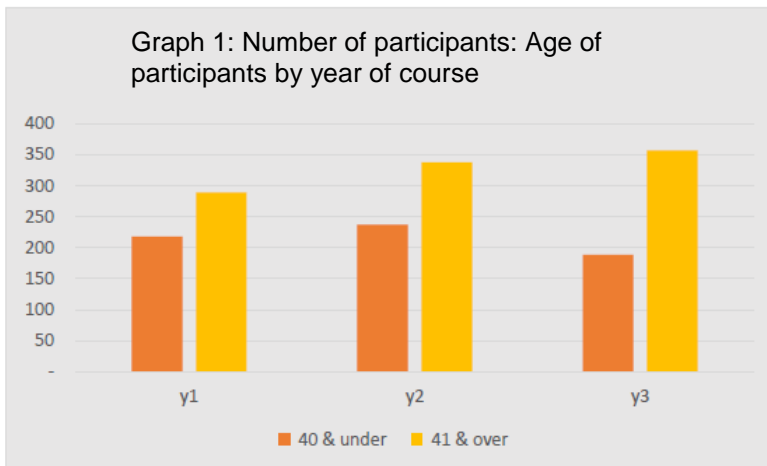
## 6.2. Characteristics of participants

Data was extracted from the SCF training register database records gender and age of participants. Participants aged 25 and under were noted on the ACT and Bitesize courses only, as the MacRobert Trust sponsored places for those aged 16 – 25.

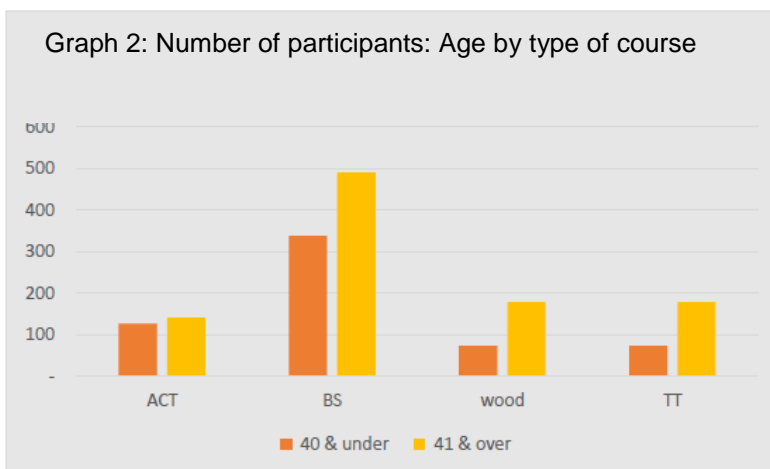
Table 4: Demographic data extracted from enrolment forms

<b>Course</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Aged 41+</b>	<b>Aged 26 - 40</b>	<b>Aged 16 - 25</b>
Access	113	154	141	99	27
Bitesize	331	497	490	237	101
Woodland	71	36	76	31	n/a
Township	125	126	178	73	n/a
<b>TOTAL %</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>9%</b>

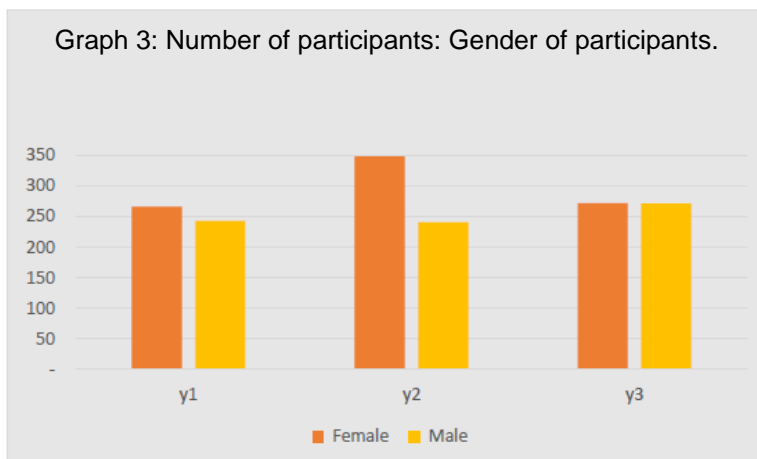
SCF have demonstrated the ability to deliver training that encouraged women to attend training. Their approach encouraged women to attend the courses. Perhaps, the fact that the training team were all women, meant this was seen as important; there was also a deliberate effort to deliver training events that was inclusive. Steps were taken to ensure that trainers and staff were aware of gender issues. The training courses also have helped to reduce social isolation: several participants commented in qualitative review that crofting is a lonely occupation.



Graph 1 shows the age of participants (40 and under, 41 and above) by year of course which indicates higher numbers of older people than younger people in each year, and the gap is wider in year 3, perhaps due to the fact relatively less Bitesize courses were run.



Graph 2 shows the age bands by type of course. Older people outnumbered younger people on each type of course, although the younger: older ratio was almost equal in the Access to Crofting toolkit courses.



Graph 3 indicates there were 12% more women participants than men. This is particularly the case in year 2, when two women-only fencing courses took place.

### 6.3 Participants' perspectives

All participants in courses were asked to complete a pre-course / post-course questionnaire. This was collected separately in the Township Training Courses which were devolved to local areas. The table below shows the percentages of ACT/WL/BS participants who strongly agreed or agreed with statements and is based on 1069 responses. ACT course participants had some different questions, so they are

presented separately from Bitesize and Woodland courses. This table is important as it demonstrates that participants achieved the desired outcomes of the course.

<b>Table 5: Participant responses to post-event questionnaire</b>	
Percent of participants who strongly agree or agree that	%
The course met or exceeded my expectations	98.2%
The course was pitched at the right level for me	96.5%
The trainer was clear and easy to understand	98.9%
The trainer responded well to questions	99.7%
The handouts were useful (if applicable)	97.6%
The venue met or exceeded my expectations	97.3%
<b>ACCESS TO CROFTING TOOLKIT</b>	
I now have a better understanding of small-scale crofting agricultural production	98.2%
I now feel more informed about crofting in the context of national and EU policy	88.2%
I now have an understanding of primary production and food chain organisation	86.0%
I have gained croft land management skills	90.0%
I have a better understanding of crofting ecosystems	84.0%
I have more knowledge of resource efficiency & low carbon economy	65.9%
<b>BITESIZE/WOODLAND</b>	
I will now be able to increase my product quality	82.0%
I have built on my previous skills	94.1%
I learned a new skill	95.2%
I have been able to access peer support and shared knowledge	96.1%
It will now be able to manage my croft more effectively	89.2%

n=1068

*The following analysis has been extracted from the final external evaluation of the project undertaken by Dr D Heaney, Rossal Research and Consultancy.*

*“People who attended the courses have been either very satisfied or satisfied with them, with very few exceptions. 98% of respondents agreed that the course met or exceeded their expectations, 96% that the course was pitched at the right level, 99% that the trainer was clear and easy to understand, almost all that the trainer responded well to questions, 98% that handouts were useful and 97% that the venue met or exceeded expectations.*

*98% of participants on the Access to Crofting Toolkit gained a better understanding of small-scale crofting agricultural production, 90% gained croft land management skills. 65% have more knowledge of resource efficiency & low carbon economy.*

*98% of respondents on Bitesize/woodland courses learnt a new skill, 82% felt they will be able to increase product quality.”*

The evaluation of the ACT course reveals its strengths in terms of land management practice, production methods and its place within policy. However, only 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of respondents felt that the course allowed a greater understanding of resource efficiency and a low carbon economy. This was highlighted within the evaluation at an early stage and directly relates to learning outcomes within theme 3:

### **THEME 3: CROFT LAND MANAGEMENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

*Based on National Occupational Standards LANCS70, LANCSH3, LANEM15, LANAgM8*

To identify the key characteristics of croft land use: topography, soil type, weather, different habitats (machair, in-bye, upland and hill systems). To highlight practical considerations when setting up a croft business: land type, size, buildings, apportionments and common grazing accessibility.

To develop an awareness of environmental best practice and a basic understanding of statutory environmental designations at a local, national and EU level and how these could affect croft and management and where to seek further advice or guidance. To understand habitat management and creation in a crofting context.

An annual course evaluation at end of year 1 and year 2 was held with the relevant ACT tutors and the lower response relating to resource efficiency and low carbon economy was highlighted as a potential area for improvement. Steps were taken to improve the communication of the intended learning outcomes with participants to increase the level of understanding in this respect which showed an improvement in year 3. This highlights an area to develop in future training, particularly with reference to policy outcomes in terms of learning for sustainability and agricultural sustainability.

Evaluation of participant perception data relating to the bitesize courses suggests that a firm grounding in practical skills acquisition and new skills was achieved. 82% related the learning to being able to increase product quality, although this figure is not commensurate with data relating to skills and learning. This indicates a potential area for improvement or development of new training that focuses on improving practical skills to directly and measurably improve quality and profitability of an enterprise.

## **7. Lessons Learned**

### **7.1 Issues/Challenges**

There were two main challenges during the project, firstly, that of project staff ill health. Our Training Administrator became seriously ill and long-term sickness sadly eventually led to ill health retirement. Ineligible costs that were unable to be retrieved from KTIF were in the region of £2,553 which fell to SCF core funds to cover. This needs to be taken into account through SCF core budgets when developing funded projects whereby staff absence will not be covered.

The second challenge related to the provision of Township Training events. Although all targets were met for this element of the project uptake was slow and tended to come from shared communities of practice such as breed societies (e.g. the Shetland Sheep Society). The original intention of the training events had been to allow learner-led demand from townships and grazings committees to develop the direction of courses. However established organisations did not access the training on the whole,

with the exception of a day developed and piloted to deliver a successful common grazings management workshop which ran in four areas of the crofting counties.

The lead tutor for this course was Arthur MacDonald, a skilled facilitator who has worked within crofting common grazings development and management across the crofting areas of Scotland. Using an interactive visual display “The Grazings Game” participants were given scenarios relating to croft land management, grazing duties, livestock production and regulatory frameworks to explore scenario planning. This was attended by a number of grazing shareholders, clerks and committee members and demand increased throughout the project.

## 7.2 Identified Impacts

Project impact was detailed as follows: -

**Economic Impact:** Increasing levels of production and improving agricultural products on crofts and smallholdings within the Highlands and Islands. Reducing overhead costs and streamlining efficiency.

- Early stage decision making through knowledge acquisition supported new entrant crofters to develop effective business models.
- Bite sized skills courses supported crofters to upskill to improve product quality and develop efficient and resilient businesses.
- Greater numbers of new entrants encouraged and retention of crofting enterprises within communities through skills development which aligns with wider economic policy for crofting areas

**Social Impact:** An increased productivity of crofts has a positive impact on local economies. Also, training courses improve social capital through facilitation of new community networks to encourage cooperation and the development of knowledge transfer within the Highland and Islands.

- Social justice aims achieved through gender equality policy and responding demand for training rooted in unconscious bias for women in agriculture.
- Development of strong instructor network and supporting peer to peer network development through crofting communities of practice.

**Environmental Impact:** Sustainability, land management to support environmental best practice and high nature value crofting. Supporting landscapes, biodiversity and livelihoods in remote and rural areas. Developing carbon neutral practice within agricultural production.

- Developing common grazings training, moorland and peatland management training days in association with SNH policy and support regimes.
- Croft land management module within the access to crofting course supports high nature value crofting practice and embeds best practice for greening to early career crofters.

## 8. Communication and Engagement

### Social Media

1. Facebook page was the main form of communication and with around 5,550 followers this proved successful vehicle to promote training and take booking enquiries.
2. At the same time, we open a new dedicated Skills Boost Facebook page which had 493 followers.
3. We have a closed Facebook group for peer to peer support - The Communal Fank for ACT participants which had 135 members.
4. Developed a new Women in Crofting closed Facebook group with 100 members.
5. Twitter @SCFHq and @SCFTraining with 3,834 followers.
6. Courses were regularly kept up to date on our own SCF Website using google analytics to assess traffic on the site.
7. Courses were kept up to date and featured on the Scottish National Rural Network (SNRN) website and social channels.

### Visual Media

8. Developed an SCF YouTube page and produced two videos promoting crofting training which were filmed at live training events and posted to the YouTube site
9. BBC Alba filmed a Women's Fencing Course and ran a piece on their nightly news programme "An La"

### Face to Face

10. Training was represented annually at the Royal Highland, Black Isle, Skye and NSA Highland Sheep Shows.
11. Self-employed tutors promoted SCF courses throughout their own social media, one such example is Elchies who ran goat keeping courses.
12. Local Course Directors promoted courses within their own township through attending meetings and putting up posters in local shops and halls.

### Printed Media and E Newsletters

13. Regular project updates were publicised in the SCF's magazine, The Crofter that is distributed to 1,800 members.
14. SCF's ENewsletter was used to promote the project, this goes out monthly to 1,000 people and Skills Boost produced a monthly training Enewsletter that was sent out to around 1,900 people.
15. HIE and Scottish National Rural Network Newsletters were also used to promote the training.
16. Seven articles appeared in the press regarding specific elements of the training project. The West Highland Free Press, the Ross Shire Journal, the Press and Journal and the Glasgow Herald.

## 9. Recommendations

- It is clearly apparent that this type of informal vocational training to support crofting development is required throughout the Highlands and Islands. There is a high level of goodwill which can be maintained through supportive funding regimes in remote and rural areas and this should be sought to develop and build new projects.
- Funding continuing training would bring benefit to Scottish crofters and smallholders in remote and rural areas which has a spin off to the rural economy in the Highland and Islands, allow crofting to contribute to building communities of practice and resilience in rural communities.
- It is highly unlikely that this depth and breadth of training could be sustained by private sources as crofting incomes are often derived from part-time activity. The project has developed capacity in terms of crofter training and it would be of tangible benefit for this to be maintained through future programmes to support a mixed land use and crofting community development.
- Skills Boost has succeeded in widening and strengthening skills in rural agriculture in the Highlands and Islands to a diverse audience, and SCF as a stakeholder-led organisation should continue to develop this approach building on the goodwill and momentum from previous initiatives.
- Developing a second tier Entry level Course aimed at crofters in early stages of production – 2 years + which could be part practical, part classroom based would pilot a mixed model to evolve the access to crofting toolkit. Live case studies, croft visits and tutor panel Q&A would enhance learner-led outcomes.
- While the face-to face element of training is both popular and highly beneficial, the provision of some aspects of training in an on-line learning format would enhance and augment learning for practical skills. Curated video lists, handouts and flipped classroom resources will add value to courses. Linking up with FAS resources on-line and existing providers who can curate resources will enhance values of resources for tutors and participants, which could open up and widen access to those who cannot easily take time away from the croft.
- Provision of more women-only practical skills courses would meet a growing demand and support Scottish Government Women in Agriculture taskforce initiatives. In addition widen social justice themes of equality in line with Scottish Government agricultural policy and policy to support learning for sustainability.



## **10. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the project met and exceeded targets within the original identified KTIF budget. With established administrative and financial processes in place and an excellent team of training professionals, the dynamism of the project team was able to quickly identify and meet demand and supply appropriate training to a range of crofters covering an extensive geographic area of Islands and mainland Scotland.

Recommendations suggest a further training programme could be developed to align with economic development, sustainability and social objectives within the crofting areas of Scotland to underpin policy direction and that SCF as a stakeholder-led organisation is well placed to do this. It is noted that the goodwill arising from the project is excellent evidenced through training waiting lists.

