

# ENABLING THE NEXT GENERATION

Young People and the Highlands and Islands  
Maximising Opportunities:  
CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND



---

# CONTENTS

---

<b>Headline findings</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Research study approach	3
Research questions	3
<b>2 The Caithness and Sutherland context</b>	<b>4</b>
Introduction	4
Overview of Caithness and Sutherland	4
Socio-economic profile	4
<b>3 Key findings for Caithness and Sutherland</b>	<b>6</b>
Introduction	6
Staying and leaving	6
Education	8
Employment	9
Community and culture	12
Maximising opportunities	13
Concluding remarks	15

# HEADLINE FINDINGS

---

## Staying and leaving

- Young people in Caithness and Sutherland are more likely than regionally, and in 2015, to identify as committed stayers (55%). Those from Caithness are more likely than those from Sutherland to plan to stay.
- Three-fifths see themselves living in the region in future; a third locally, and the remainder elsewhere. Those from Caithness are more likely than those from Sutherland to see themselves living locally.
- Most young people from Caithness and Sutherland feel that those who stay in the region post-school are lucky to be able to do so. However, higher than average proportions feel they will not achieve their potential if they stay, and they need to leave to access training and employment opportunities, and to get on in life.

## Education

- Young people in Caithness and Sutherland are broadly positive about the educational offer in the region, more so than in 2015 - particularly in relation to the range of higher, post-graduate and remote-learning opportunities. However, they are less likely to feel courses on offer align well with employment opportunities in the region. Those from Caithness are markedly more positive about the educational offer than those from Sutherland.
- Course choice, subject specialisation and good academic reputation are important to young people in Caithness and Sutherland in choosing where to study and most feel this is available to them in the region.
- There is greater awareness of apprenticeships amongst young people in Caithness and Sutherland than regionally, and they are more likely to be perceived as effective routes into employment. However, as with elsewhere, more needs to be done to improve accessibility.

## Employment

- Young people in Caithness and Sutherland are more likely to want to gain full-time employment in the long term, and less likely to aspire to self-employment. Ideas and access to finance are cited as barriers and confidence in starting their own business is lower than regionally.
- Almost half cite lack of local opportunities as a barrier to achieving employment goals. This is higher than average, reflecting experiences in the Outer Hebrides and Argyll and the Islands.
- Young people from Sutherland are more likely than those in Caithness to perceive barriers to achieving employment goals, specifically a lack of opportunities, affordable housing and transport, and childcare.
- Just under half of respondents want to work in their local area in future. This is higher than regionally and has increased since 2015. Those from Caithness are markedly more likely than those in Sutherland to want to do so, and to feel the factors they are looking for are available locally, at least to some extent.

## Community and culture

- Young people in Caithness and Sutherland are more likely than average to participate in their community although, reflecting the general trend, participation is lower than in 2015.
- While views on their local town or community have improved amongst young people in Caithness and Sutherland since 2015, they are more mixed than they are across the region overall. Feelings of safety, pride and inclusion are evident, though markedly fewer feel their needs are being met.
- Young people from Caithness and Sutherland are more likely to perceive barriers to participation in arts, leisure and culture than is the case for the overall. Lack of availability was the key barrier.

## Maximising opportunities

- Young people from Caithness and Sutherland are more likely to feel they have had to make compromises to live in the region, particularly in terms of transport and access to amenities, events, services and leisure facilities.
- For young people in Caithness and Sutherland and regionally, employment factors and a low cost of living were rated as the most important economic aspects in making the Highlands and Islands attractive to young people.
- In terms of social factors, quality of life emerged as key both in Caithness and Sutherland and regionally. Access to good healthcare, low levels of crime and availability of recreational/social opportunities were a higher than average priority to those in Caithness and Sutherland.

---

# 1 INTRODUCTION

---

1.1 In 2018, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) commissioned ekosgen to undertake a major research study focused on the changing attitudes and aspirations of young people aged between 15 and 30, in relation to living in the Highlands and Islands. The study builds on similar research undertaken by HIE in 2015 and explores how opportunities in the region can be maximised for all young people to live, work and study in the Highlands and Islands<sup>1</sup>.

1.2 This report presents the findings of young people from Caithness and Sutherland who participated in the research. It provides comparisons with the results for the Highlands and Islands overall and findings from the 2015 study. Where possible, analysis is provided on the differences between the views of young people living in Caithness and young people living in Sutherland.

## RESEARCH STUDY APPROACH

1.3 The research study consisted of an in-depth survey of young people both within and outwith the Highlands and Islands, coupled with a programme of online focus groups with young people. These were supported by a social media engagement campaign to foster interest and engagement in the research. A broad programme of consultation with stakeholders across the region was undertaken to explore the perspectives of employers, policy-makers and key groups in relation to the study. Additionally, desk research around regional and national policy aimed at population growth and talent attraction was carried out alongside socio-economic profiling and data analysis of young people in the Highlands and Islands and its sub-regions.

