

The [Rural Economy Action Group](#) (REAG) was set up in 2019 to implement the National Council of Rural Advisors' report [A new blueprint for the rural economy](#). Its remit included to develop a **framework for rural & island economic policy** and a **suite of indicators** on rural economic activity to inform government strategy. The REAG's work was suspended in February 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This work should resume as the Scottish Parliament embarks on a new term. We expect a refreshed REAG, with cross-portfolio support, to set out a programme of work underpinned by wellbeing economy principles and informed by a robust analytical strategy. The emerging framework must play to the strengths of rural and island economic resilience as we contend with the impacts of Brexit, the pandemic and the climate emergency.

We expect this framework to be guided by the membership of the Rural Economy Stakeholders Group, the Rural Youth Stakeholder Group and the two regional Conventions, by pre-pandemic benchmark reports including the Scottish Council for Development & Industry's [Rural Commission Report](#) and by emerging learning on the flexibility, adaptation and creativity of the organisations underpinning the rural economy – including small and micro enterprises, social enterprises, self employment and community organisations. InspirAlba's work on the [characteristics of rural social enterprise in Scotland](#) is particularly relevant.

Once complete, we expect the framework will be used to proactively initiate rural economic policy rather than the current approach which, land or marine-based activities aside, mainly consists of rural/island proofing policy emerging from other government departments. We expect a **comprehensive, specific and long term Rural & Island Vision and Economic Strategy**. The Strategy must integrate action to address wider impacts on the rural and island economy including maximising opportunities to invest in childcare, elderly care and social care generally, mental health & wellbeing, housing, transport and digital connectivity.

We also expect:

- The work of the REAG and the newly announced [Council for Economic Transformation](#) to be fully aligned.
- The development of a national start-up funding programme for rural small and micro enterprises, social enterprises and the self employed based on evidence of what works. For example, we expect the [Rural Entrepreneurs' Fund](#) to be an ongoing programme, rather than a one-off, with flexible criteria, wrap-around support, peer networking opportunities and administration devolved to local areas.
- Linked to the above, a geographic and sectoral mapping of incubators, including those proposed in the [Logan Review](#), and of enterprise support organisations accompanied by a dedicated capacity-building programme to maximise their reach, relevance and impact in rural and island areas.
- A review of the [Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland](#) to ensure it builds on and strengthens the small, micro and social enterprise sectors as well as the community sector and self employment alongside the introduction of additional, specific actions to build youth enterprise and collective leadership skills through the curriculum and youth work.