SCF have an excellent track record in achieving successful projects focusing on professional learning for crofters but given the challenging nature of distance to travel, scarcity of tutors and small class sizes in remote and rural areas coupled with costs of delivery means that future projects would require financial intervention to support such projects.

The responses of participants within project evaluation provide an in-depth perspective of what was achieved in the project. There were many learning points and reflections from the Bitesize courses in particular; the feedback from participants demonstrates the width and the depth of the learning that has gone on in the project, and this verifies that the desired outcomes of the project were achieved.

## **Annexe 1**

### **Qualitative Information to Support Achievement of Identified Impact**

#### **Access to Crofting Toolkit (ACT)**

*The outcomes assigned to ACT were that participants would understand the role of crofting and its context within rural policy; the role of primary production within crofting; and the role of crofting ecosystems.*

*Expectations. Participants on the Access to Crofting Toolkit course were asked about their Crofting background and why they chose to do the course. A small selection of several hundred quotes are included in Table 6 below. It was difficult to select quotes for inclusion in the table to one page. There were many stories, themes, hopes and ambitions. The quotes make interesting reading and display real diversity in the participants, some of whom wrote at length.*

*This ranges from those with generations of crofting in their family who felt unsure about taking over responsibility, to those who are moving back after years living elsewhere to take over a croft, to those who have moved from an urban environment and are interested in a change in lifestyle. Some of people were coming from different places, sometimes with a background in agriculture, sometimes with a desire to work on the land, and with new ideas, around the environment. There were people who just want to know more about crofting, or particular aspects of it, and those who have just inherited a croft and don't know what to do with it.*

*Participants displayed a range of experience. Some were no more than hopeful or interested in the idea of one day owning a croft. Other people wanted to understand the paperwork, some needed practical skills, and some wanted to see whether crofting was feasible for them. There were stories of father's croft, uncle's croft, inheritance, and the importance of community and heritage, in some cases persuading the older generation to keep the land. Many of the participants displayed a strong feeling of wanting to do something with the land, which perhaps, was not being used to its full potential.*

*Some participants were more interested in horticulture than animal husbandry. Others were realising the difficulty in getting a croft. This small sample of the comments conveys the context, and the range of backgrounds of participants. It also conveys enthusiasm and potential for the future. On the whole, those attending the Access to Crofting Toolkit participants were looking for a way of getting started.*

Table 7 Selected responses - Access to Crofting Toolkit: Do you have a crofting background and why you chose to do the course?
<i>We have recently purchased a new property with some land and keep sheep and horses. Looking to broaden my knowledge and understanding of crofting, record keeping, sheep husbandry etc.</i>
<i>Out of curiosity; to see if it is possible to become a crofter and if so how to go about it.</i>
<i>I currently grow my own veg/polytunnel/chickens/ducks/rabbits – my dream is to have a croft or smallholding, so I wanted to do the course to find out more about all aspects of crofting.</i>
<i>I feel it in an essential prerequisite for joining the world of crofting.</i>
<i>My wife and I have recently taken over a family croft and wish to make the best use of it we can manage.</i>
<i>Grown up on a croft so understand the basics, but now have my own croft and I am looking into developing my skills</i>
<i>my father has assigned his croft to me and I would like to know as much as possible</i>
<i>I have been a tenant of a community development croft now for almost 3 years. I have a small flock of breeding hebridean ewes. I still feel I am new to crofting, have not developed my skills as I would like to have, and am too reliant on the support of the crofting community. I wish to develop my skills and understanding and look to increasing my independence, and to develop my croft further</i>
<i>To find out more about how to start up, run a croft, finding the right land and financial info.</i>
<i>I grew up on a croft surrounded by sheep and have always shown an interest in getting my hands dirty helping out with anything I could. I decided to do this course because I always believed I could be a crofter but supposed I never thought I have enough knowledge about it. Also I have a keen interest in our history / heritage and how crofting effected the area and country I was born and raised in.</i>
<i>It provides an excellent introduction to the basics.</i>
<i>My family have crofted for generations. Having been brought up with crofting I have helped out from an early age. I moved to Aberdeen for a number of years but always home for lambing, shearing, sales. I am now home for good and my Mum is going to assign a croft to me. Even though I have a lot of experience in crofting I feel I don't know a lot of behind the scenes or how to take it further.</i>
<i>To give us some info on what we can do, what funding is available to us, who we can contact to help.</i>
<i>I have about an acre of land. Have a goat and looking to breed goats.</i>
<i>I am developing a business plan to start up a market garden.</i>
<i>I lived next to my Uncle's croft throughout my childhood and helped my grandparents and uncle with a range of tasks over the years. I recently and unexpectedly inherited my Uncle's croft and after winding up his business there, I now need to decide how best to work it and how to go about bringing it back to good order.</i>
<i>Grandfather still runs the croft my mother grew up on. I spent all my school and university holidays on the croft but will now be moving there on a work placement. I'm keen to gain some relevant qualifications to back up and build on my experience. To gain qualifications as evidence for crofting experience as well as attend formal learning of the correct procedures.</i>
<i>No formal education in animal husbandry- like to learn the basics &amp; meet other aspiring crofters.</i>
<i>I have recently taken on the tenancy of the croft from Dad so would like some guidance on what's involved and what's feasible on the land I have.</i>
<i>I would like to gain an insight into crofting, as this has always interested me. I would very much like to become involved in crofting, and hope that this course will give me the knowledge of what is required and help me decide whether to pursue this further.</i>
<i>We bought a 5 acre croft last summer but could do with help with getting grants and some advice about how to make the best use of the land that we own.</i>
<i>To ensure I understand how to make the best of crofting - and legalities involved. (Maximising carbon sequestration / low carbon use/ community resilience important)</i>
<i>I would like to get into crofting but am having difficulty finding land</i>

*ACT Learning Points. Participants were asked the main learning points from the course. The main learning points included:*

- *For some everything was new, all aspects were learning points, and a lot was learned.*
- *Trainers and network: New entrants appreciated meeting other crofters, interacting with experienced crofter tutors and interacting with peer crofters.*
- *Croft management/ record keeping*
- *Horticulture and Livestock*
- *Subsidies/grants*
- *The Law*
- *Crofting may not be for me.*

*Several quotes illustrate participants' learning points.*

<i>A lot of very good learning points, best is that I now feel very confident knowing what information I need to get and where to get it.</i>
<i>That is sounds totally impossible to ever get a croft. This is useful to know.</i>
<i>Red tape surrounding acquiring, keeping, maintaining livestock.</i>
<i>Enthusiasm, encouragement, ideas.</i>
<i>I have a more concise idea of how to go about achieving my croft and what I should do with it. I will be looking into more detailed information I have been given so that I can get started asap. I also would like to say thank-you to everyone involved for all the information and support it has been more than I expected.</i>
<i>Starting point for business plan and getting the necessary registrations and notifications in place on which to build to improve holding which has been badly neglected, before developing diversification business</i>

*ACT Improvements There were many people who made no suggestions for improvement or said the course was just fine as it was. One improvement suggested that was taken up by the SCF Training Team, was to bring more practical skills into the toolkit, some felt there was too much time in the classroom. The last ACT course was held at the tutor's horticultural business, so that they could provide practical sessions interweaved with the lectures.*

<i>A few more activities would help break up long lectures.</i>
<i>Making the course over three or four days.</i>
<i>Running separate courses for people who already have a croft or are in the process of buying one versus people who are just aspiring to be crofters. This would allow those already active in crofting to go into more detail on specific areas and avoid more basic questions.</i>
<i>Lewis is a fairly unique environment and all aspects of the course should focus on how to manage that.</i>

*ACT Reflections. Reflections contained thoughts on how participants would apply their new knowledge learning they had:*

<i>I have a more concise idea of how to go about achieving my croft and what I should do with it. I will be looking into more detailed information I have been given so that I can get started asap. I also would like to say thank-you to everyone involved for all the information and support it has been more than I expected.</i>
<i>Starting point for business plan and getting the necessary registrations and notifications in place on which to build to improve holding which has been badly neglected, before developing diversification business</i>
<i>Confirmed the need for much more ground preparation.</i>
<i>Really enjoyed visit to the croft to start the course to see the relevance of presentations by tutors. Learning on the course focused my thinking on planning and how a croft could work for me.</i>
<i>This was such a great course. I learned FAR more than I expected, and it was incredibly impressive. SO MUCH food for thought, thank-you!</i>
<i>Very valuable course and very enjoyable. Intend to get registered on croft by next year.</i>
<i>Record keeping and tutor from solicitors – I personally would prefer to have before lunch. A massive topic/subject to cover in two days. Arrived apprehensive and feeling inadequate – have left feeling invigorated, positive, enthusiastic and not alone! Thank you so very much and I look forward to keeping in touch.</i>

### **Bitesize Skills and Woodland Courses**

*The outcome in these courses was more straightforward: that participants were able to build skills capacity, competitiveness of primary production methods and improve product quality. Analysis was less straightforward as the feedback was on a large number of courses on a range of topics. There were lots of learning points. This section is important, and it demonstrates the width and the depth of the learning that has gone on in the project and verifies that the desired outcomes were achieved.*

*Bitesize Learning Points. There were so many learning points from participants on the Bitesize course they have been shortened and summarised by course:*

- *Croft Ground. Drainage, soil sample uses and to plan land use. Importance of soil. The order and timing for liming and fertilising. Insight into the work and expense required for rush and bracken clearance. Robocut machine. Learning about all the different grants etc that are available.*
- *Drystone. History and understanding of the technique. Hands-on, practical go at disassembling and reconstructing a wall. How to start with proper foundation height and depth. How to build a drystone dyke. Learning the basic techniques, but also the WHY behind each strategy & tip.*
- *Goats. The medication. Vitamins, minerals, copper etc. The marketing of the meat. Care of goats on a larger scale. Practical guide to goat keeping as a business invaluable.*
- *Lambing. Animal welfare. Understanding of the lambing process. added confidence re difficult lambings and care. Practical handling dead lambs. Turning lambs. Preparation for ewes before lambing, handling, importance of cleanliness. Presentation of lambs in the womb. Different birth styles. Hands-on and theory relative to each other. Understanding disease, problems and*

after care. managing to castrate. Ewe management, nutrition. learning what equipment is needed. Lambing simulator. String/loop. Feeding tube and injections. How to distinguish which lamb is which Learning about the full cycle of lambing. confident about terminologies. Pulling lambs, docking, neutering.

- *Polytunnels. Wind proof, rainwater harvesting. Pest control, germination temperature.*
- *Plants for diseases. The techniques of building. Making the polytunnel level.*
- *Scything. Technique and sharpening. How to use the scythe. Setting the scythe to suit the person using it. That scything is by far more effective/sensible to use for rushes than a brush cutter. How to mow to cut croft without strimmer. Washing the blade will not make it rusty. How to peen the blade.*
- *Woodland. Examples of woodland regeneration, planting. Finding out about the Woodland Trust. Visiting an existing woodland with establishes and new trees. Seeing woodland management in action. Legislation. How to look after growing trees. Different species on different soil. Pruning branches to force growth and keep a straight tree. Site selection for types of trees and grants info. Tree management. Mulching. Tree protection skills, plastic matting. The use of black DPM for protecting juvenile trees. Weed suppression. Rabbit control. Wiggle room for trees, distance Use sharp spade. Planning is key. Don't let the trees dry out before planting otherwise wasting time and money.*

### *BS Improvements*

*A list of improvements suggested across in the sample of available Bitesize courses are below, most participants did not list any, or said "none". No major improvements are listed.*

<i>1 day is only enough for very general course.</i>
<i>Structured sections for different types of work.</i>
<i>Maybe something on when to choose what technique - but it's in the handouts.</i>
<i>Preparation of foundations for completely new wall.</i>
<i>It would be better to show the different wall types before the practical.</i>
<i>More detail about techniques at the start.</i>
<i>a little more theory behind stone selection and how to choose a style of wall.</i>
<i>I feel there were too many people in close confinement.</i>
<i>Handout would be an added bonus.</i>
<i>Suggestions to bring materials from home to try with the techniques.</i>
<i>Hoof clipping AFTER lunch next time.</i>
<i>A second follow-on course.</i>
<i>the more hands-on practice the better.</i>
<i>Bit more about planning your trees and where you'll plant it.</i>
<i>Provide an example of how machinery (eg small digger) could be used to prepare a site.</i>

**BS Reflections.** There were a lot of reflections and the tables below show quotes which reflect common or interesting themes brought up by the participants:

### Croft Land

<i>Plan to continue bringing croft land into use by clearing more bracken and brush.</i>
<i>Confirmed my thinking vis-à-vis drainage, but also driven home soil management. Plan to proceed with drainage work plus soil testing, sampling and remedies. Also will pick up looking at grants.</i>
<i>This course has enlightened me with regard to what will be required to bring my croft back into work, and the opportunities available to get this under way.</i>
<i>Robocutter was amazing. Food was fantastic, a very knowledgeable instructor. Lots of take home learning and actions!</i>

### Drystone

<i>Will be building paths and walls as part of my new build.</i>
<i>Plan to build retaining walls, stock shelters for croft.</i>
<i>Excellent instructor and a great venue.</i>
<i>I think this should be extended to as many crofters as want to do it. It's a useful skill and good to learn with others, and with such an excellent trainer.</i>
<i>This has increased my confidence to now go and implement these skills on my own croft.</i>
<i>I feel more able to tackle the rebuilding work on my 3 ruins.</i>
<i>I believe that such courses are of huge benefit to the retention of traditional skills and I intend to put the training into practice.</i>

### Goats

<i>Great double act, was helpful being split into smaller groups for practical segments. Always felt engaged even when feeling sleepy after lunch.</i>
<i>Please run courses in Caithness and Sutherland, it's so far for me to travel to each course and it costs me a fortune in time and money and there's so many I just can't go to.</i>
<i>Beautiful location and well kept animals and pens.</i>
<i>Had a fab day and it's great to network with others in a similar situation.</i>

### Lambing

<i>Unexpected benefit - I got to assist with a live lambing! Great venue, friendly and happy tutors. Recommend this to anyone who is thinking about or needing assistance with lamb care and ewes.</i>
<i>The course was fantastic on all levels, being able to assist in lambing under supervision exceeded all my expectations for the day. Has made me more confident in increasing my work with sheep and enlarging my flock size.</i>
<i>Lambing starts in 3 weeks. This has increased my confidence as I always feel a bit rusty at the start.</i>
<i>Hopefully the course was an introduction to a new way of life, especially if a croft should become available.</i>
<i>Will help me to have the confidence to assess a lambing situation, know what to look for and what the solutions might be.</i>
<i>I really enjoyed the content of the course and I found it interesting. I plan to have a croft one day and a few sheep so will no doubt revisit the content of the course.</i>
<i>I don't have sheep yet but this course has helped my confidence and the skills I have learned today have helped a great deal.</i>
<i>Great to be able to ask questions related to my own flock and how to build on it.</i>
<i>Best of the 3 courses I've now been on!</i>
<i>This is THE benchmark course, the BEST one I've done with the Crofting Federation. Thank-you!</i>

