

# Donald MacKinnon

Age: 24

Location: Isle of Lewis



Image: Rural Youth Project

## Main Challenges



Enterprise support for young people



Digital connectivity



Accessibility for tourists

“Other parts of the island are seeing the benefits that high speed broadband can deliver; people can work from home, people can connect with anyone, anywhere in the world and really – it doesn’t matter where you are – people can do a variety of jobs. That’s going to be really important for the islands going forward.”

- Donald MacKinnon

## Background

After studying Politics and Geography at Glasgow University, Donald MacKinnon returned home to the Isle of Lewis with a determination to build a life for himself working the land, and a commitment to building a strong future for the island.

Donald is a crofter, grazing his flock of sheep on the common and croft land, producing store lambs and meat which he sells locally.

“I wanted to come home; Crofting was a big part of that”

Passionate and committed to crofting, Donald is the vice chairman of The Scottish Crofting Federation, through which he represents crofters and campaigns to make crofting more accessible to new entrants.

“There is no doubt that the most active crofters are getting older, but recently we’ve seen more young people getting interested.”

Donald jumps at opportunities to network with his local and wider community, leveraging the power of ideas platforms – one example is his involvement with the Outer Hebrides LEADER Local Action Group:

“It is a great chance for you to get involved and talk about how we can make the islands a better place to live for young people.”

Like most crofters, Donald also works another job. Both positions Donald has held since returning to the island, have focused on community development. First, as a Development Officer for a Community Association, and now in his role working for the Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh (Carloway Estate Trust) Community Land Trust.

At present, Donald is working on a large-scale redevelopment of a former school.

Image: Donald MacKinnon



**“I think there are lots of opportunities. It is a great place to live; you have an excellent quality of life.”**

**- Donald MacKinnon**

## Background

The community bought the Carloway Primary School in 2017 and has been raising funds since to refurbish and repurpose the building. Inside the building, there will be a community shop, a community kitchen and office space which will be used by a variety of businesses and organisations, including the Community Land Trust.

“Currently, there is no shop in the village, and it is a 24-mile round trip to get a pint of milk which is not viable really for that community.”

“This project will provide services and facilities for that community that they desperately need and will make it sustainable in the long term.”

One of the key challenges Donald recognises is impacting the development of the island’s economy - as well as potentially making it less attractive for young people to live there – is the issue of connectivity.

“I think connectivity is really important, particularly in rural areas. Having a good broadband connection is vital now – it’s an essential part of everyday life. In the village where I live, we don’t have great broadband at the minute, it’s hopefully going to be improved. But I think other parts of the island are seeing the benefits that high speed broadband can deliver; people can work from home, people can connect with anyone, anywhere in the world and really – it doesn’t matter where you are – people can do a variety of jobs. That’s going to be really important for the islands going forward.”

Proud of the island and hopeful for the future, Donald is clear that there are many opportunities for young people willing to relocate.

“It is a great place to live, you have an excellent quality of life. It is a great place to grow up, so I think for people thinking about starting a family – it’s certainly a great place for kids.

“Tourism is growing. There are opportunities for people to come up with innovative ideas for how we benefit from that and how we get the most value out of it.

“There are also opportunities in crofting. There are crofts available. A lot of land isn’t being used. And for those who are interested in getting involved – there are opportunities available.”

## Solutions

1. Restore the new entrants and the young entrants scheme so opportunities are available for new entrants and young crofters coming into the sectors.

2. Additional short-term financial support from the Scottish government to support those who have secured grants through the Crofting Agricultural Grants Scheme for capital projects under the scheme. Despite securing up to 80% in grants, for many who do not have the resources themselves, it is the immediate cashflow that can pose a significant barrier to entry.

3. Broadband and mobile connectivity so that all communities on the Islands have good. Whilst there’s talk of 5G on the mainland, some communities don’t even have 3G. This is not only vital for Island inhabitants to help them stay connected both personally and professionally but is essential for tourists coming to the area.



### We’re social!

 @Rural Youth Project

 @RYP2018

 @RYP2018

 Rural Youth Podcast

 Rural Youth Project

The Rural Youth Project is kindly supported by:

