



Briefing Note for Strategic Audiences – April 2024

Enabling locally-led research for the viability and sustainability of remote island communities.

Background

Traditional university-driven research can feel irrelevant to large swathes of society. Many people with genuine research needs (whether they recognise it in those terms or not) are ignored by the conventional research agenda. UKRI, the UK government's research funding agency, has identified this as a crucial challenge, and they are piloting Community Research Networks in response.

Since the start of 2023, the nascent Isles of Scilly CRN, led by the Isles of Scilly Community Venture, received a £50k development grant from UKRI to explore this possibility here on Scilly. We are now seeing how we can put local people in charge of research into the issues important to them.

What are we doing?

Our Exploratory Phase, assessing the potential for a Community Research Network on the Isles of Scilly, has been investigating:

- What research topics people on Scilly consider to be important.
- The local appetite for directing research.
- What support is needed to achieve locally-led research.
- Whether setting up a Community Research Network for Scilly is needed.
- How a Scilly CRN could work.

Who is involved?

The Exploratory Phase is being undertaken by a collaboration between the *Isles of Scilly Community Venture*, the *Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust*, and the *Isles of Scilly Museum Association*, with the support of the *University of Exeter*. This phase is wholly funded by UKRI.

What will the CRN do?

We will facilitate locally-driven research into topics aligned our over-arching theme of *the viability and sustainability of remote island communities* by:

- Supporting people in taking their ideas through the entire research journey.
- Developing research collaborations between people with ideas and relevant academics.
- Demystifying the idea of “research” to make it accessible and meaningful.
- Supporting local research projects with fundraising, project management and communications.
- Providing opportunities to develop research skills on Scilly.
- Creating local skilled employment.
- Building a library of locally-relevant research to help local people benefit from its outcomes.

How far have we got?

We started this project by going out into the local community to have conversations with a wide range of people prompted by two key questions.

- What do you think of research and innovation projects that have happened on Scilly?
- What topics do you think should be researched on Scilly?

The Isles of Scilly Community Research Network is an open and formally defined partnership of key organisations and individuals with a commitment to driving community-led research and innovation for the Isles of Scilly.

The IoS CRN is led by Isles of Scilly Community Venture CIC, registered company number: 10836250.
Registered office: Porthmellon Enterprise Centre, Porthmellon, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, TR21 0JY.



Isles of Scilly Community Research Network

We then moved on to a phase of structured interviews, conducted on our behalf by master's students from the University of Exeter who came on a field trip to Scilly. This has given us the backbone of our Isles of Scilly CRN research manifesto.

We have learned that people on Scilly have a mixed view of research. There's a widespread sense that the wrong questions are asked because of a lack of local perspective. Local people have a lot of important questions, and significant appetite to investigate them. However, they are inhibited by unfamiliarity with the research world, questioning of their confidence of skills, lack of time and geographical remoteness.

Aggregating all the perspectives we received led to the distillation of our overarching theme – *the viability and sustainability of remote island communities*. This gives an overall coherence whilst being wide enough to embrace the vast majority of ideas people brought forward.

Our next step was to pilot activities which explored how the CRN could work. A networking event on Scilly where locals could bring research ideas to talk with potential academic partners from Exeter University was successful in “humanising” the groups and creating genuine links. Our “Community Advocates” (paid local young graduates who act as the front-line face of the CRN) is showing considerable promise in bridging the Scilly community with the academic world.

How will it work?

This year will see UKRI providing £1m over five years to five Community Research Networks in the UK. We feel the Isles of Scilly should be one of them.

If we are successful in securing the funding, the CRN will be hosted by the Isles of Scilly Community Venture, with a formal partnership agreement governing the overall funded collaboration. At present this will include the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust & the University of Exeter, and other parties will be welcomed.

Everyone on Scilly or with an interest in the islands will be welcome to participate in the CRN's activities, but research ideas must have a promoter who is a local resident (whether or not they also work for an island organisation involved in the CRN). The CRN will have a full-time Coordinator. We feel that Community Advocates – with a diverse range of skills and interests across all five islands – should be a big part of the way the CRN works.

We will support those with research ideas, from articulating the research question to disseminating results. We will use an innovative community-driven filter to prioritise ideas, considering the scale, complexity, and consequent resource demands of the idea, whilst ensuring equity across Scilly, making sure that the CRN fully involves the off-islands. The CRN will also make training and development opportunities in research skills available to both the Community Advocate team and the wider Scilly community.

Individuals can help develop the CRN by becoming members. Local organisations can become core partners or strategic stakeholders who commit to seeking opportunities for the CRN. Academics and research institutions will use the CRN to collaborate in local research opportunities. Above all, research ideas from members of the community and local organisations must be the lifeblood of the Isles of Scilly Community Research Network.

What's Next

1. Learning: We continue talking to people about their ideas and exploring how the CRN can help meet their research needs.
2. Securing local support: Would your organisation like to be involved? Do you have time personally?
3. Applying for UKRI funding – this competitive process could bring £1m to Scilly over the next five years.

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