<i>This course has been fantastic. I have made a new contact now able to understand a lot more about the lambing process.</i>
<i>Found the course very thorough and informative, would have happily stayed longer. Found it useful to be talked through the practical side as I did it.</i>
<i>This was an excellent course, very informative and pitched at the right level. It was good to meet like-minded people. Definitely encouraging, can't wait to get some sheep again. Good to see lambing in progress.</i>
<i>Really enjoyed the day. I plan to research some areas more fully. Will keep an eye on any other courses coming up.</i>
<i>Brilliant day, everyone got to do everything practical. Tutor was fab, very informative, easy to understand.</i>
<i>Skills which will help me with the keeping of my new flock. Physical learning, which balances my SRUC work.</i>
<i>Excellent venue. Really appreciated the hands-on experience and tutors having patience to keep calm and lamb.</i>
<i>Just looking forward to putting what I've learnt into practice and the lambing sheds at home running smoother.</i>
<i>Feel more confident to cope with lambing. Really good course.</i>
<i>I have learned more about ewe and lamb maintenance, to the point where I would now feel more capable to offer help to friends and family locally who keep large flocks. The little things like learning about medication, tubing lambs and ensuring survival after ewe has lambed. Very interesting day - delivered perfectly, very professional.</i>
<i>All very well informed; information and skills which I will be able to implement on our farm. Has spurred me on to ask farming friends if I could help and continue my new skills learned.</i>

## Woodland

<i>Going to plant soon.</i>
<i>Will be planting 1000 trees in the spring and plan to investigate local species.</i>
<i>Great benefit was becoming sure that my scheme will work. Am now convinced that my investment (time and money) will be worthwhile.</i>
<i>Enjoyed the course and look forward to beginning my woodland project. I'd like to see a separate training day detailing figures and worked examples of applications.</i>
<i>Subsequent to the training I anticipate applying for a grant, to undertake tree planting on my croft.</i>
<i>Content on the day was very concise - great to have the option to receive more detailed info. Can now get on with ground prep and planting on 2 crofts. Connection to other crofters.</i>
<i>Planting trees as shelter belts will greatly improve the productivity of other crops.</i>
<i>My original plan is to diversify my crofting activities (away from livestock) with this course I can now diversify into tree growing onto my crofts with a lot more knowledge than previously.</i>
<i>I was/am keen to do more planting on our common grazing but what we have done today will be restricted to small areas. It would be useful to have more information on planting larger areas, say up to 2 or 3 Ha which will require some mechanical help.</i>
<i>Now to consider location and species carefully. It's hard work and time consuming.</i>
<i>An indication of who may be available locally to provide help - professionals and volunteer network would be handy.</i>



## **Township Training**

- 1. To enable participants to adapt measures to increase competitiveness and impact on profit margins and production levels.*
- 2. To upskill existing crofters and smallholders and update crofting practice.*
- 3. To acquire skills and knowledge for a broad range of land management techniques relating to crofting and smallholding.*

*There was less material on Township training as the delivery of these course was delegated to local environments to cater for local needs. Only a small number of questionnaires were returned. SCF had less control over the process. Of the small number returned (less than 30) the levels of positive responses were on a similar level to the Bitesize course*

*To remedy this, the following questions were asked at one township training course*

- 1) How did the tutor help to achieve your training objectives?*

*There was discussion with the tutor leading up to the session which guided the approach. There was a well thought through plan which guided us through the Grazing Regulations and Crofting Law based on our own written regulations. The tutor ensured that everyone was involved and had the opportunity to ask questions whilst keeping the session flowing.*

- 2) What worked well about the day?*

*The session was well structured, there was some work involving scenario / role play (with props) which helped to give perspective and context, as well as ample opportunity for questions.*

- 3) Has this event brought participants closer together?*

*Yes, in particular it has brought some common knowledge across several committees in the area and the opportunity to discuss issues in different areas.*

- 4) Do you have plans for any similar events (SCF or otherwise) in the future?*

*There was quite a bit of interest, so it was a bit disappointing that less than half attended in the end for various reasons. I would welcome any further relevant training.*

## **Long term reflection from participants**

*In order to examine the extent to which the Skills Boost Project achieved the outcomes assigned, a purposive sample of 20 participants were sent a follow-up survey inviting them to provide longer term reflections on the benefits of the courses. This was sent to participants (and tutors) who had agreed to follow up, who had been on two or more courses (some had been on many), and who the SCF team selected as participants who had something to say to the evaluation (therefore not a random sample). The survey included three simple questions and 12 responses*

were received, which ranged from short answers to paragraphs of detail – these included many good points so are included here to provide details to the reader.

### What do you think about the SCF courses you have been on?

*I found the sheep course informative and fascinating. Although not a crofter the herding with dogs section was, for me the best bit. Watching the tutor tell us how he trained his 4 month old pup and then show how good she and her mum are was brilliant. Even experienced crofters in the audience were commenting how much they had learnt.*

*I have been on a variety of courses. The most practical ones are brilliant. Fencing, basic chainsaw maintenance and crosscutting, scything. The sheepdog training course subsidised by SCF was very useful and made the sessions much more affordable. Each course has provided opportunities to meet with other crofters or prospective crofters to allow for information exchange and establishing ongoing support networks. The Access to Crofting course was the only one I found disappointing. I have been in crofting for thirty years and the main problem is the dwindling community and the change away from collaborative work. We no longer need to call in help to*

*pack down a delivery of draff or stack 200 small hay bales as I now just move round bales with the tractor. Perhaps the basic information was useful to some new entrants but I wanted more direction on making grant applications, keeping data and crofting law. Dealing with the Crofting Commission is so unsatisfactory as they will not enforce any of their aspirational regulations.*

*Very good and helpful.*

*I thought they were excellent. We did the Access to Crofting Toolkit. We loved it, learnt a huge amount and it really got us moving in the right direction. We met lots of nice folk, importantly we met keen folk who actually had a desire to croft and who understood the absolute privilege it is to be able to croft a piece of Scotland. I also attended a bringing your croft back into good use or title to that effect. It was good, but the input was more about flogging your land a little harder for cattle and sheep, rather than actual modern thinking of soil restoration. SCF has some brilliant tutors and members but is torn, old school tradition and new ideas pulling in very different ways. We have to look at climate change and sustainability and ask the difficult questions. SCF has to move with the times and recognise that we have to stay ahead of the curve. Trees, soil restoration and wildlife will play a big part of the future.*

*We are tutors for some courses in Shetland. They are a good way to where skills in rural communities*

*Very practical hands-on training. Good competent trainers.*

*We have worked in partnership with SCF for many years organising and facilitating the many different practical courses. Animal Husbandry for beginners was aimed at crofters who had either just inherited or acquired a croft and really did not know anything about keeping animals. We were extremely fortunate to have 2 wonderful tutors who were qualified vets and had a small mixed farm with sheep, pigs, hens, geese ducks and goats. As a result of attending the animal husbandry courses over the years, students readily admitted that they had gained confidence, knowledge and appreciated the opportunity to have practical experience on a variety of livestock etc. Since the course, many went on to manage their own flocks/goat herds etc. The Dry stone walling course was extremely popular and again, we always had a waiting list and one year we ran the course twice to meet demand. Those that attended were crofters who again had just acquired a 'run' down croft with fallen stone walls and they just did not know where to start. The Dry Stone walling course was also popular with the young crofters keen to add another skill.*

*After each year, we would evaluate the feed back and then decide along with the SCF training team, which courses to run again for the next year or to run a new course that had been repeatedly requested. The Bee keeping course was one such request and this was extremely successful, two of the crofters who attended that day course actually went on to keep their own bee hives which can be extremely challenging.*

*The Scything course was delivered in the last year and had been organised due to demand for the course. As much as we would have loved to have delivered the course in previous years, we had been unable to find a tutor. Professional and experienced Scything tutors are very very few and always in great demand but finally we were able to run the course. Many that attended the scything course have since continued Scything and the strimmer is now discarded!*

*If further funding had been available again to continue these courses for this year and the years to come, we would have been able to run the Scything course again and again. In fact, there is such a demand for traditional skills, from all age of crofter/small holder.*

*I myself am a crofter and having been the facilitator and organiser for these courses as part of my 'day' job, I know first hand how important it is for new crofters to learn traditional skills and I understand how they feel, overwhelmed at the beginning, and they don't know where to start.*

*If I had had the opportunity to attend just one of these practical courses and the 'Access to crofting' course when I took on my croft, I feel that I would have got the croft land into a better*

condition far quicker than the time it actually took because of my lack of experience and knowledge, and there were none of these opportunities then.

Every week I will take enquiries from crofters/small holders wanting to know when the next Scything/Dry Stone walling/Animal husbandry course starts and sadly I have to refer them back to SCF and tell them that we are not running any courses in Mid Argyll for the foreseeable future. We did use to run a few traditional skill courses but again we had to secure funding to help keep the cost down for participants. I have thought about trying to organise some of the courses but again, funding would be required to support the courses. I do sincerely hope that the SCF can secure further funding in order to continue to delivery of the practical and theory courses as I am acutely aware that there are crofters/small holders out there who are so keen to manage their land in the traditional way, and want to learn and keep traditional skills for the next generation.

Has attending these courses made a difference to the way you croft/ or your day to day working life?

it's allowed me to learn how to be a crofter. Despite the fact the Croft has been with us since family were moved to there during the Highland clearances, I had to convince my dad not to sell the croft, to keep it in the family, it's our tradition. That's important to me. He's was all for letting it go, selling up. I have been on a number of the SCF courses, and with the skills I have learnt on them, I have been able to prove to my dad I can do this. He has just recently finally agreed to sign the croft over to me. I need to keep learning, though, and there's nothing else like this being done.

Attending the course and organising it has given me a better understanding of sheep handling and crofting and also a few tips on training my young non collie dogs

The practical courses have given me skills and confidence to be able to undertake more tasks efficiently and competently. Or to know what I am actually asking someone else to do for me.

I am aspiring crofter; it made me more interested in crofting way of life. Recently I joined SCF and started actively looking for a croft.

Not really, it's us who are sharing what we do and changing the way other people work on their land. It is an easy way to set up and run a course. It takes all the admin elsewhere which is a bonus. It makes it easy to run one or two extra courses without too much extra work

Made me more confident in using the skills I have learned

Absolutely - it helps give you drive and energy to know there are other like minded folk doing the same and wanting to learn like yourself. Crofting used to be more co-operative, but with the ageing population and number of abandoned crofts, active, young and keen crofters are often few and far between, and are rarely just next door. This can make modern active Crofting quite lonely.

I have found courses interesting, well organised and well informed. The tutors are of a very high standard and the attendees usually fully engaged. There has sometimes been follow-up communication/information between both attendees and tutors.

the ACT course was particularly useful and I am about to embark on more horticulture with a view to selling or supply other businesses

What are the consequences of the SCF training project finishing for you?

No direct consequences for me, however I think it's a shame as the funding for the tutors made them happy to provide the time to give the education to their fellow crofters. However, the course was so successful last year that another crofter has organised a similar Sheep day this year, to try to appeal to crofters and tourists alike. So the project allowed the community to initiate something successful that may well become an annual event.

<i>The end of this project would mean that there would no longer be opportunities to meet other people trying to croft as I am, removing a forum for exchange of information and networking, improving my skills base and enabling me to croft more efficiently and cost effectively. Other courses are available but the subsidy from SCF made the short courses affordable. The courses were also delivered in such a friendly and accessible manner, and within reasonable travelling distance, that they were extremely popular and well received. I hope that SCF will be able to continue to provide a range of courses particularly ones aimed at understanding soil management and woodland management in the light of climate change and trying to husband the ground in the best possible way for productivity and the planet.</i>
<i>I would like to continue with more courses, I feel I am only at the start of the understanding how I could live as a crofter.</i>
<i>More admin! Less courses run. We have to charge a bit more for our own courses to cover costs. This doesn't seem to make too much difference to participants. Courses are full whoever is putting them on.</i>
<i>Disappointing, there has been a useful and interesting range of courses available and very well subscribed.</i>
<i>It is a real shame. A lack of new skills and few opportunities for keen crofters to meet up and share knowledge, help and of course friendship. We have a toddler and the last few years have been a challenge to find time to attend courses, now we have the time and all the courses are gone. We hope that funding is found.</i>
<i>I will feel isolated from the SCF without the regular contact. The courses were such a good way of finding out about best practice from the professionals. It was also a way of finding out what other crofter/small holders were doing and getting to know each other from all different locations.</i>

### **Women-Only courses**

*The majority of registered crofters are male (74%). However, the proportion of female registered crofters has doubled from 13% to 26% in the last four years (Ipsos MORI 2018). Crofting Commission figure suggest the split is 65/35, so the situation is changing.*

*SCF ran two women-only fencing courses in year 2 in response to demand. Some women had said they would prefer to learn physical skills in that environment, as women together. Both courses were over-subscribed. A sheepdog course happened to attract an all-female cohort: participants on the course considered the value of this supporting their empowerment.*

*Satisfaction levels on all-women courses were high, just as they were generally in the other courses. Women noted the impact of the training on their confidence to undertake tasks themselves, or in dealing with contractors. They also enjoyed the learning environment. This aligns with the Women in Farming and Agriculture Report (Scottish Government 2017)*

*“I have wanted to learn to fence for some time. I feel I can save money to put towards other areas of the croft by doing fencing myself. It is difficult to get fencers to come and quote on small jobs and nearly impossible to get more than one quote for grant purposes so easier to do it ourselves. I appreciated that this training was for women, I would not have had the confidence to attend a course requiring physical effort with men. I enjoyed the course”.*

*An excellent article in the West Highland Free Press, Lisa MacDonald points out that it is not the intention to exclude men, but rather to help level the playing field for those who need the space to step up. "Fencing skills were not the only reward... what these women were taking away from the day was self-belief and independence"*  
*One, woman crofter commented that she will feel more isolated if it is not possible to continue funding training courses.*

*SCF have developed approaches which encourage women to sign up to their courses, with good gender balance, in particular in the Bitesize courses. This fits well with the Scottish Government Women in Agriculture Task Force guidelines for trainers, and there have been learning points for development of policy in Scotland, and beyond.*

## Annexe 2: External Evaluation Report



# Evaluation of Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost Project 2016-2019

Dr. David Heaney  
Rossal Research & Consultancy  
June 2019

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Acknowledgments: I would like to thank the Scottish Crofting Federation team for all their help providing me with data, and context to that data, it made my job much easier. Also, the crofters who supplied me with quotes, either directly, or through their comments on evaluation forms. Also, thanks to John Williamson who provided the maps of participants. This independent evaluation was part of funding awarded by the Scottish Government Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and Scottish Natural Heritage.  
David Heaney June 2019





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost project has been a success. Much has been achieved in the three years due to the experience, organisation, dedication and vision of the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) Training Team. The Skills Boost project confirms that SCF are an important provider of agricultural training in rural Scotland.
- The training project has been delivered as planned; reaching all targets and milestones set in the application. In some cases, targets have been significantly exceeded.
- There were four different types of courses provided: Access to Crofting Toolkit (ACT): A 2-day classroom-based intensive entry-level course providing a range of croft land management knowledge. Bitesize (BS): A wide range of day long vocational, practical skills courses delivered by local tutors and crofter tutors who are experts in their fields. Township Training (TT): Aimed at established townships or communities of practice. Woodland (WL): a wide range of practical skills for woodland creation and management.
- In total 124 (79 Bitesize, 15 ACT, 18 TT, 12 WL) courses were delivered as per target. There have been 1646 (842 Bitesize, 272 ACT, 252 TT and 280 WL) participants on the four course types over three years, which is 137% of the target output of 1200 planned in the original funding application. This means there were 1792 training days delivered.
- The large majority of participants in the project have been very satisfied with the content. Overall, 98% of participants agreed that the course met or exceeded their expectations, 96% that the course was pitched at the right level, and 99% that the trainer was clear and easy to understand.
- Participants gained knowledge and learnt practical vocational skills, which they can apply to their work, and have interacted with fellow crofters. 98% of respondents on Bitesize/woodland courses learnt a new skill, 82% felt they will be able to increase product quality.
- More women than men have participated in the project. Responding to participant feedback, two women-only courses were provided in the second year of the project, enabling women to learn skills in an environment that has suited them well. SCF have demonstrated their ability to deliver training for women in agriculture.
- The project built on the previous funded work 2013-2015, and there now exists an efficient administrative framework for continued training for crofters.
- The online forum for crofters did not work as well as planned, it was time-consuming to manage, and was not used to the extent that had been planned.
- The training courses contributed to reduction of social isolation amongst crofters.
- The township training courses took a lot of hard work to deliver.
- The courses are also catering for aspiring crofters, and non-crofters, widening and re-generating agricultural skills in rural communities. Through this process, some aspiring crofters learnt the reality of accessing land in the Highlands and Islands, and the limitations as well as the opportunities of crofting.
- The project created 3 full-time posts, employed 180 sessional tutors, 102 sessional Local Courses Directors, hired 170 venues and 15 local caterers.