1.4 In total 272 young people from Caithness and Sutherland participated in the research, of which 60% (162) are from Caithness and 40% (110) are from Sutherland. In terms of age, 25% of the respondents from Caithness and Sutherland are 15-18 years old, 41% are 19-24 and 34% are aged 25-30. Over three-quarters of respondents from Caithness and Sutherland (76%) are female, whilst 23% are male. The remaining 1% preferred not to say.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.5 The study has two principal aims. The first is to provide an overview of the evolving attitudes and aspirations of young people in the Highlands and Islands and how these have changed since 2015. The second is to identify gaps in the current provision of education, training and employment opportunities and points to consider so that opportunities can be maximised for all young people. The research was designed to address the following objectives:

- Provide a socio-economic profile of young people in the Highlands and Islands overall, and of its sub-regions;
- Provide a brief overview of key regional and national policy initiatives designed to support population growth and talent attraction strategies;
- Track how the attitudes and aspirations of young people have changed, if at all, since the previous study was undertaken in 2015;
- Explore provision of and attitudes to education, training and employment opportunities across the region, identifying gaps, areas of inequality, and good practice examples; and
- Identify areas and specific points for consideration in terms of how to better position the Highlands and Islands as a place where young people want to live, work and study. Further policy interventions may be required to support this.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2015 research is available at [www.hie.co.uk/young-people-research](http://www.hie.co.uk/young-people-research) and 2018 findings at [www.hie.co.uk/yp-research](http://www.hie.co.uk/yp-research)

---

## 2 THE CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND CONTEXT

---

### INTRODUCTION

2.1 This chapter provides an overview of the social and economic context of Caithness and Sutherland. It includes a general overview of the area and its main centres, population and migration trends, the educational offer and employment trends.

### OVERVIEW OF CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND

2.2 Situated at the northernmost tip of the Scottish mainland, Caithness and Sutherland covers a large geographic area of approximately 7,650km<sup>2</sup>. With an estimated population of 38,267 in 2018, it has a very low population density of around five inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. Both Caithness and Sutherland are coastal areas, Caithness covers the most north eastern point of the mainland, with Sutherland bordering to the west.

2.3 Sutherland covers a larger geographical area than Caithness, accounting for over 5,000km<sup>2</sup>, but has a smaller population, at approximately 13,500 compared to 25,500 for Caithness. Whilst both are rural areas, Caithness has larger population centre - Wick and Thurso, the main towns, have populations of approximately 7,000 and 8,000 respectively. By comparison, Golspie and Dornoch, the largest towns in Sutherland, have populations of around 1,400 and 1,300 respectively.

2.4 Caithness and Sutherland is connected by road to the rest of Scotland primarily by the A9, which runs along the East Coast to Wick and up to Thurso. From Scrabster, a short distance from Thurso, there is a ferry connection to Orkney. There is a rail service from Wick to Inverness, which stops at several other towns and villages in Caithness and Sutherland and provides onward connections with destinations further south. Wick John O'Groats Airport offers daily flights to Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

2.5 Compared to the rest of the Highlands and Islands, professional, scientific and technical activities are more represented than elsewhere. This reflects the importance of Dounreay nuclear power plant, the largest employer in Caithness with approximately 1,000 employees.<sup>2</sup> Although the power plant stopped generating electricity in 1994, the decommissioning process is ongoing, providing a number of highly technical jobs.<sup>3</sup> Tourism is also a key sector with locations such as John O'Groats and Dornoch, as well as the North Coast 500 route attracting visitors to the area.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE<sup>4</sup>

#### Population and migration trends<sup>5</sup>

2.6 The total population of Caithness and Sutherland in 2018 was 38,267. Of this, 15% (5,927) were estimated to be young people aged 15-30, slightly below the proportion across the Highlands and Islands (16%) and well below the national average of 20%. The lower proportion of young people in the area is in part a result of the 10% decline in the number of 15-30-year olds living in Caithness and Sutherland between 2011 and 2018.

2.7 Across the Highland Council area (Highland), which includes Caithness and Sutherland, there was a total net in-migration in 2017-18. However, there was a net out-migration of young people aged 15-19. Population projections also show that the number of 15-30-year olds living in Highland is

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/dounreay/about/recruitment>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hie.co.uk/regional-information/area-information/caithness-and-sutherland/overview.html>

<sup>4</sup> In this section, data for the Highlands and Islands and/or Highland has been used where it is not available at sub-regional level (i.e. for Caithness and Sutherland).

<sup>5</sup> Data in this section is from the following National Records of Scotland (NRS) publications: Small Area Mid-Year Population Estimates 2011 and 2018, Migration to and from Scotland 2017-18 and Sub-National Population Projections (2016 based).

---

expected to fall by 10% between 2018 and 2041. This is below the decline projected regionally (-13%) but higher than that expected nationally (-6%).

## Education

**2.8** School leaver attainment in the Highland Council area tends to be below the national average. The majority (96%) of school leavers in 2017/18 went on to positive destinations (94% nationally). School leavers in Highland were less likely than nationally to go on to Further or Higher Education (20% and 35% respectively compared to 27% and 41% across Scotland). However, as with elsewhere in the region they more likely to go into employment (37% versus 23% nationally)<sup>6</sup>.

**2.9** Further and Higher Education (FE and HE) provision in Caithness and Sutherland is delivered through North Highland College UHI. The College operates through a series of college centres across the North Highlands and provides a variety of courses across a range of subjects including postgraduate and undergraduate degrees, HNDs, HNCs and SVQ courses.

**2.10** In 2017-18 there were approximately 8,000 HE and 11,000 FE students from Highland studying at universities or colleges in Scotland. The majority (83%) of FE students from Highland are studying within the Highlands and Islands, with most enrolled at institutions within the Highland Council area (81%). This mirrors the regional trend, with 80% of FE students from the Highlands and Islands studying within the region. FE students from Highland aged 20-24 were more likely to be studying outside the region than those aged 16-24 or 25+ (24% compared to 16% and 20% respectively).

**2.11** Around half (51%) of HE students from Highland were enrolled at institutions outside of the Highlands and Islands, slightly lower than the regional average (54%). Just under two-fifths (38% versus 34% overall) were studying in the region, most (36%) within the Highland Council area. Around one in ten (11%) were undertaking Open University learning (12% across the Highlands and Islands overall)<sup>7</sup>.

**2.12** Younger HE students from Highland were more likely to be studying outside of the region than older students - 62% of those aged 16-19 and 66% of those aged 20-24 are doing so compared to 28% of those aged 25+. The latter were more likely to be studying locally (46% compared to 32% of 16-19-year olds and 28% of those aged 20-24) or through the Open University (22%, 4% and 5% respectively).

## Employment and economic activity<sup>8</sup>

**2.1** Employment and economic activity rates of the working age population in Caithness and Sutherland tend to be above both the regional and national rates. In 2018, the employment rate was 80.6% compared to 78.9% for the Highlands and Islands and 74.1% for Scotland. The economic activity rate was 83.6% compared to 81.3% regionally and 77.4% nationally. While estimates are not available for 16-24-year olds in Caithness and Sutherland, employment (70.4%) and economic activity (74.2%) rates for those aged 16-24 in Highland are also both higher than the regional (67.1% and 71.6% respectively) and national (57.2% and 63.3%) averages.

**2.2** Reflecting the higher rate of economic activity, a lower proportion of the working age population in Caithness and Sutherland are economically inactive (16.4%) than across the Highlands and Islands overall (18.7%) and Scotland (22.6%), although the rate is in line with that for Highland (16.7%). Data on economic inactivity for those aged 16-24 in Caithness and Sutherland is not available, however, the economic inactivity rate for those aged 16-24 in Highland (25.8%) is also lower than both the regional (28.4%) and national averages (36.7%). In 2018, the unemployment rates for the working age population (2.9%) and those aged 16-24 (6.3%) in the Highlands and Islands are below those for Scotland (4.3% and 9.6% respectively).

---

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government School leaver attainment and initial destinations: statistics, 2017-18

<sup>7</sup> Analysis is based on data from the Scottish Funding Council for 2017-18

<sup>8</sup> Data in this section is from the Annual Population Survey January to December 2018

