

Career Trajectories and Career Education in Rural Schools

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SINCLAIR - Building Enduring Partnerships

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This paper presents the findings of an ongoing PhD research project into the career and employment trajectories of students from rural schools in two Scottish locations: the islands of Orkney and the islands of Shetland. In this project 23 Higher Education students originally domiciled in the islands were interviewed at the point of graduation and one year later. The interviews explored students' educational and career transitions, and were analysed thematically. In line with Corbett's notion of 'learning to leave' (Corbett, 2007), the findings demonstrate how academically successful students visualise trajectories 'out' of their communities to mainland higher education providers as 'common sense'. However, this paper will demonstrate how for many students 'learning to leave' was visualised as part of a wider life trajectory – which often included a visualised later 'return' to their island communities. The findings of this paper therefore challenge simplistic associations of the pursuit of education and outmigration from rural communities. A key question however is raised by the research in terms of how far the career routes that students adopt in their school to career transition potentially facilitate or prevent a later return to island or rural communities. This question raises several considerations for the role of careers or employability education in rural schools in terms of supporting student career development, and these will be explored in the paper.