- This work has helped to sustain, develop and broaden crofting in rural Scotland over the last three years, providing localised, non-accredited training. There is a lack of affordable training alternatives for low-income crofters or aspiring crofters.
- SCF need continued public funds to maintain and develop training for experienced crofters, new crofters and aspiring crofters.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Evaluation Report is to assess the effectiveness of the Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost Project 2016 – 2019. The project was managed by the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), a non-profit organisation recognised as the representative of crofters and crofting. SCF have delivered other training projects, and this project was built on the success of the Short Duration Training for Crofters and Smallholders Programme 2013-2015, which delivered training to 1873 participants who accessed the programme over 2124 training days.

The Skills Boost project addressed a lack of non-accredited vocational training for crofters and smallholders in the Highlands and Islands, which is local, affordable and topical. This report has been produced as an external independent evaluation using source data provided by the SCF Training Team, including annual internal reports.

The aim of the project was to provide knowledge transfer and skills development training opportunities to specifically benefit crofters and smallholders engaged in agriculture and rural land development.

The objective of Skills Boost was to provide a three-year training project which meets identified need to:

- a) equip new entrants to crofting with the right agri-business skills and promote succession planning;
- b) foster lifelong learning via the provision of practical vocational training;
- c) focus on cooperation and the development of knowledge transfer in rural areas via township training.

The project costing £428,400 was funded by the Scottish Government Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF), Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Woodland Trust Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and income received from participants:-

KTIF	£267,618
HIE	£89,206
Participant Income	£44,100
Woodland Trust Scotland	£15,476
SNH	£12,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£428,400</b>

The stated aim of the evaluation was to explore the impact achieved. This report provides an overview of project objectives, targets and outcomes, taking into account the effectiveness of the intervention. Increasing skills should improve viability of crofting agriculture and provide associated economic, social and environmental benefits to rural communities. The evaluation was commissioned to examine social, economic, and environmental impacts:

- **Economic Impact:** Increasing levels of production and improving agricultural products on crofts and smallholdings within the Highlands and Islands. Reducing overhead costs and streamlining efficiency.

- **Social Impact:** Improving social capital through facilitation of new community networks to encourage cooperation and the development of knowledge transfer within the Highland and Islands.
- **Environmental Impact:** Carbon reduction, resource efficiency and the protection of crofting ecosystems. Maintaining land in good stead and improving abandoned land that was once previously productive throughout the Highland and Islands.

The ethos was that training should be local, affordable and topical. SCF was to provide training days at a cost of £305 per day.

There were four types of courses that ran within the Skills Boost Project:

- **Access to Crofting Toolkit:** An intensive entry-level classroom-based course that gives participants a grounding in a broad range of croft land management knowledge including regulation and statutory duties in animal production, horticulture and croft woodland. Aimed at aspiring, successor and new crofters who are looking to make good, early decisions and acquire a broad range of crofting skills. The format of the training uses a combination of blended digital resources, online peer support and face to face teaching sessions.
- **Bitesize:** A wide range of day long vocational, practical skills courses delivered by local tutors and crofter tutors who are experts in their fields. Training is demand-led and locally focused meaning courses have been delivered in a wide variety of locations from the mainland and islands. Courses are open to all, aimed at crofters or those looking to learn an additional skill.
- **Woodland:** SCF were commissioned by Woodland Trust Scotland to administer courses that complement a wide range of practical skills for woodland creation and management.
- **Township Training:** Aimed at established townships or communities of practice this has brought a wide range of learning opportunity for established crofters including demo days, croft visits and discussion groups. Township training events are commissioned by groups in crofting areas and comprise either a demonstration day, visiting speaker or educational croft visit.

In the original application there were three types of courses envisaged, but the woodland courses were categorised separately once the project began, as these courses were commissioned by the Woodland Trust. In the application, each of the courses were assigned a set of outputs in terms of numbers of courses and participants, local course directors and trainers, and a set of outcomes. These were to be assessed by the evaluation. The outcomes were as follows for each course:

### **Access to Crofting Toolkit**

To understand the role of crofting and agricultural production for small units under 30ha within the Highlands and Islands and its context within national and EU rural policy.

To understand the role of primary production within crofting and its importance within food chain organisation.

To understand the role of crofting ecosystems in terms of land management practices, resource efficiency and supporting a low carbon economy within agriculture.

### **Bitesize Skills and Woodland Courses**

Participants will be able to build skills capacity, competitiveness of primary production methods and improve product quality.

### **Township Training**

To enable participants to adapt measures to increase competitiveness and impact on profit margins and production levels.

To upskill existing crofters and smallholders and update crofting practice.

To acquire skills and knowledge for a broad range of land management techniques relating to crofting and smallholding.

## **METHODS**

The Scottish Crofting Federation Training Team adopted the Kirkpatrick model, a worldwide standard for evaluating the effectiveness of training, for ongoing evaluation throughout the project. Created by Dr Don Kirkpatrick in the 1950s, the model is applied before, during and after training:

Pre-Course Expectations: Gathered from participants upon enrolment.

Stage 1: Reaction. The degree to which participants find the training favourable, engaging and relevant to their needs. Gathered from evaluation forms at the end of the training day.

Stage 2: Learning. The degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training. Gathered from evaluation forms.

Stage 3: Behaviour. The degree to which participants apply what they have learned during training. This data gathered from case studies by follow up with participants.

Stage 4: Results. The degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training. This data was drawn from themes which emerge during evaluation and matched to project outcomes.

### **Quantitative analysis**

To deliver the administration and co-ordination of the project, SCF compiled a database with details of participants on each course, including their gender, age, crofting status, and pre-course expectations. These spreadsheets were used primarily as a record of those attending, but were anonymised for evaluation purposes. The detailed and comprehensive nature of this database made a rigorous analysis of project activity possible. SCF had used these spreadsheets to produce activity data for their annual project reports. Training days were calculated by multiplying the participants by the length of the course in days  $\text{Total} = (\text{ACT} \times 2) + (\text{BS} \times 1) + (\text{TT} \times 0.5) + (\text{WL} \times 1)$

Participants completed a questionnaire on enrolment and another on completion of the course. This contained a series of Likert-scale questions, some generic and some specific to the course. These were entered into a spreadsheet and collated by the SCF training team

### **Qualitative Data**

Data was drawn from feedback forms and coded into themes which were analysed against project outcomes.

## RESULTS – QUANTITATIVE DATA

### Numbers of courses, participants and training days

Using extractions from SCF database, Table 1 below shows the anticipated and achieved number of participants, courses and training days by type of course. The number of courses achieved was as anticipated, except for four additional Bitesize courses. In total 124 courses were delivered over three years. Courses were delivered across different crofting areas which included Skye, Gairloch, Moray, Caithness, Argyll, Easter-Ross, Wester-Ross, Lewis and Shetland.

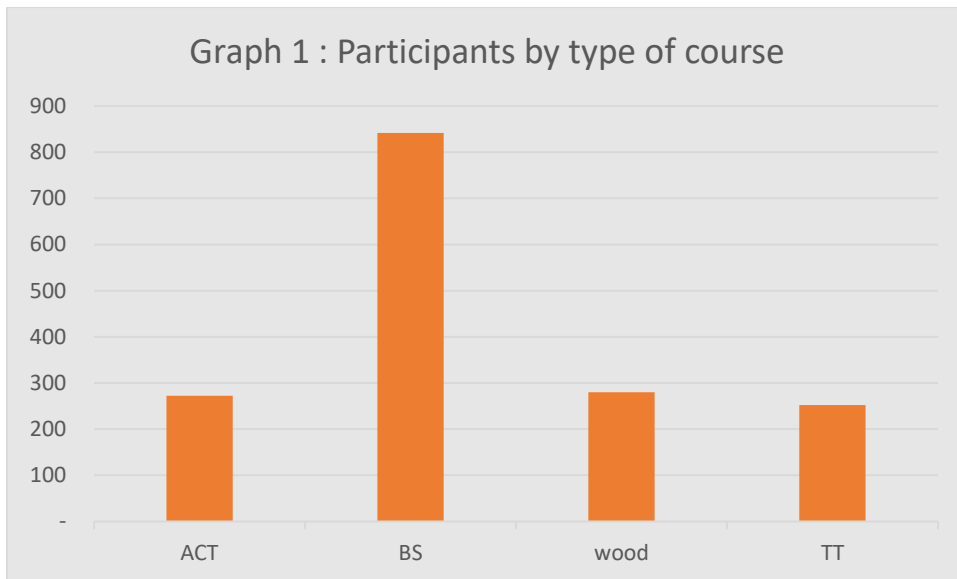
It should be noted that, in year 3, a croft woodland conference was held, and 4 courses were held within it. 173 people attended the conference, which was organised by the Woodland Trust, and they are included in the numbers presented. In years 1 and 2 there were 8 woodland courses with 107 participants. Overall there were 1646 participants in the skills boost project over the three years. This exceeds the anticipated number by 446, 137% of the anticipated output. Achieved numbers were higher than anticipated for each of the course types. This resulted in the number of training days exceeding targets 1792 rather than the 1260 anticipated, a difference of 532; 142% of the anticipated output.

Table 1 Anticipated outputs and achieved outputs					
Course Type		Anticipated Outputs	Outputs Achieved	Difference	Percent of anticipated outcome
Access to Crofting Toolkit	Participants	150	272	122	181%
	Courses	15	15	0	100%
	Training Days	300	544	244	181%
Bitesize	Participants	750	842	92	112%
	Courses	75	79	4	105%
	Training Days	750	842	92	112%
Township Training	Participants	180	252	72	140%
	Courses	18	18	0	100%
	Training Days	90	126	36	140%
Croft Woodland	Participants	120	280	160	233%
	Courses	12	12	0	100%
	Training Days	120	280	160	233%
Total Numbers	Participants	1200	1646	446	137%
	Courses	120	124	4	103%
	Training Days	1260	1792	532	142%

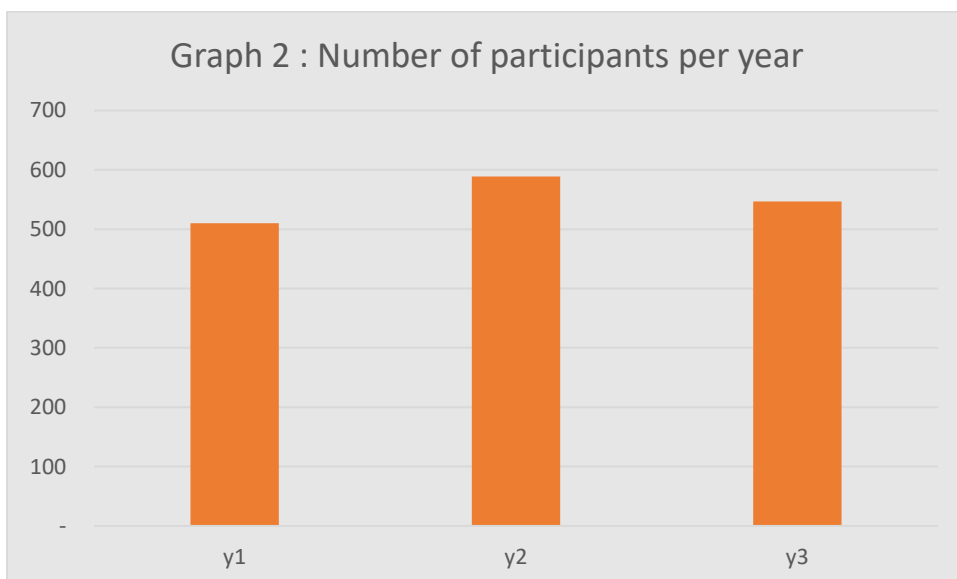
\*a croft woodland conference was held in year 3, with 4 courses, 173 attenders.

\*\* Training days Total = (ACT\*2) + (BS\*1) + (TT\* 0.5) + (WL \*1)

Graph 1 shows the numbers of participants by type of course. The Bitesize practical skills courses had the largest number of participants.

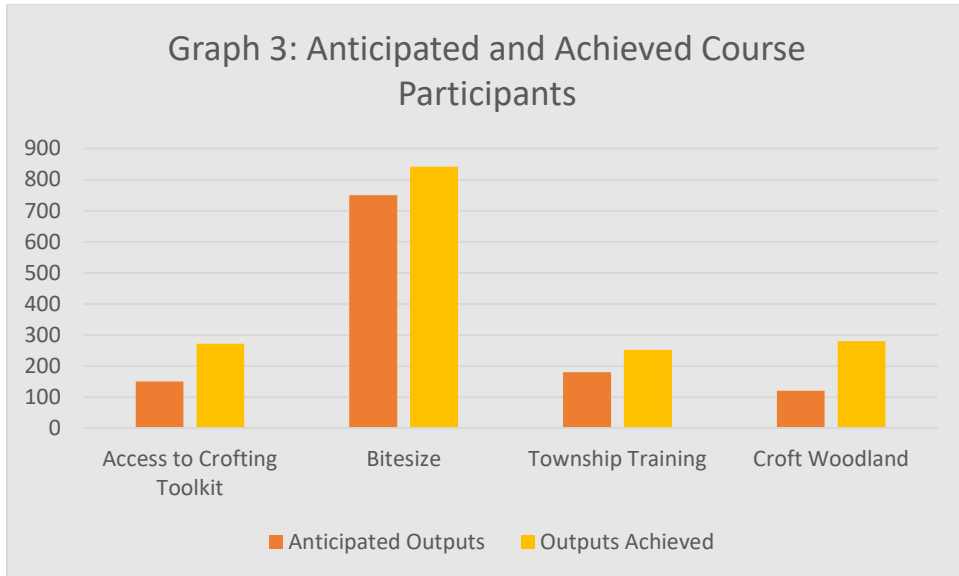


Graph 2 shows the numbers of participants in each year of the course. Participation was highest in year 2, when more Bitesize courses were run, due to demand.

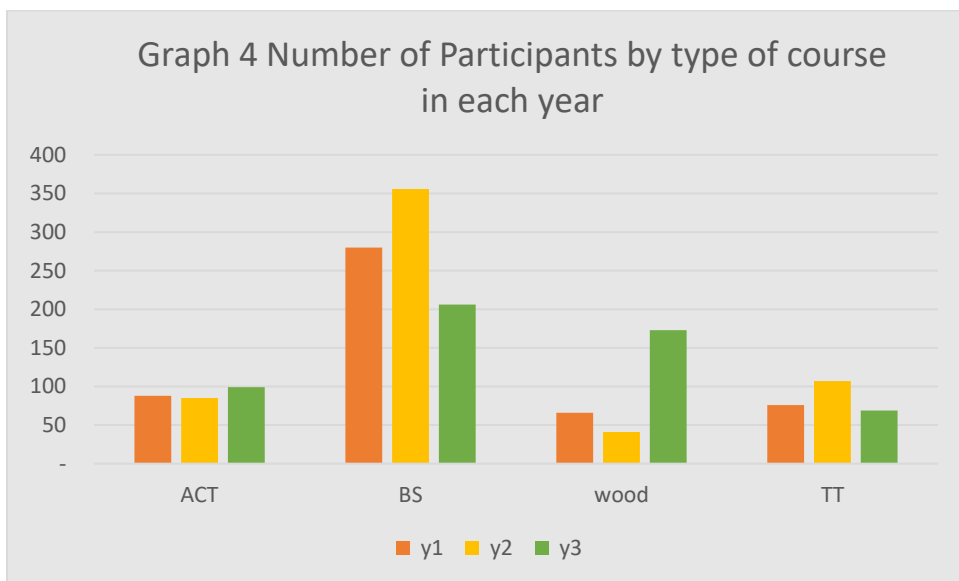


Graph 3 shows the anticipated participants and the achieved participants for each of the four types of courses. All four types of courses were above target. In particular, the access to crofting course had 272 actual participants, rather than the 150 that were planned, 233% of anticipated output.





Graph 4 shows the participants by type of course by year, and shows the number of Bitesize courses higher in year 2 in response to demand. Woodland numbers are higher due to the conference.



These graphs and tables demonstrate that SCF have met its targets in terms of numbers of courses, and participants, and training days.

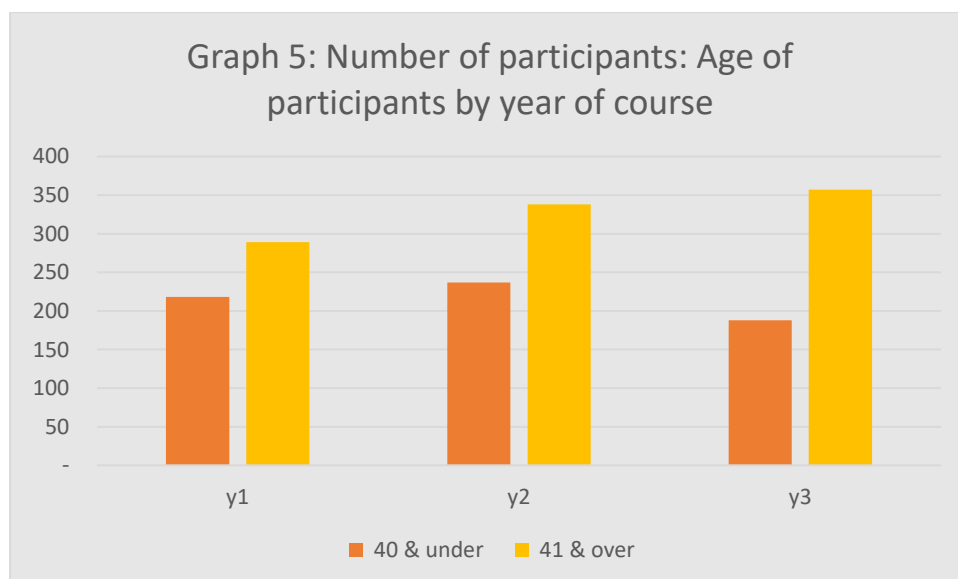
#### Practical Training skills (Bitesize Courses)

Table 2 below shows a list of the different kinds of courses delivered in the Bitesize courses during the three years, extracted from the SCF database, ranging from animals to horticulture, to croft maintenance.

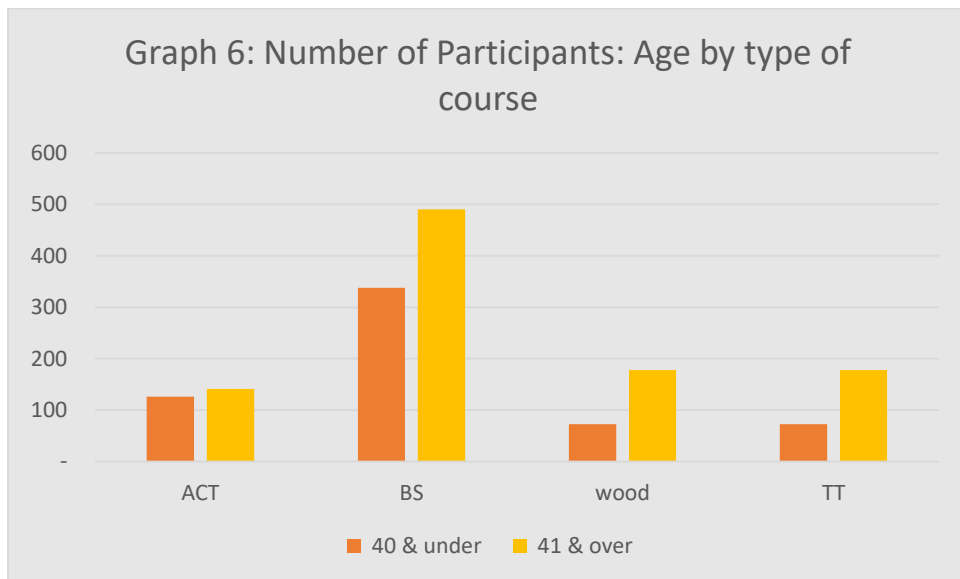
Table 2 Bitesize Courses Delivered in Project years 1 to 3
• Animal Husbandry
• Lambing
• Shearing
• Sheep and Pre Lamb Health
• Practical Pig Keeping
• Goat Keeping
• Backyard Poultry Keeping
• Intro to Beekeeping
• Sheep Dogs and Handlers Training
• Horticulture
• Polytunnel Growing
• Scything
• Bringing Croft Ground Back to Life
• Trees for the Croft
• Drystone Skills
• Strained Wire Fencing
• Women's Strained Wire Fencing
• Permaculture
• Best Practice with Medicines for keepers of Cattle and Sheep
• Intro to Peatland Restoration
• Practical Skills for Managing Common Grazings

### Characteristics of participants

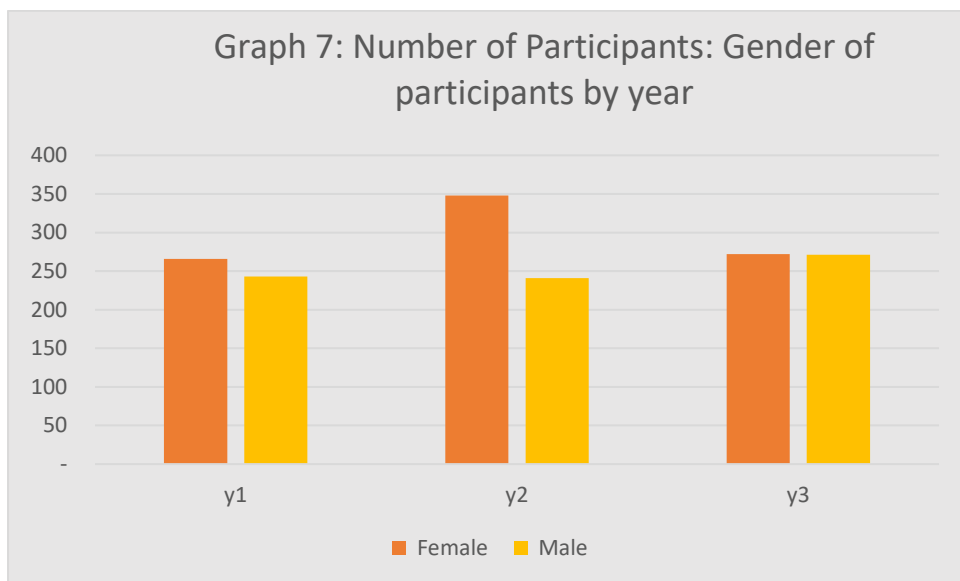
Some further analysis of participant characteristics is possible from the SCF database. Firstly, looking at age of participants. Graph 5 shows the age of participants (40 and under, 41 and above) by year of course. There are more older people than younger people in each year, and the gap is wider in year 3, perhaps due to the fact relatively less Bitesize courses were run.



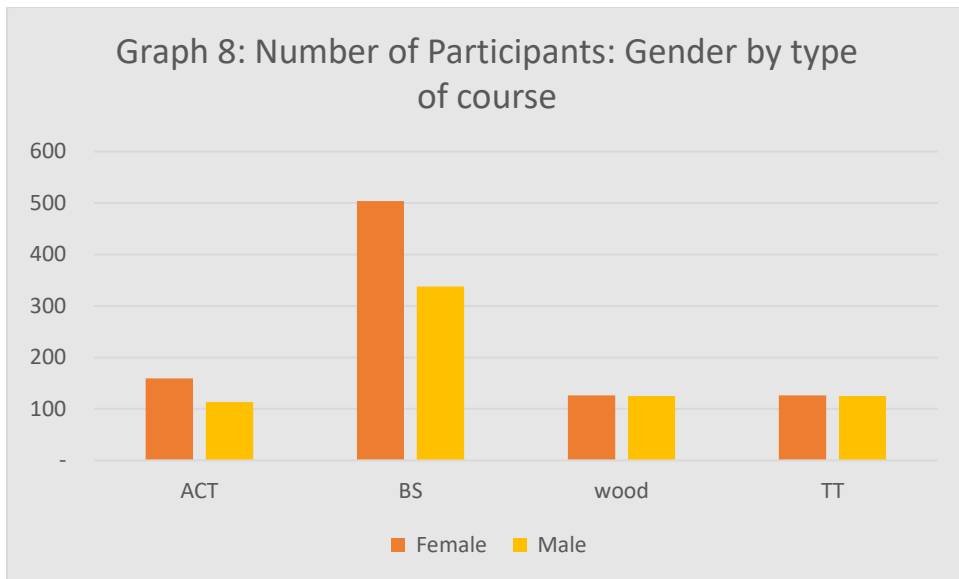
Graph 6 shows the age bands by type of course. Older people outnumbered younger people on each type of course, although the younger: older ratio was almost equal in the Access to Crofting toolkit courses.



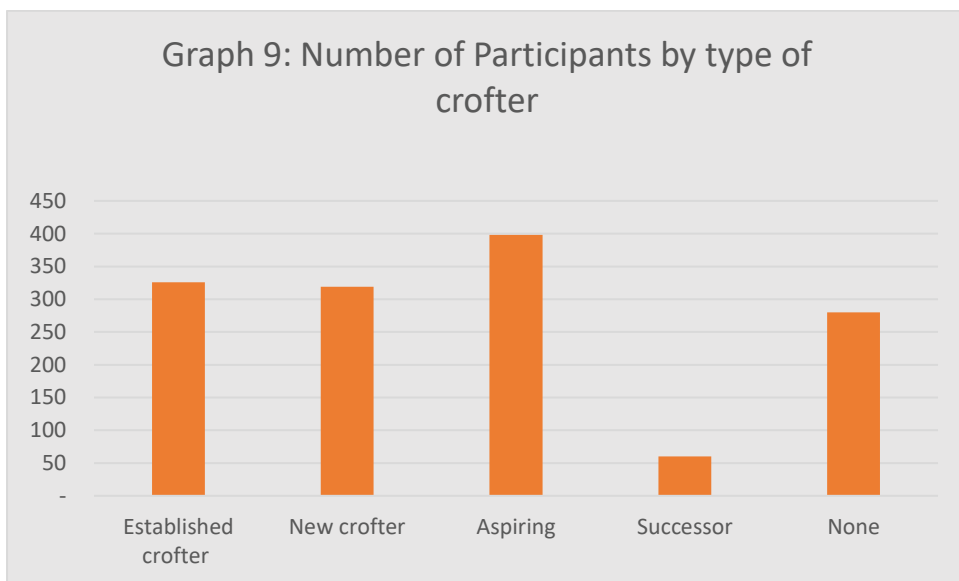
There were more women participants than men, as shown in Graph 7. This is particularly the case in year 2, when 2 women-only courses took place.



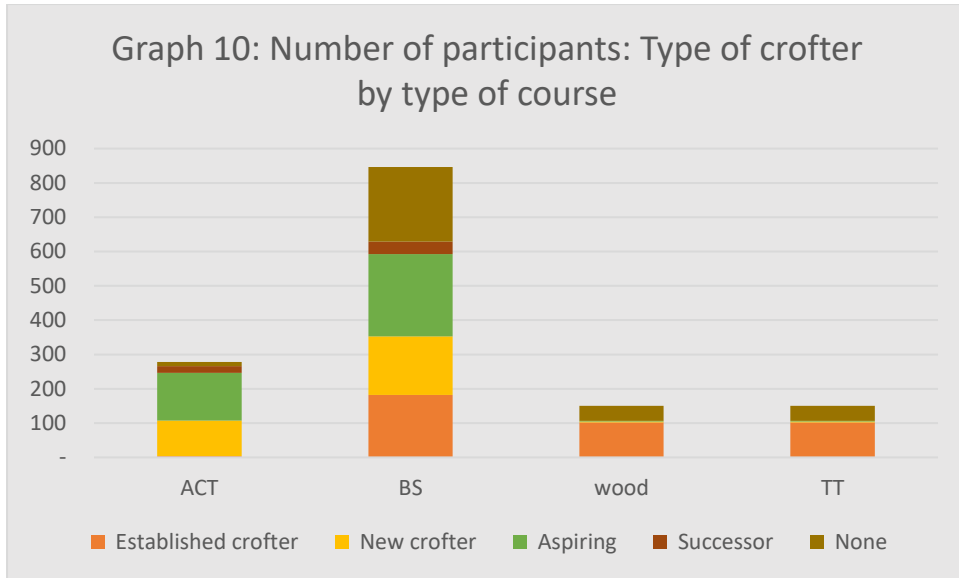
Graph 8 shows there were relatively more women participants in the Access to Crofting and Bitesize courses, whereas the female/male ratio was around 50:50 in the Woodland and Township Training courses, as shown in Graph 8. Perhaps the Bitesize courses suited women better.



Graph 9 shows the breakdown of the number of participants across all courses and over three years by type of crofter. Participants were asked to classify themselves into one of five types. “Aspiring crofter” was the category selected most often (29% of respondents); “established crofter” (25%) ; “new crofter” (24%) “none” (20%) and “successor” (4%). “None” is likely to be smallholders or those with an interest in agriculture or crofting.