## 3 KEY FINDINGS FOR CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND

### INTRODUCTION

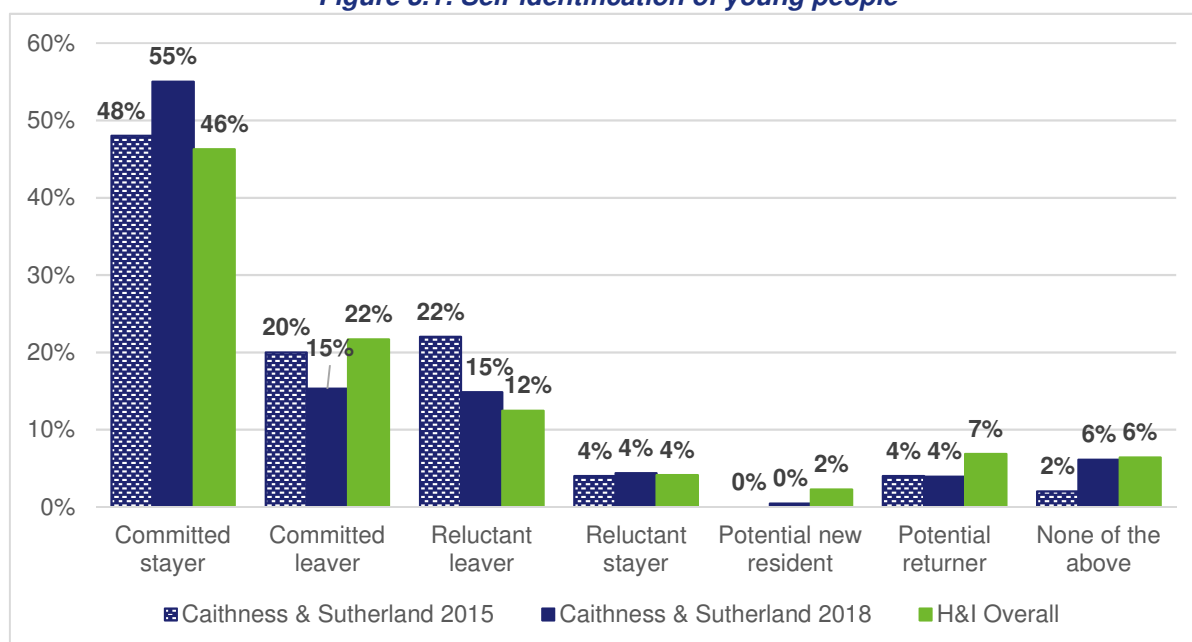
3.1 This chapter provides the key findings from the survey of young people from Caithness and Sutherland. As with the region-wide report it looks at attitudes around staying and leaving, education, employment, community and culture and maximising opportunities. It focuses mainly on where there are differences in the views of young people from Caithness and Sutherland compared to the regional average, and variations between those living in different parts of Caithness and Sutherland.

### STAYING AND LEAVING

3.2 Young people from Caithness and Sutherland are more likely to plan to stay in the Highlands and Islands than is the case across the region as a whole (Figure 3.1). More than half (55%) identify as committed stayers compared with 46% regionally. This represented an increase of seven percentage points since 2015, slightly below the 10-percentage point increase seen regionally. Young people from Caithness (58%) are more likely to be committed stayers than those from Sutherland (50%).

3.3 A higher proportion of young people in Caithness and Sutherland identify as reluctant leavers (15% compared to 12% regionally), although this has declined from 22% in 2015. Just 15% are committed leavers, lower than the 22% regionally and a decrease of five percentage points since 2015.

**Figure 3.1: Self-identification of young people**



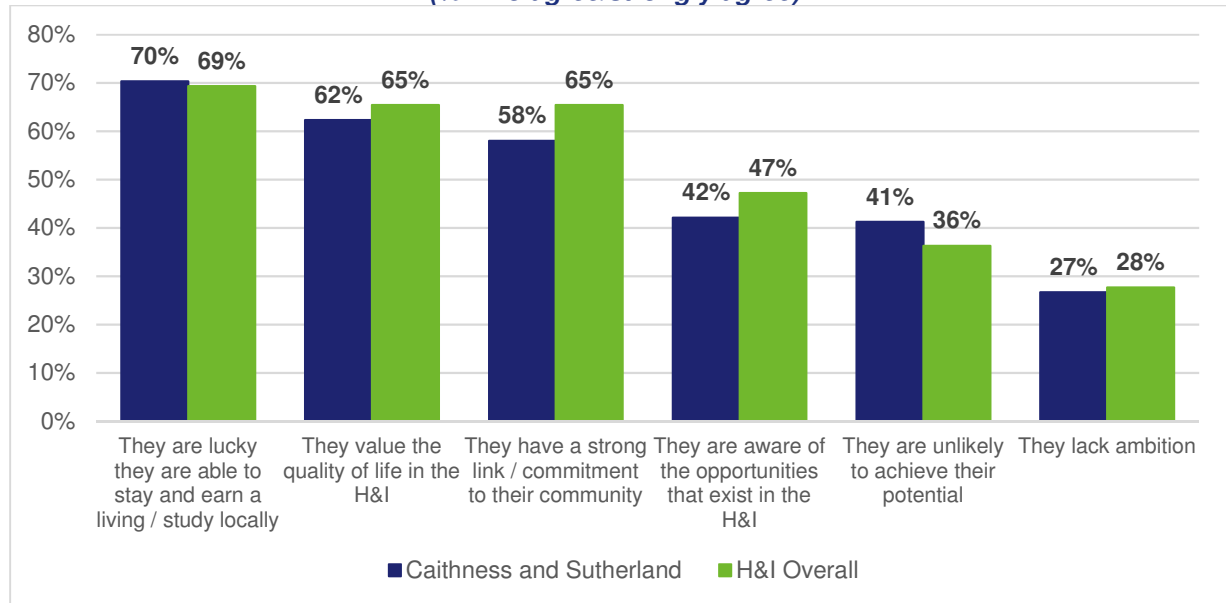
Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=229, H&I Overall n=2,539)*

