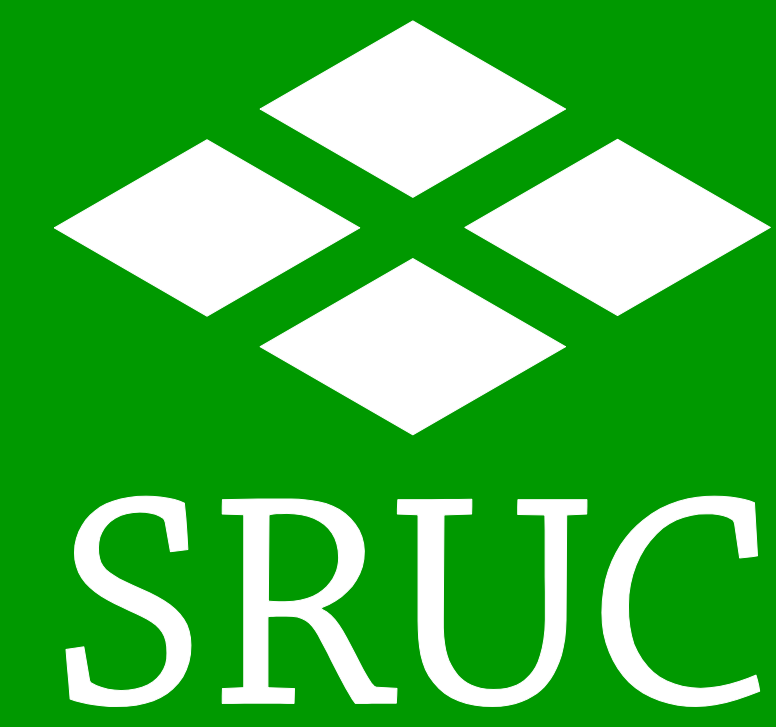


# Family Estates and Rural Resilience



**Dr Mike Woolvin and Dr Sarah Skerratt**  
Scotland's Rural College  
West Mains Road  
Edinburgh, EH9 3JG, Scotland  
Email: [mike.woolvin@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:mike.woolvin@sruc.ac.uk)      Email: [sarah.skerratt@sruc.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.skerratt@sruc.ac.uk)

## Introduction

This research **aims to explore the links between the management and decision-making of family estates, and wider rural (community) resilience.**

**‘Resilience’ is defined as:**

- the existence, development and mobilisation of resources, in order to thrive in an environment characterised by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise;
- the deliberate development of capacity in order to respond to and influence change;
- the development of new trajectories for the future.



**Four broad themes of resilience were examined:**

- Whether the estates in this study are simply resilient or not, and cannot become resilient;
- Whether resilience is established and enhanced through deliberate pathways or choices, and whether certain decision making pathways are essential;
- Whether resilience is at the level of the individual, family, group, estate community, or wider - bringing in people and institutions from outside the locality;
- Whether the estates in this study feel that it is appropriate that they should be expected to take responsibility for wider rural resilience.



## Methods

- Random selection of 23 estates** from Scottish Land and Estates database, with reference to location, size, and family ownership.
- Desk-based review** of available literature regarding estate.
- Face-to-face semi-structured interview.**

	0 – 1000 hectares	1001 – 10000 hectares	10 001+ hectares	Total
Highland and Island	2 (4)	2 (4)	1	5 (9)
North East	1	1	0	2
Central	4	1	0	2
South East	3	1	0	4
South West	2	1	0	3
Total	12 (14)	6 (8)	1	19 (23)

Figure 1.: Sample of family estates. Numbers in (italics) include ‘top up’ figures.