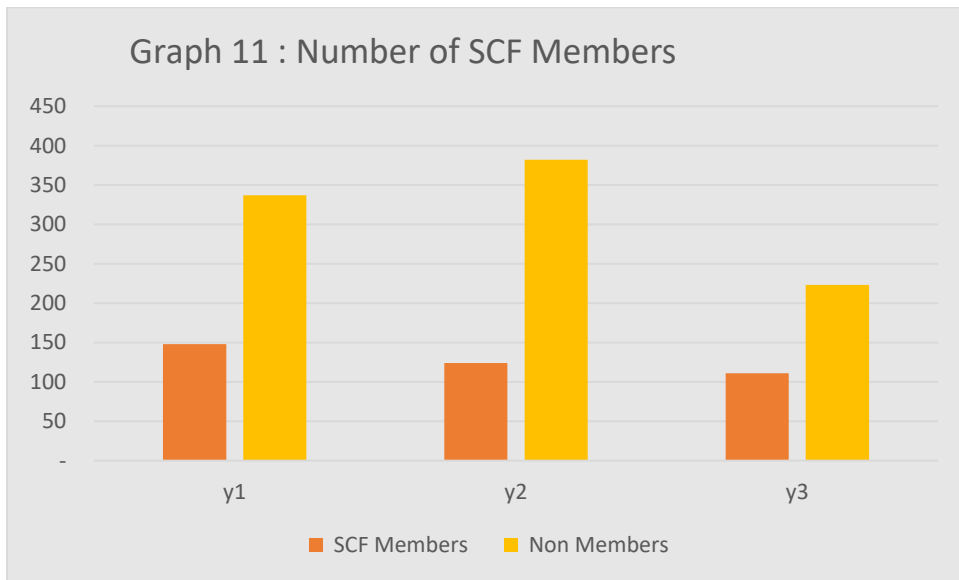


Graph 10 breaks these categories into the four types of courses. This shows clear differences in the make-up of the courses. The Access to Crofting Course was almost all new and aspiring crofters. The Bitesize courses contain all types, whereas the woodland course and the township training course were mostly of experienced crofters.



### SCF Membership

Graph 11 shows the number of participants who were SCF Members in each year. It was a minority in each year.



### Location

It was possible to produce maps of the location of courses and participants. These are included in the Appendix, and they show total participants and their location; the location of Bitesize courses, location of participants on Bitesize courses; Location of Access to Crofting Toolkit courses, and location of participants. The maps demonstrate that Bitesize course were delivered in a range of locations, reaching out to crofters, whereas participants were prepared to travel longer distances to attend ACT courses. Most of the participants from outside Scotland attended ACT courses. The maps also demonstrate that location of courses on islands is essential to attract participants. There were no ACT courses on Orkney and Shetland, and no participants from there, whereas the Western Isles ACT course boosted the numbers of participants there. Similarly, a Bitesize course Shetland attracted participants. This

shows it is not viable for crofters from the islands to travel to mainland Scotland for training.

### Costs of courses

Table 3 shows the sources of funding and their contribution. Scottish Government KTIF contributed £267,618 to the project, which equates to £149 per training day. The total public (SG, HIE and others) contribution to the project was £368,824. This equated to an average cost of £206 per training day, or £2974 per course, or £224 per participant.

Participants paid an average of £27 per course (this varied between courses and whether other funding sources were available to offset participant costs). Total cost of the project (including private and participant contributions) was equivalent to £239 per training day; this was significantly less than the anticipated cost per training day of £305.

Table 3 Costs per course, per participant, and per training day				
Sources	Contribution	Cost per course	Cost per participant	Cost per training day
Scottish Government	£267,618	£2,158	£163	£149
Other Public	£101,206	£816	£61	£56
Participant Income	£44,100	£356	£27	£25
Other Private	£15,475	£125	£9	£9
Total	£428,399	£3,455	£260	£239
Public	£368,824	£2,974	£224	£206

The project created 3 full-time posts over the 3-year period, employed 180 sessional tutors, 102 sessional Local Courses Directors, hired 170 venues and 15 local caterers. This investment in local crofting communities has a multiplier effect (estimate 3-4) in remote and rural areas of Scotland.

## Participants' perspectives

All participants in courses were asked to complete a post-event questionnaire. This was collected separately in the Township Training courses which were devolved to local areas. The table below shows the percentages of ACT/WL/BS participants who strongly agreed or agreed with statements and is based on 1069 responses. ACT course participants had some different questions so they are presented separately from Bitesize and Woodland courses. This table is important as it demonstrates that participants achieved the desired outcomes of the course.

Table 4: Participant responses to post-event questionnaire	
Percent of participants who strongly agree or agree that	%
The course met or exceeded my expectations	98.2%
The course was pitched at the right level for me	96.5%
The trainer was clear and easy to understand	98.9%
The trainer responded well to questions	99.7%
The handouts were useful (if applicable)	97.6%
The venue met or exceeded my expectations	97.3%
ACCESS TO CROFTING TOOLKIT	
I now have a better understanding of small-scale crofting agricultural production	98.2%
I now feel more informed about crofting in the context of national and EU policy	88.2%
I now have an understanding of primary production and food chain organisation	86.0%
I have gained croft land management skills	90.0%
I have a better understanding of crofting ecosystems	84.0%
I have more knowledge of resource efficiency & low carbon economy	65.9%
BITESIZE/WOODLAND	
I will now be able to increase my product quality	82.0%
I have built on my previous skills	94.1%
I learned a new skill	95.2%
I have been able to access peer support and shared knowledge	96.1%
It will now be able to manage my croft more effectively	89.2%

n=1068

People who attended the courses have been either very satisfied or satisfied with them, with very few exceptions. 98% of respondents agreed that the course met or exceeded their expectations, 96% that the course was pitched at the right level, 99% that the trainer was clear and easy to understand, almost all that the trainer responded well to questions, 98% that handouts were useful and 97% that the venue met or exceeded expectations.

98% of participants on the Access to Crofting Toolkit gained a better understanding of small-scale crofting agricultural production, 90% gained croft land management skills. 65% have more knowledge of resource efficiency & low carbon economy.

98% of respondents on Bitesize/woodland courses learnt a new skill, 82% felt they will be able to increase product quality.

### Future Demand for courses

In years 2 and 3, in the post-evaluation questionnaire, respondents were asked to tick the practical skills courses they would be interested in enrolling on in the future. There were significant levels of demand recorded for further courses. This was fairly evenly spread across the range of given options, as shown in Table 5. In total, participants' interest was expressed in 2904 further courses.

Course	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Fencing	140	87	227
Drystone	149	82	231
Woodland	124	105	229
Horticulture	130	110	240
Beekeeping	145	102	247
Animal Husbandry	124	63	187
Sheep & Pre lamb	142	72	214
Cattle	107	49	156
Pigs	118	73	191
Poultry	112	91	203
Sheepdogs	135	49	184
Shearing	114	47	161
Lambing	113	58	171
Calving	78	35	113
Permaculture	0	96	96
Diversification	29	6	35
Spraying	19	0	19
Total	1779	1125	2904

Respondents were also asked to list other courses they might be interested in. The list of varied potential subjects is below.



Table 6 List of potential practical skills courses suggested by participants
• Land Improvement
• Croft Restoration
• Drainage - understanding of drainage systems and requirements
• Humane slaughter – poultry
• Scottish Traditional cooking and baking
• Public good and Biodiversity/conservation issues: how to include in crofting
• Market Gardening
• Planning Permission
• Renewables
• Crofting towards young people
• Practical Course re Peatland
• Butchery/Sausage making
• How to get a croft
• Insect farming ( alternative protein)
• Herbal Medicine
• Orchards/fruit trees - Propagation, pruning & care
• Organic Fruit Trees / Organic Certification

More formally, SCF has a waiting list of 1461 people, 943 women and 518 men, who have registered an interest to take further courses.

## RESULTS - QUALITATIVE DATA

SCF has collected a wealth of material and it makes sense to analyse responses from each type of course, as they are distinct, and to address whether the outcomes assigned to each course have been achieved. An analysis of a sample of courses delivered in years 1 and 2 is presented.

The qualitative data presented below is shown by type of course, firstly Access to Crofting Toolkit and then the Bitesize courses, divided into the different subject matters. In the four-stage evaluation approach used in the project, participants recorded their expectations prior to the course and, their learning points, suggested improvements and reflections after the course. The analysis presented shows participants' views of each stage. Quotes are included in italics.

After this, there are sections on the views of participants looking back on the impact of the course, the views of the Scottish Crofting Federation staff and board, and a section on women-only courses.

### Access to Crofting Toolkit (ACT)

The outcomes assigned to ACT were that participants would understand the role of crofting and its context within rural policy; the role of primary production within crofting; and the role of crofting ecosystems.

Expectations. Participants on the Access to Crofting Toolkit course were asked about their Crofting background and why they chose to do the course. A small selection of several hundred quotes are included in Table 6 below. It was difficult to select quotes for inclusion in the table to one page. There were many stories, themes, hopes and ambitions. The quotes make interesting reading and display real diversity in the participants, some of whom wrote at length.

This ranges from those with generations of crofting in their family who felt unsure about taking over responsibility, to those who are moving back after years living elsewhere to take over a croft, to those who have moved from an urban environment and are interested in a change in lifestyle. Some of people were coming from different places, sometimes with a background in agriculture, sometimes with a desire to work on the land, and with new ideas, around the environment. There were people who just want to know more about crofting, or particular aspects of it, and those who have just inherited a croft and don't know what to do with it.

Participants displayed a range of experience. Some were no more than hopeful, or interested in the idea of one day owning a croft. Other people wanted to understand the paperwork, some needed practical skills, some wanted to see whether crofting was feasible for them. There were stories of father's croft, uncle's croft, inheritance, and the importance of community and heritage, in some cases persuading the older generation to keep the land. Many of the participants displayed a strong feeling of wanting to do something with the land, which perhaps, was not being used to its full potential.

Some participants were more interested in horticulture than animal husbandry. Others were realising the difficulty in getting a croft. This small sample of the comments

conveys the context, and the range of backgrounds of participants. It also conveys enthusiasm and potential for the future. On the whole, the on the Access to Crofting Toolkit participants were looking for a way of getting started.

<b>Table 7 Selected responses - Access to Crofting Toolkit: Do you have a crofting background and why you chose to do the course?</b>
<i>We have recently purchased a new property with some land and keep sheep and horses. Looking to broaden my knowledge and understanding of crofting, record keeping, sheep husbandry etc.</i>
<i>Out of curiosity; to see if it is possible to become a crofter and if so how to go about it.</i>
<i>I currently grow my own veg/polytunnel/chickens/ducks/rabbits – my dream is to have a croft or smallholding, so I wanted to do the course to find out more about all aspects of crofting.</i>
<i>I feel it in an essential prerequisite for joining the world of crofting.</i>
<i>My wife and I have recently taken over a family croft and wish to make the best use of it we can manage.</i>
<i>Grown up on a croft so understand the basics, but now have my own croft and I am looking into developing my skills</i>
<i>my father has assigned his croft to me and I would like to know as much as possible</i>
<i>I have been a tenant of a community development croft now for almost 3 years. I have a small flock of breeding hebridean ewes. I still feel I am new to crofting, have not developed my skills as I would like to have, and am too reliant on the support of the crofting community. I wish to develop my skills and understanding and look to increasing my independence, and to develop my croft further</i>
<i>To find out more about how to start up, run a croft, finding the right land and financial info.</i>
<i>I grew up on a croft surrounded by sheep and have always shown an interest in getting my hands dirty helping out with anything I could. I decided to do this course because I always believed I could be a crofter but supposed I never thought I have enough knowledge about it. Also I have a keen interest in our history / heritage and how crofting effected the area and country I was born and raised in.</i>
<i>It provides an excellent introduction to the basics.</i>
<i>My family have crofted for generations. Having been brought up with crofting I have helped out from an early age. I moved to Aberdeen for a number of years but always home for lambing, shearing, sales. I am now home for good and my Mum is going to assign a croft to me. Even though I have a lot of experience in crofting I feel I don't know a lot of behind the scenes or how to take it further.</i>
<i>To give us some info on what we can do, what funding is available to us, who we can contact to help.</i>
<i>I have about an acre of land. Have a goat and looking to breed goats.</i>
<i>I am developing a business plan to start up a market garden.</i>
<i>I lived next to my Uncle's croft throughout my childhood and helped my grandparents and uncle with a range of tasks over the years. I recently and unexpectedly inherited my Uncle's croft and after winding up his business there, I now need to decide how best to work it and how to go about bringing it back to good order.</i>
<i>Grandfather still runs the croft my mother grew up on. I spent all my school and university holidays on the croft but will now be moving there on a work placement. I'm keen to gain some relevant qualifications to back up and build on my experience. To gain qualifications as evidence for crofting experience as well as attend formal learning of the correct procedures.</i>
<i>No formal education in animal husbandry- like to learn the basics &amp; meet other aspiring crofters.</i>

<i>I have recently taken on the tenancy of the croft from Dad so would like some guidance on what's involved and what's feasible on the land I have.</i>
<i>I would like to gain an insight into crofting, as this has always interested me. I would very much like to become involved in crofting, and hope that this course will give me the knowledge of what is required and help me decide whether to pursue this further.</i>
<i>We bought a 5 acre croft last summer but could do with help with getting grants and some advice about how to make the best use of the land that we own.</i>
<i>To ensure I understand how to make the best of crofting - and legalities involved. (Maximising carbon sequestration / low carbon use/ community resilience important)</i>
<i>I would like to get into crofting but am having difficulty finding land</i>

ACT Learning Points. Participants were asked the main learning points from the course. The main learning points included:

- For some everything was new, all aspects were learning points, and a lot was learned.
- Trainers and network: New entrants appreciated meeting other crofters, interacting with experienced crofter tutors and interacting with peer crofters
- Croft management/ record keeping
- Horticulture
- Livestock
- Subsidies/grants
- The Law
- Crofting may not be for me

Several quotes illustrate participants' learning points.

<i>A lot of very good learning points, best is that I now feel very confident knowing what information I need to get and where to get it.</i>
<i>That is sounds totally impossible to ever get a croft. This is useful to know.</i>
<i>Red tape surrounding acquiring, keeping, maintaining livestock.</i>
<i>Enthusiasm, encouragement, ideas.</i>
<i>I have a more concise idea of how to go about achieving my croft and what I should do with it. I will be looking into more detailed information I have been given so that I can get started asap. I also would like to say thank-you to everyone involved for all the information and support it has been more than I expected.</i>
<i>Starting point for business plan and getting the necessary registrations and notifications in place on which to build to improve holding which has been badly neglected, before developing diversification business</i>

ACT Improvements There were many people who made no suggestions for improvement or said the course was just fine as it was. One improvement suggested that was taken up by the SCF Training Team, was to bring more practical skills into the toolkit, some felt there was too much time in the classroom. The last ACT course was held at the tutor's horticultural business, so that they could provide practical sessions interweaved with the lectures.

A few quotes illustrate improvements:

<i>A few more activities would help break up long lectures.</i>
<i>Making the course over three or four days.</i>

*Running separate courses for people who already have a croft or are in the process of buying one versus people who are just aspiring to be crofters. This would allow those already active in crofting to go into more detail on specific areas and avoid more basic questions.*

*Lewis is a fairly unique environment and all aspects of the course should focus on how to manage that.*

**ACT Reflections.** Reflections contained thoughts on how participants would apply their new knowledge learning they had:

*I have a more concise idea of how to go about achieving my croft and what I should do with it. I will be looking into more detailed information I have been given so that I can get started asap. I also would like to say thank-you to everyone involved for all the information and support it has been more than I expected.*

*Starting point for business plan and getting the necessary registrations and notifications in place on which to build to improve holding which has been badly neglected, before developing diversification business*

*Confirmed the need for much more ground preparation.*

*Really enjoyed visit to the croft to start the course to see the relevance of presentations by tutors. Learning on the course focused my thinking on planning and how a croft could work for me.*

*This was such a great course. I learned FAR more than I expected, and it was incredibly impressive. SO MUCH food for thought, thank-you!*

*Very valuable course and very enjoyable. Intend to get registered on croft by next year.*

*Record keeping and tutor from solicitors – I personally would prefer to have before lunch. A massive topic/subject to cover in two days. Arrived apprehensive and feeling inadequate – have left feeling invigorated, positive, enthusiastic and not alone! Thank you so very much and I look forward to keeping in touch.*

### **Bitesize Skills and Woodland Courses**

The outcome in these courses was more straightforward: that participants were able to build skills capacity, competitiveness of primary production methods and improve product quality. Analysis was less straightforward as the feedback was on a large number of courses on a range of topics. There were lots of learning points. This section is important and it demonstrates the width and the depth of the learning that has gone on in the project, and verifies that the desired outcomes were achieved.