3.4 Reflecting the higher proportion of committed stayers, young people in Caithness and Sutherland are more likely to see themselves living somewhere in the Highlands and Islands in 10 years' time (59% compared to 55% regionally). Around a third (33%) expect to be living in their local area, and a further quarter (26%) elsewhere in the region (compared to 32% and 23% respectively overall).

3.5 Respondents from Caithness (37%) are much more likely to envisage living in their local area in the future than those from Sutherland (26%) who are more likely to expect to be living elsewhere in the region (35% compared with 20% of those in Caithness). Overall, young people in Sutherland are more likely to plan to live somewhere in the Highlands and Islands (61%) than those in Caithness (57%).

3.6 Most young people from Caithness and Sutherland feel that those who stay in the local area post-school are lucky to be able to do so (70%), and that they value the quality of life (62%). However, they are also more likely to agree that those staying are unlikely to reach their potential (41% versus 36% overall), and less likely to feel that they have a strong link or commitment to their local community (58% versus 65%) or are aware of regional opportunities (42% compared to 47%).

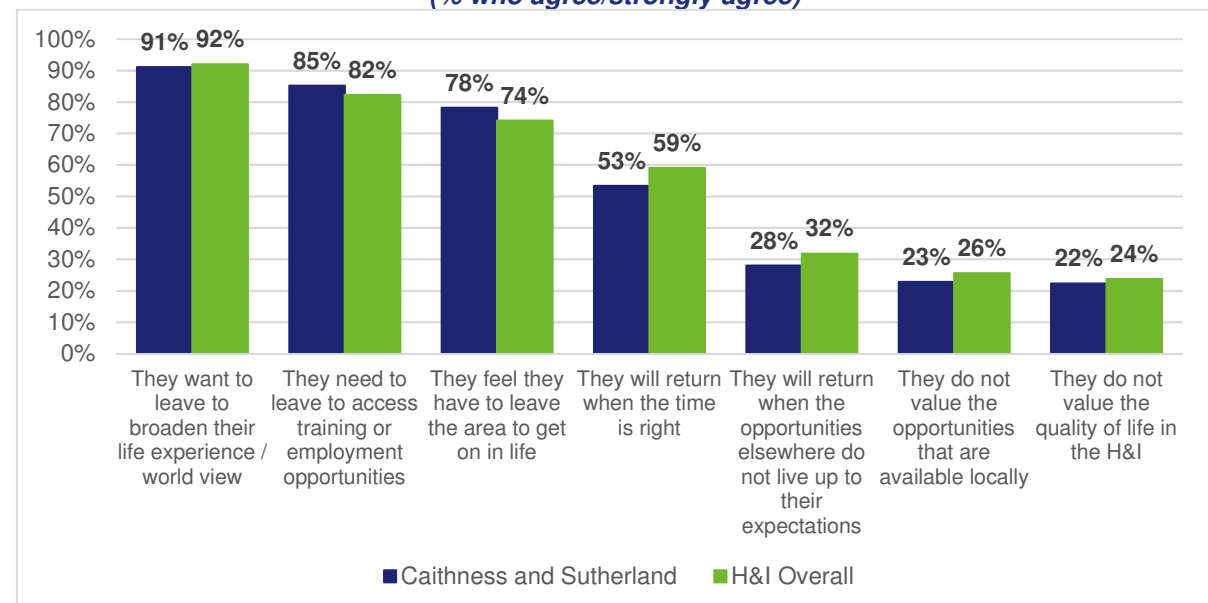
**Figure 3.2: Perceptions about young people who stay in the local area (% who agree/strongly agree)**



Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=228, H&I Overall n=2,527)*

3.7 Young people from Caithness and Sutherland are more likely than regionally to think that young people need to leave the Highlands and Islands to access opportunities, and that if they leave, they are unlikely to return. Specifically, they are more likely to agree that young people need to leave to access training or employment opportunities (85% versus 82% regionally) or to get on in life (78% versus 74%), and less likely to feel that leavers will return when the time is right (53% versus 59% regionally) or when the opportunities elsewhere don't live up to their expectations (28% compared to 32% overall).