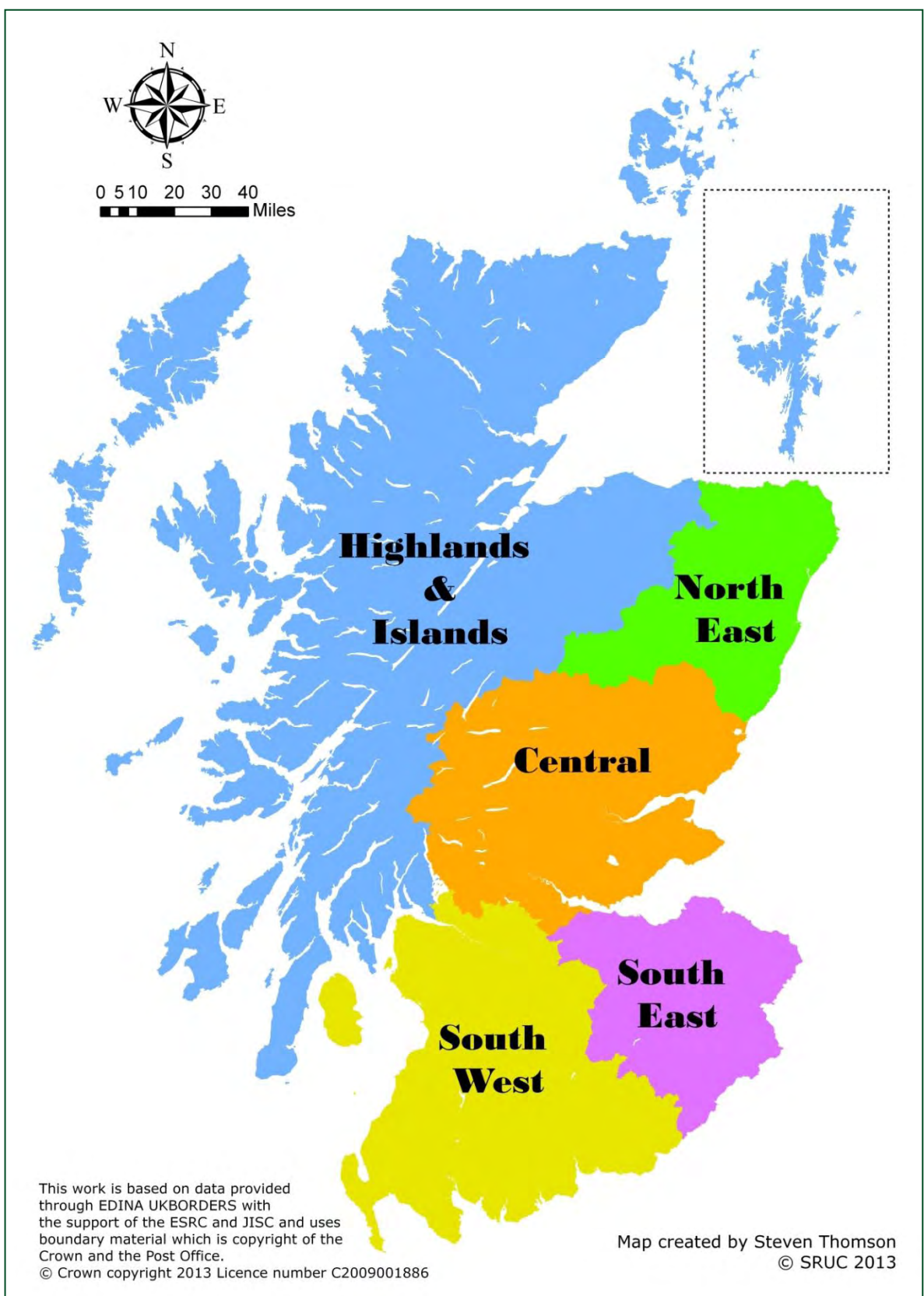


Figure 2: Map of the 5 Scottish Land and Estates regions



This research is funded by Scottish Government's Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS) under Theme 8 'Vibrant Rural Communities' of the Food, Land and People Programme (2011-2016).



[www.sruc.ac.uk](http://www.sruc.ac.uk)

## Results

- Estate functions are diverse**, this diversification is increasingly important with internal and external factors influencing opportunities. **Motivations** are personal and can involve broader balancing of estate and community priorities (potentially supporting employment opportunities, local services; investing in the local area).
- Strength is influenced by** the estate's time-horizon; the point of inheritance; the purpose of indebtedness as investment rather than spend; diversity and size of revenue streams; geographical location, land quality and estate size.
- Estates remain strong and adaptable by** using accumulated experience in a context of on-going change and deliberately instigating change including: decision-making arrangements; formalising business planning; diversifying investments; and increasing awareness of the external (policy/grant) context.
- All interviewees engage with others** within and beyond their estates, at a range of scales. Interviewees identified three types of connection: i) seeking professional advice and information; ii) formal/informal community connections; iii) formal/informal networking with agencies and organisations.
- Interviewees' engagement is influenced by** the issue concerned; the estate's physical and social characteristic and generational change. There is a distinction between engaging with others, and the processes of on-estate decision-making.
- The majority stated **it is appropriate for estates be expected to deliver to wider rural development objectives** (citing responsibility, self-compulsion, driving local businesses). A smaller number stated it is **appropriate but with qualifications and caveats** (concerns about 'paternalism'; depends on size/composition of estate and demand; distinction between 'responsibility' and 'involvement'; interplay with profitability); A minority stated **it is not appropriate** (a role for others; should be no more/less expectation; business viability must come first; location dependent).
- For private estates to deliver more** interviewees reported uncertainty and lack of clarity (policy and funding); bureaucracy and relationships with institutions; perceptions of estates and support for community engagement must change.



## Conclusions

- A vibrant and strong resident family estate can contribute to the on-going vibrancy of rural communities** on or near the estates, through activities including employment, service provision (eg: housing, business space), and developing shared local plans.
- Multiple factors influence estate involvement** including geographical location, size/activities of estate, stage in generational timeline, governance and perceived willingness of others to engage.
- Estates are diverse**; engagement with estates must not be 'standardised'.

## Acknowledgements

(i) Thank you to Steven Thomson (SRUC) for producing figure 2.