**Bitesize Learning Points.** There were so many learning points from participants on the Bitesize course they have been shortened and summarised by course:

- Croft Ground. Drainage, soil sample uses and to plan land use. Importance of soil. The order and timing for liming and fertilising. Insight into the work and expense required for rush and bracken clearance. Robocut machine. Learning about all the different grants etc that are available.
- Drystone. History and understanding of the technique. Hands-on, practical go at disassembling and reconstructing a wall. How to start with proper foundation height and depth. How to build a drystone dyke. Learning the basic techniques, but also the WHY behind each strategy & tip.

- Goats. The medication. vitamins, minerals, copper etc. The marketing of the meat. Care of goats on a larger scale. Practical guide to goat keeping as a business invaluable.
- Lambing. Animal welfare. Understanding of the lambing process. added confidence re difficult lambings and care. Practical handling dead lambs. Turning lambs. Preparation for ewes before lambing, handling, importance of cleanliness. Presentation of lambs in the womb. Different birth styles. Hands-on and theory relative to each other. Understanding disease, problems and after care. managing to castrate. Ewe management, nutrition. learning what equipment is needed. Lambing simulator. String/loop. Feeding tube and injections. How to distinguish which lamb is which Learning about the full cycle of lambing. confident about terminologies. Pulling lambs, docking, neutering.
- Polytunnels. Wind proof, rainwater harvesting. Pest control, germination temperature.
- Plants for diseases. The techniques of building . Making the polytunnel level.
- Scything. Technique and sharpening. How to use the scythe. Setting the scythe to suit the person using it. That scything is by far more effective/sensible to use for rushes than a brush cutter. How to mow to cut croft without strimmer. Washing the blade will not make it rusty. How to peen the blade.
- Woodland. Examples of woodland regeneration, planting. Finding out about the Woodland Trust. Visiting an existing woodland with establishes and new trees. Seeing woodland management in action. Legislation. How to look after growing trees. Different species on different soil. Pruning branches to force growth and keep a straight tree. Site selection for types of trees and grants info. Tree management. Mulching. Tree protection skills, plastic matting. The use of black DPM for protecting juvenile trees. Weed suppression. Rabbit control. Wiggle room for trees, distance Use sharp spade. Planning is key. Don't let the trees dry out before planting otherwise wasting time and money.

### BS Improvements

A list of improvements suggested across in the sample of available Bitesize courses are below, most participants did not list any, or said “none”. No major improvements are listed.

<i>1 day is only enough for very general course.</i>
<i>Structured sections for different types of work.</i>
<i>Maybe something on when to choose what technique - but it's in the handouts.</i>
<i>Preparation of foundations for completely new wall.</i>
<i>It would be better to show the different wall types before the practical.</i>
<i>More detail about techniques at the start.</i>
<i>a little more theory behind stone selection and how to choose a style of wall.</i>
<i>I feel there were too many people in close confinement.</i>
<i>Handout would be an added bonus.</i>
<i>Suggestions to bring materials from home to try with the techniques.</i>
<i>Hoof clipping AFTER lunch next time.</i>
<i>A second follow-on course.</i>
<i>the more hands-on practice the better.</i>
<i>Bit more about planning your trees and where you'll plant it.</i>
<i>Provide an example of how machinery (eg small digger) could be used to prepare a site.</i>

**BS Reflections.** There were a lot of reflections and the tables below show quotes which reflect common or interesting themes brought up by the participants:

#### Croft Land

<i>Plan to continue bringing croft land into use by clearing more bracken and brush.</i>
<i>Confirmed my thinking vis-à-vis drainage, but also driven home soil management. Plan to proceed with drainage work plus soil testing, sampling and remedies. Also will pick up looking at grants.</i>
<i>This course has enlightened me with regard to what will be required to bring my croft back into work, and the opportunities available to get this under way.</i>
<i>Robocutter was amazing. Food was fantastic, a very knowledgeable instructor. Lots of take home learning and actions!</i>

#### Drystone

<i>Will be building paths and walls as part of my new build.</i>
<i>Plan to build retaining walls, stock shelters for croft.</i>
<i>Excellent instructor and a great venue.</i>
<i>I think this should be extended to as many crofters as want to do it. It's a useful skill and good to learn with others, and with such an excellent trainer.</i>
<i>This has increased my confidence to now go and implement these skills on my own croft.</i>
<i>I feel more able to tackle the rebuilding work on my 3 ruins.</i>
<i>I believe that such courses are of huge benefit to the retention of traditional skills and I intend to put the training into practice.</i>

#### Goats

<i>Great double act, was helpful being split into smaller groups for practical segments. Always felt engaged even when feeling sleepy after lunch.</i>
<i>Please run courses in Caithness and Sutherland, it's so far for me to travel to each course and it costs me a fortune in time and money and there's so many I just can't go to.</i>
<i>Beautiful location and well-kept animals and pens.</i>
<i>Had a fab day and it's great to network with others in a similar situation.</i>

#### Lambing

<i>This course has been fantastic. I have made a new contact now able to understand a lot more about the lambing process.</i>
<i>Found the course very thorough and informative, would have happily stayed longer. Found it useful to be talked through the practical side as I did it.</i>
<i>This was an excellent course, very informative and pitched at the right level. It was good to meet like-minded people. Definitely encouraging, can't wait to get some sheep again. Good to see lambing in progress.</i>
<i>Really enjoyed the day. I plan to research some areas more fully. Will keep an eye on any other courses coming up.</i>
<i>Brilliant day, everyone got to do everything practical. Tutor was fab, very informative, easy to understand.</i>
<i>Skills which will help me with the keeping of my new flock. Physical learning, which balances my SRUC work.</i>

<i>Excellent venue. Really appreciated the hands-on experience and tutors having patience to keep calm and lamb.</i>
<i>Just looking forward to putting what I've learnt into practice and the lambing sheds at home running smoother.</i>
<i>Feel more confident to cope with lambing. Really good course.</i>
<i>I have learned more about ewe and lamb maintenance, to the point where I would now feel more capable to offer help to friends and family locally who keep large flocks. The little things like learning about medication, tubing lambs and ensuring survival after ewe has lambed. Very interesting day - delivered perfectly, very professional.</i>
<i>All very well informed; information and skills which I will be able to implement on our farm. Has spurred me on to ask farming friends if I could help and continue my new skills learned. Unexpected benefit - I got to assist with a live lambing! Great venue, friendly and happy tutors. Recommend this to anyone who is thinking about or needing assistance with lamb care and ewes.</i>
<i>The course was fantastic on all levels, being able to assist in lambing under supervision exceeded all my expectations for the day. Has made me more confident in increasing my work with sheep and enlarging my flock size.</i>
<i>Lambing starts in 3 weeks. This has increased my confidence as I always feel a bit rusty at the start.</i>
<i>Hopefully the course was an introduction to a new way of life, especially if a croft should become available.</i>
<i>Will help me to have the confidence to assess a lambing situation, know what to look for and what the solutions might be.</i>
<i>I really enjoyed the content of the course and I found it interesting. I plan to have a croft one day and a few sheep so will no doubt revisit the content of the course.</i>
<i>I don't have sheep yet but this course has helped my confidence and the skills I have learned today have helped a great deal.</i>
<i>Great to be able to ask questions related to my own flock and how to build on it.</i>
<i>Best of the 3 courses I've now been on!</i>
<i>This is THE benchmark course, the BEST one I've done with the Crofting Federation. Thank-you!</i>

## Woodland

<i>Going to plant soon.</i>
<i>Will be planting 1000 trees in the spring and plan to investigate local species.</i>
<i>Great benefit was becoming sure that my scheme will work. Am now convinced that my investment (time and money) will be worthwhile.</i>
<i>Enjoyed the course and look forward to beginning my woodland project. I'd like to see a separate training day detailing figures and worked examples of applications.</i>
<i>Subsequent to the training I anticipate applying for a grant, to undertake tree planting on my croft.</i>
<i>Content on the day was very concise - great to have the option to receive more detailed info. Can now get on with ground prep and planting on 2 crofts. Connection to other crofters.</i>
<i>Planting trees as shelter belts will greatly improve the productivity of other crops.</i>



*My original plan is to diversify my crofting activities (away from livestock) with this course I can now diversify into tree growing onto my crofts with a lot more knowledge than previously.*

*I was/am keen to do more planting on our common grazing but what we have done today will be restricted to small areas. It would be useful to have more information on planting larger areas, say up to 2 or 3 Ha which will require some mechanical help.*

*Now to consider location and species carefully. It's hard work and time consuming.*

*An indication of who may be available locally to provide help - professionals and volunteer network would be handy.*

### **Township Training**

1. To enable participants to adapt measures to increase competitiveness and impact on profit margins and production levels.
2. To upskill existing crofters and smallholders and update crofting practice.
3. To acquire skills and knowledge for a broad range of land management techniques relating to crofting and smallholding.

There was less material on Township training as the delivery of these course was delegated to local environments to cater for local needs. Only a small number of questionnaires were returned. SCF had less control over the process. Of the small number returned (less than 30) the levels of positive responses were on a similar level to the Bitesize course

To remedy this, the following questions were asked at one township training course

- 1) How did the tutor help to achieve your training objectives?  
*There was discussion with the tutor leading up to the session which guided the approach. There was a well thought through plan which guided us through the Grazing Regulations and Crofting Law based on our own written regulations. The tutor ensured that everyone was involved and had the opportunity to ask questions whilst keeping the session flowing.*
- 2) What worked well about the day?  
*The session was well structured, there was some work involving scenario / role play (with props) which helped to give perspective and context, as well as ample opportunity for questions.*
- 3) Has this event brought participants closer together?  
*Yes, in particular it has brought some common knowledge across several committees in the area and the opportunity to discuss issues in different areas.*
- 4) Do you have plans for any similar events (SCF or otherwise) in the future?  
*There was quite a bit of interest so it was a bit disappointing that less than half attended in the end for various reasons. I would welcome any further relevant training.*

### **Long term reflection from participants**

In order to examine the extent to which the Skills Boost Project achieved the outcomes assigned, a purposive sample of 20 participants were sent a follow-up survey inviting them to provide longer term reflections on the benefits of the courses. This was sent to participants (and tutors) who had agreed to follow up, who had been on two or more courses (some had been on many), and who the SCF team selected as participants who had something to say to the evaluation (therefore not a random sample). The

survey included three simple questions and 12 responses were received, which ranged from short answers to paragraphs of detail – these included many good points so are included here to provide details to the reader.

What do you think about the SCF courses you have been on?

*I found the sheep course informative and fascinating. Although not a crofter the herding with dogs section was, for me the best bit. Watching the tutor tell us how he trained his 4 month old pup and then show how good she and her mum are was brilliant. Even experienced crofters in the audience were commenting how much they had learnt.*

*I have been on a variety of courses. The most practical ones are brilliant. Fencing, basic chainsaw maintenance and crosscutting, scything. The sheepdog training course subsidised by SCF was very useful and made the sessions much more affordable. Each course has provided opportunities to meet with other crofters or prospective crofters to allow for information exchange and establishing ongoing support networks. The Access to Crofting course was the only one I found disappointing. I have been in crofting for thirty years and the main problem is the dwindling community and the change away from collaborative work. We no longer need to call in help to pack down a delivery of draff or stack 200 small hay bales as I now just move round bales with the tractor. Perhaps the basic information was useful to some new entrants but I wanted more direction on making grant applications, keeping data and crofting law. Dealing with the Crofting Commission is so unsatisfactory as they will not enforce any of their aspirational regulations.*

*Very good and helpful.*

*I thought they were excellent. We did the Access to Crofting Toolkit. We loved it, learnt a huge amount and it really got us moving in the right direction. We met lots of nice folk, importantly we met keen folk who actually had a desire to croft and who understood the absolute privilege it is to be able to croft a piece of Scotland. I also attended a bringing your croft back into good use or title to that effect. It was good, but the input was more about flogging your land a little harder for cattle and sheep, rather than actual modern thinking of soil restoration. SCF has some brilliant tutors and members but is torn, old school tradition and new ideas pulling in very different ways. We have to look at climate change and sustainability and ask the difficult questions. SCF has to move with the times and recognise that we have to stay ahead of the curve. Trees, soil restoration and wildlife will play a big part of the future.*

*We are tutors for some courses in Shetland. They are a good way to where skills in rural communities*

*Very practical hands-on training. Good competent trainers.*

*We have worked in partnership with SCF for many years organising and facilitating the many different practical courses. Animal Husbandry for beginners was aimed at crofters who had either just inherited or acquired a croft and really did not know anything about keeping animals. We were extremely fortunate to have 2 wonderful tutors who were qualified vets and had a small mixed farm with sheep, pigs, hens, geese ducks and goats. As a result of attending the animal husbandry courses over the years, students readily admitted that they had gained confidence, knowledge and appreciated the opportunity to have practical experience on a variety of livestock etc. Since the course, many went on to manage their own*

flocks/goat herds etc. The Dry stone walling course was extremely popular and again, we always had a waiting list and one year we ran the course twice to meet demand. Those that attended were crofters who again had just acquired a 'run' down croft with fallen stone walls and they just did not know where to start. The Dry Stone walling course was also popular with the young crofters keen to add another skill.

After each year, we would evaluate the feedback and then decide along with the SCF training team, which courses to run again for the next year or to run a new course that had been repeatedly requested. The Bee keeping course was one such request and this was extremely successful, two of the crofters who attended that day course actually went on to keep their own bee hives which can be extremely challenging.

The Scything course was delivered in the last year and had been organised due to demand for the course. As much as we would have loved to have delivered the course in previous years, we had been unable to find a tutor. Professional and experienced Scything tutors are very very few and always in great demand but finally we were able to run the course. Many that attended the scything course have since continued Scything and the strimmer is now discarded!

If further funding had been available again to continue these courses for this year and the years to come, we would have been able to run the Scything course again and again. In fact, there is such a demand for traditional skills, from all age of crofter/small holder.

I myself am a crofter and having been the facilitator and organiser for these courses as part of my 'day' job, I know first-hand how important it is for new crofters to learn traditional skills and I understand how they feel, overwhelmed at the beginning, and they don't know where to start.

If I had had the opportunity to attend just one of these practical courses and the 'Access to crofting' course when I took on my croft, I feel that I would have got the croft land into a better condition far quicker than the time it actually took because of my lack of experience and knowledge, and there were none of these opportunities then.

Every week I will take enquiries from crofters/small holders wanting to know when the next Scything/Dry Stone walling/Animal husbandry course starts and sadly I have to refer them back to SCF and tell them that we are not running any courses in Mid Argyll for the foreseeable future. We did use to run a few traditional skill courses but again we had to secure funding to help keep the cost down for participants. I have thought about trying to organise some of the courses but again, funding would be required to support the courses. I do sincerely hope that the SCF can secure further funding in order to continue to delivery of the practical and theory courses as I am acutely aware that there are crofters/small holders out there who are so keen to manage their land in the traditional way, and want to learn and keep traditional skills for the next generation.