**Figure 3.3: Perceptions about young people who leave the local area (% who agree/strongly agree)**



Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=229, H&I Overall n=2,523)*



## Views of school pupils

3.8 Only a small number of school pupils in Caithness and Sutherland took part in the survey (31). As such, care needs to be taken in interpreting findings. Of this small sample, more aspire to go to university than regionally (69% compared to 59%) and fewer to move directly into employment (3% compared to 10% overall). A similar proportion as regionally want to go to college (13% versus 15%) or undertake an apprenticeship (6% versus 7%).

3.9 These school pupils from Caithness and Sutherland were less likely than elsewhere to rate their subject choice at school as good or very good - 61% did compared to 71% regionally. They were more likely to feel that the range of subjects on offer at school will limit their post-school options (62% agreed compared to 46% regionally). As for those elsewhere in the region, experiences outside of school (93%) and advice from family and friends (74%) had the greatest influence on their post-school decisions.

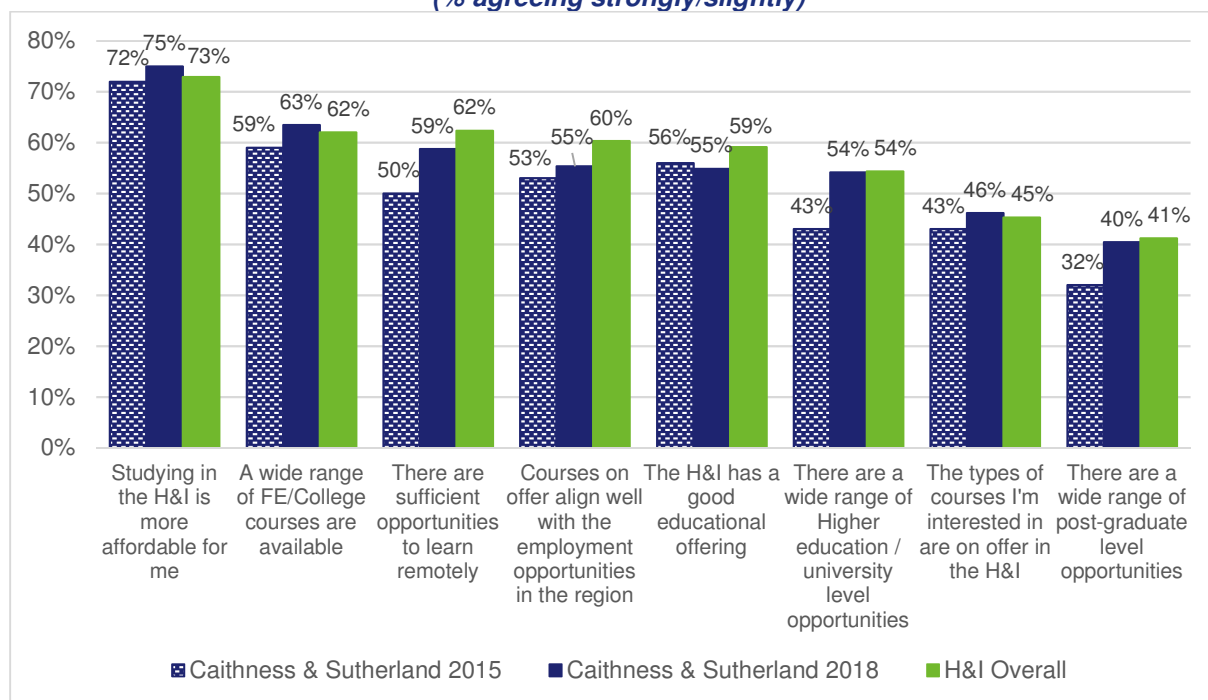
## EDUCATION

3.10 Young people from Caithness and Sutherland have similar perceptions of the educational offer in the Highlands and Islands to others living in the region (Figure 3.4). Most feel there is a good range of further education (63% compared to 62% regionally) and higher education (both 54%) opportunities, and two-fifths that there is a good range of post-graduate opportunities (40% compared to 41%). However, they are less likely than average to feel that the courses on offer in the region align well with employment opportunities (55% compared to 60% regionally).

3.11 Views on most aspects of the educational offer have improved since 2015, particularly in relation to the range of HE (up 11 percentage points) and post-graduate opportunities (up eight percentage points), and opportunities to learn remotely (up nine percentage points) (Figure 3.4).

3.12 Within the area, young people from Caithness have a far more positive view of the HE and FE offer in the Highlands and Islands than those from Sutherland. Around seven in 10 (69%) agree there is a wide-ranging FE offer and 61% feel this is the case for HE. In contrast, only 32% of young people from Sutherland agree that there is a good FE offer and just 21% a wide range of HE opportunities.