Has attending these courses made a difference to the way you croft/ or your day to day working life?

*it's allowed me to learn how to be a crofter. Despite the fact the Croft has been with us since family were moved to there during the Highland clearances, I had to convince my dad not to sell the croft, to keep it in the family, it's our tradition. That's important to me. He's was all for letting it go, selling up. I have been on a number of the SCF courses, and with the skills I have learnt on them, I have been able to prove to my dad I can do this. He has just recently finally agreed to sign the croft over to me. I need to keep learning, though, and there's nothing else like this being done.*

*Attending the course and organising it has given me a better understanding of sheep handling and crofting and also a few tips on training my young non collie dogs*

*The practical courses have given me skills and confidence to be able to undertake more tasks efficiently and competently. Or to know what I am actually asking someone else to do for me.*

*I am aspiring crofter; it made me more interested in crofting way of life. Recently I joined SCF and started actively looking for a croft.*

*Not really, it's us who are sharing what we do and changing the way other people work on their land. It is an easy way to set up and run a course. It takes all the admin elsewhere which is a bonus. It makes it easy to run one or two extra courses without too much extra work*

*Made me more confident in using the skills I have learned*

*Absolutely - it helps give you drive and energy to know there are other like-minded folk doing the same and wanting to learn like yourself. Crofting used to be more co-operative, but with the ageing population and number of abandoned crofts, active, young and keen crofters are often few and far between, and are rarely just next door. This can make modern active Crofting quite lonely.*

*I have found courses interesting, well organised and well informed. The tutors are of a very high standard and the attendees usually fully engaged. There has sometimes been follow-up communication/information between both attendees and tutors.*

*the ACT course was particularly useful and I am about to embark on more horticulture with a view to selling or supply other businesses*

What are the consequences of the SCF training project finishing for you?

*No direct consequences for me, however I think it's a shame as the funding for the tutors made them happy to provide the time to give the education to their fellow crofters. However, the course was so successful last year that another crofter has organised a similar Sheep day this year, to try to appeal to crofters and tourists alike. So the project allowed the community to initiate something successful that may well become an annual event.*

*The end of this project would mean that there would no longer be opportunities to meet other people trying to croft as I am, removing a forum for exchange of information and networking, improving my skills base and enabling me to croft more efficiently and cost effectively. Other courses are available but the subsidy from SCF made the short courses affordable. The courses were also delivered in such a friendly and accessible manner, and within reasonable travelling distance, that they were extremely popular and well received. I hope that SCF will be able to continue*

*to provide a range of courses particularly ones aimed at understanding soil management and woodland management in the light of climate change and trying to husband the ground in the best possible way for productivity and the planet.*

*I would like to continue with more courses, I feel I am only at the start of the understanding how I could live as a crofter.*

*More admin! Less courses run. We have to charge a bit more for our own courses to cover costs. This doesn't seem to make too much difference to participants. Courses are full whoever is putting them on.*

*Disappointing, there has been a useful and interesting range of courses available and very well subscribed.*

*It is a real shame. A lack of new skills and few opportunities for keen crofters to meet up and share knowledge, help and of course friendship. We have a toddler and the last few years have been a challenge to find time to attend courses, now we have the time and all the courses are gone.*

*We hope that funding is found.*

*I will feel isolated from the SCF without the regular contact. The courses were such a good way of finding out about best practice from the professionals. It was also a way of finding out what other crofter/small holders were doing and getting to know each other from all different locations.*

### **Views of Scottish Crofting Federation**

The SCF Training Team provided much support to this evaluation. This included three in-depth interviews, firstly to check details of courses, and databases, and secondly to ascertain their views on the project. These interviews were recorded and themes were drawn from them. While this data is not a from a neutral standpoint, it does add detail, context and verification to the analysis.

Staff had a lot to say about the project. They felt the last three years had gone really well, and they worked really well together as a team, with different strengths. It was notable how much dedication the team has had to the project, at some points working many more hours than contracted for. In terms of staffing, the only downside had been one project administrator had been ill, and was eventually replaced by the current post holder. This had impact on the capacity to deliver courses, as the two training and development managers had to do the administration as well as their own jobs.

The previous project (2013-2015) was a big learning curve for the training team; they learnt from their mistakes, and Skills Boost refined what was delivered. The team feel like they know what they are doing, and have built up goodwill and capacity has been built up. They knew that centralisation of enrolment was more effective, and the team felt they were target driven. They all felt there was a “positive vibe” about the work they were doing – and that they were now achieving something. *“courses sometimes book up in two days with people interested in changing their lives”*.

Access to Crofting Toolkit. The team recognised that 2 days in the classroom on the ACT course is too long for crofters – who want some hands-on experience, so changes were made to mix up teaching and experiential learning. One or two of the venues for ACT courses were a little crowded, but the team have learnt that ACT courses don't need to be local, and the solution is to hold courses where there is space, and less

expense, and where the hands-on element can be incorporated. SCF provided support for tutors who were good at practical skill delivery but less experienced at formal lecturing. They realised that there was an “A-Team” of tutors, and the best results were delivered using these experienced tutors, rather than less experienced, more local tutors. In the future, the team felt that different levels of ACT courses should be explored, as the participants came from a variety of perspectives. The ACT course has put some beginners off going for a croft when they realised it was not for them, that maybe it was too much hard work: this is on the whole a good thing.

Township Training. The SCF training team reported that township training took a lot of work to achieve the outputs. The course had been devised as an effort to get more established crofters into training. There is a group of crofters that are hard to reach in terms of training. It is difficult for established crofters to get away from the croft, and they also may feel there is less need for training. The township training was new, something that had not been tried in the previous projects, was cost neutral for participating townships. Invitations were made to townships, either online or letters, but there was little initial response. It was a struggle in the first year, it then began, taking shape as a “community of practice “on the Black Isle, rather than a township, but it worked.

This group wanted to learn about polytunnels; this proved popular and was repeated. Then, Assynt Crofters Trust wanted to celebrate their 25 year anniversary, and a course was set up around that event. There was frustration from the team that there were opportunities that could be taken, and a concern about common grazings and the communal ability to manage large areas of land that are getting neglected. SCF involved a former crofting commissioner who has studied commons grazings to deliver a suite of three common grazings events in Tongue, Ullapool and Skye.

He created a “Grazing Game” and succeeded in getting the Township Clerks on board. SCF have learnt there is a need to aim courses at Grazing Clerks: if courses are provided in a prescribed format and open directed to the needs of grazings committees, there was a better level of take up.

Bitesize Course. These courses have been a great success, a lot was learnt from the previous project. There was flexibility in course delivery, and the team felt accredited courses may not be able to achieve this type of responsive delivery. There was demand for more places, so SCF ran more courses in year 2. For example, the women-only courses were introduced during the second year from demand. SCF tried an 11 am start and that helped participants who could feed their animals before coming to the course. By now, SCF feel they know what people want to learn about, and there are demands for more courses.

### Digital issues

The planned online forum – a closed Facebook group - just did not work as well as was hoped. It was found that upkeep and moderation were time-consuming for the Training Team, and crofters did not use the online format that much. However, the main SCF Facebook page has gained 5,000 likes over the last six years, and this has been a cheap and effective way of advertising forthcoming courses.

## Views of SCF Director and Chair

The SCF Director and the Chair provided their perspective on the project

*Over 2016-2019 the SCF Training team delivered a significant number of courses including 15 Introduction to Crofting two-day events. The day courses covered a range of subjects pertinent to Crofting. Feedback from participants was most positive with many extolling the knowledge and skill of the course tutors, the efficient administration and useful and interesting course content. It is a challenge requiring considerable expertise to develop and deliver Crofting courses consistently to such high standards and to ensure SCF crofting training is relevant and supportive. The professionalism and dedication of the SCF training team has enabled them to meet the challenge and helped SCF achieve an impressive track record in delivering bespoke Crofting training. (Chair)*

*Crofting is a model of sustainable use of land that maintains rural communities. The value of crofting to the environment and to the resilience of our remote rural communities is well proven. It is essential that the skills and knowledge of this way of living on the land are transferred to those coming into crofting, and that new skills are developed and passed on. Training is therefore the most essential development work that SCF does in maintaining crofting, adapting to change and bringing on the new generation of crofters. Our training managers and all involved in the programme are to be commended for delivering this essential service so effectively. We hope to develop the programme further and take it into a new phase. (Chief Executive)*

### **Women-Only courses**

The majority of registered crofters are male (74%). However, the proportion of female registered crofters has doubled from 13% to 26% in the last four years (Ipsos MORI 2018). Crofting Commission figures suggest the split is 65/35, so the situation is changing.

SCF ran two women-only fencing courses in year 2 in response to demand. Some women had said they would prefer to learn physical skills in that environment, as women together. Both courses were over-subscribed. A sheepdog course happened to attract an all-female cohort: participants on the course considered the value of this supporting their empowerment.

Satisfaction levels on all-women courses were high, just as they were generally in the other courses. Women noted the impact of the training on their confidence to undertake tasks themselves, or in dealing with contractors. They also enjoyed the learning environment. This aligns with the Women in Farming and Agriculture Report (Scottish Government 2017).

*“I have wanted to learn to fence for some time. I feel I can save money to put towards other areas of the croft by doing fencing myself. It is difficult to get fencers to come and quote on small jobs and nearly impossible to get more than one quote for grant purposes so easier to do it ourselves. I appreciated that this training was for women, I would not have had the confidence to attend a course requiring physical effort with men. I enjoyed the course”.*

An excellent article in the West Highland Free Press, Lisa MacDonald points out that it is not the intention to exclude men, but rather to help level the playing field for those who need the space to step up. *“Fencing skills were not the only reward... what these women were taking away from the day was self-belief and independence”*

One woman crofter commented that she will feel more isolated if it is not possible to continue funding training courses.

SCF have developed approaches which encourage women to sign up to their courses, with good gender balance, in particular in the Bitesize courses. This fits well with the Scottish Government Women in Agriculture Task Force guidelines for trainers, and there have been learning points for development of policy in Scotland, and beyond.

## **DISCUSSION**

The evaluation demonstrates that the Skills Boost project has been delivered as planned, and that the training project has helped give new entrants or successors the skills to access crofting; and up-skilled more established crofters to improve their business output and efficiency.

The project has developed capacity in terms of administration and delivery of courses suited to crofters, instructor network knowledge base, venues and peer support networks. During the project an “A-team” of tutors emerged, who were 1. experts at the skill they were teaching, and 2. excellent in their delivery. The feedback from participants is a credit to the tutors who delivered the courses.

The outcomes assigned to ACT were that participants would understand the role of crofting and its context within rural policy; the role of primary production within crofting; and the role of crofting ecosystems. The content of the ACT toolkit courses reflected these outcomes. The quantitative responses of participants demonstrate these outcomes were attained. In particular the role of crofting, and the role of primary production. A good example of this is two women who came on an ACT, bought a croft then did fencing, clipping courses and who now have been on TV “This Farming Life” and won a recent new entrant award.

The scores for better understanding of crofting ecosystems and more knowledge of resource efficiency and for low carbon economy were relatively less good, although still acceptable. Perhaps, these topics received less priority, this may be in part as in demand-led delivery this was not what all participants were looking for from the course. However, as climate change moves up the agenda, and sustainability and environmental targets become more crucial to agriculture, this is an area for expansion in the future. Crofting, and the practical skills associated with crofting may help provide solutions in rural areas.

Being able to undertake practical skills like fencing and lambing are important in being recognised as a crofter. In some cases, this can underpin the future viability of a croft, as those who upskill can undertake a wider range of husbandry and maintenance tasks.



SCF have demonstrated the ability to deliver training that supports social justice and empowerment for women in agriculture. Their approach encouraged women to attend the courses. Perhaps, the fact that the training team were all women, meant this was seen as important; there was also a deliberate effort to deliver training events that was inclusive. Steps were taken to ensure that trainers and staff were aware of gender issues. The training courses also have helped to reduce social isolation: several participants commented that crofting is a lonely occupation.

The responses of participants have been included in the report at length as they provide an in-depth perspective of what was achieved in the project. There were many learning points and reflections from the Bitesize courses in particular; the feedback from participants demonstrates the width and the depth of the learning that has gone on in the project, and this verifies that the desired outcomes of the project were achieved.

Much has been achieved in the three years due the experience, organisation, dedication and vision of the Scottish Crofting Federation Training Team.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The main recommendation is more of the same.
- Funding continuing training would bring benefit to the Scottish crofters, the rural economy in the Highland and Islands, allow crofting to contribute to building resilience in rural communities, and address reducing carbon emissions of agricultural production. It is highly unlikely that this education could be sustained by private sources. The project has developed capacity in terms of crofter training and it would be of tangible benefit for this to be maintained through future programmes.
- Skills Boost has succeeded in widening and strengthening skills in rural agriculture in the Highlands and Islands to a diverse audience, and SCF should continue to develop this approach.
- SCF needs to find ways of convincing the most experienced crofters to invest in updating their skills and learning new skills.
- It would be beneficial to develop tiered access courses aimed at 1. Beginners interested in crofting/working on the land. 2. aspiring crofters who have some experience and are looking for a croft. 3. new entrants in early stages of production.
- While the face-to face element of training is both popular and highly beneficial, SCF should consider the provision of some aspects of training in an on-line learning option format. This would and augment learning for practical skills, might save time and resources for tutors and participants, and could open up access to those who cannot easily take time away from the croft.

- SCF should provide more women-only practical skills courses. This would support the Scottish Government Women in Agriculture initiative, and wider social justice themes of equality in line with Scottish Government agricultural policy.
- SCF will have to continue to balance the old and the new, and place traditional crofting skills into a modern setting, which takes account of the contribution crofting can make to the environment and to reducing carbon footprint.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost project has been a success. The training project has been delivered as planned. In some cases, targets have been significantly exceeded. In total 124 courses were delivered. There were 1646 participants over three years, which is 137% of the target output of 1200. This means there were 1792 training days delivered, an average public cost of £224 per participant.

Almost all participants agreed that the course met or exceeded their expectations. They reported gaining knowledge and learning practical skills to increase their product quality. More women than men have participated in the project. The courses are widening and re-generating agricultural skills in rural communities.

The Skills Boost project has helped to sustain, develop and broaden crofting in rural Scotland over the last three years, providing localised, non-accredited training. The feedback from participants is a credit to the tutors who delivered the courses. It is important that the skills and knowledge of this way of living on the land are transferred to those coming into crofting, or skills will be lost. It is also important that new skills are developed and passed on, so that crofting remains viable in the future.

At this time of economic, political and constitutional uncertainty, SCF Training needs continued public funds to maintain and develop training for experienced, new and aspiring crofters.

## References

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# Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost 2016-2019

## All Participants

Over 3 years 1646 participants have travelled 169,815 miles to attend SCF training courses.

The map shows where people have travelled from.



# Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost 2016-2019

## Bitesize Venues

Over 3 Years, 75 Bitesize courses, have been held in 28 venues throughout the crofting regions.



## Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost 2016-2019

# Bitesize Participants

Over 3 years participants have travelled 98,334 miles to attend Bitesize training courses.

The map shows where people have travelled from.



## Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost 2016-2019

# ACT Venues

Over 3 Years, 15 'Access to Crofting Toolkit' courses, have been held in 11 venues throughout the crofting regions.



## Crofters and Smallholders Skills Boost 2016-2019

# ACT Participants

Participants travelled  
62,305 miles to attend  
Access to Crofting Toolkit Courses.

The map shows the areas  
throughout the UK and beyond  
that people travelled from.