**Figure 3.4: Qualities/characteristics of FE and HE in the Highlands and Islands (% agreeing strongly/slightly)**

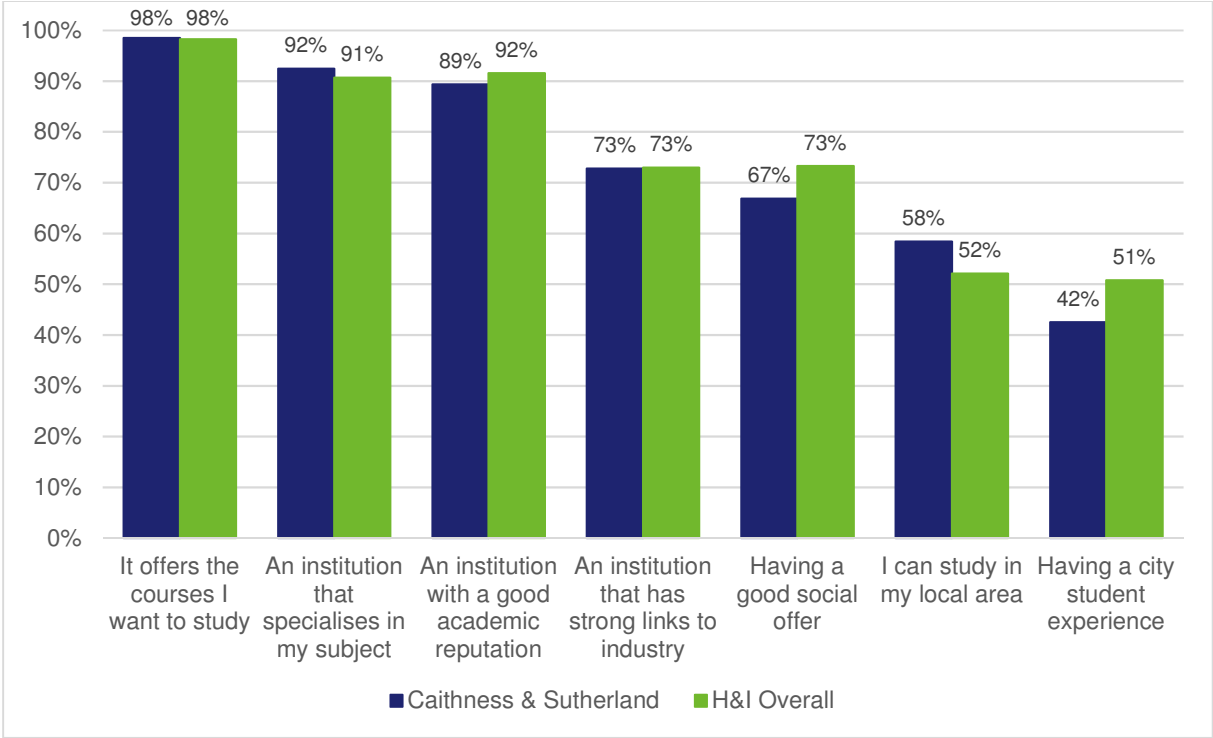


Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=206, H&I overall n=2,262)*

3.13 In line with regionally, availability of their course of choice, subject specialisation and a good academic reputation are the most important factors to young people in Caithness and Sutherland when choosing where to study, and most do feel that this is available to them (Figure 3.5). However, the proportions that felt these factors are available are lower than those citing them as important suggesting some degree of disconnect for a number of respondents.

3.14 While four in five (81%) young people from Caithness and Sutherland feel the educational offer enables them to study locally if they choose to do so, this is lower than reported regionally (86%). A higher proportion than elsewhere feel that academic institutions in the region have strong links to industry (79% compared to 73% overall). This was an important factor for three-quarters (73%) in terms of choosing where to study (both in Caithness and Sutherland and regionally).

**Figure 3.5: What HE and FE factors are available in the Highlands and Islands (% who agree to some extent/very much so)**



Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=206, H&I Overall n=2,253)*

3.15 Awareness of graduate and foundation apprenticeships is higher amongst young people in Caithness and Sutherland than across the region overall – 70% are aware of graduate and 66% of foundation apprenticeships compared to 64% and 62% regionally. A similar proportion as regionally cited awareness of modern apprenticeships (86% versus 84%).

3.16 Those in Caithness and Sutherland are more likely than average to view apprenticeships and student placements as effective routes into employment. However, less than half see apprenticeships, student placements or graduate placements as accessible to them, in line with what’s reported across the region overall.

**EMPLOYMENT**

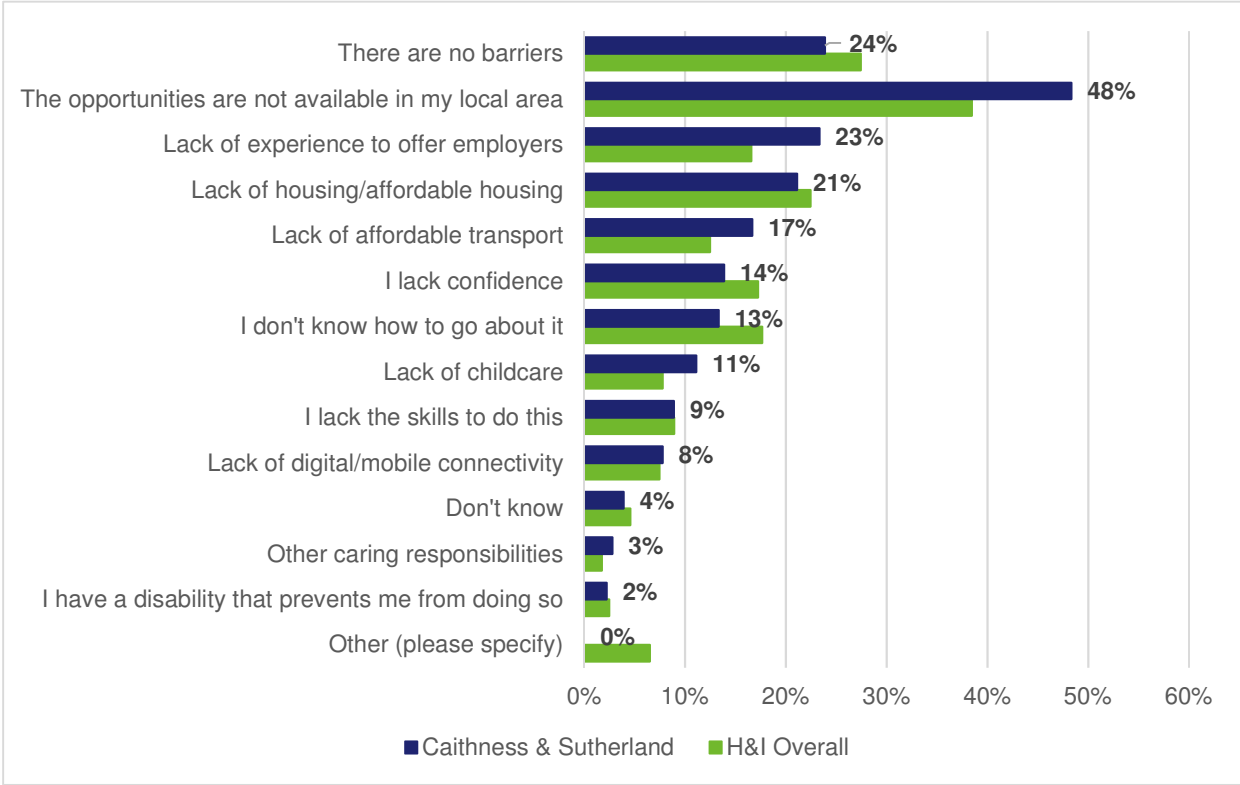
3.17 Most young people in Caithness and Sutherland aim to work full-time, with 76% stating this is their employment goal, higher than the 71% regionally. However, they are less likely to say they aspire to self-employment (15% do compared to 19% regionally).

3.18 Despite this, a similar proportion as regionally said they have the interest to start up a business (both 53%). As for the region overall, having the ideas (44%), knowledge (36%) and access to finance (15%) were barriers to doing so. Additionally, those in Caithness and Sutherland were less likely to feel they had the confidence to start their own business (28% said they did compared to 36% regionally).

3.19 Young people in Caithness and Sutherland (along with those in the Outer Hebrides and Argyll and the Islands) are most likely to identify a lack of opportunities in their local area as a barrier to achieving their employment goals - 48% state this compared to 38% overall. They are also more likely to feel they have a lack of experience to offer employers (23% compared to 17% regionally) (Figure 3.6).

3.20 Young people from Sutherland (85%) are more likely to perceive that there are barriers to achieving their employment goals than those from Caithness (71%). Specifically, they are more likely than those in Caithness to cite a lack of local opportunities (60% compared to 42%), lack of affordable housing (37% compared to 12%) and lack of affordable transport (24% versus 12%). Childcare was also identified as a barrier by 15% of those in Sutherland compared to 9% in Caithness.

**Figure 3.6: Barriers to achieving employment goals (% agreeing each is a barrier)**

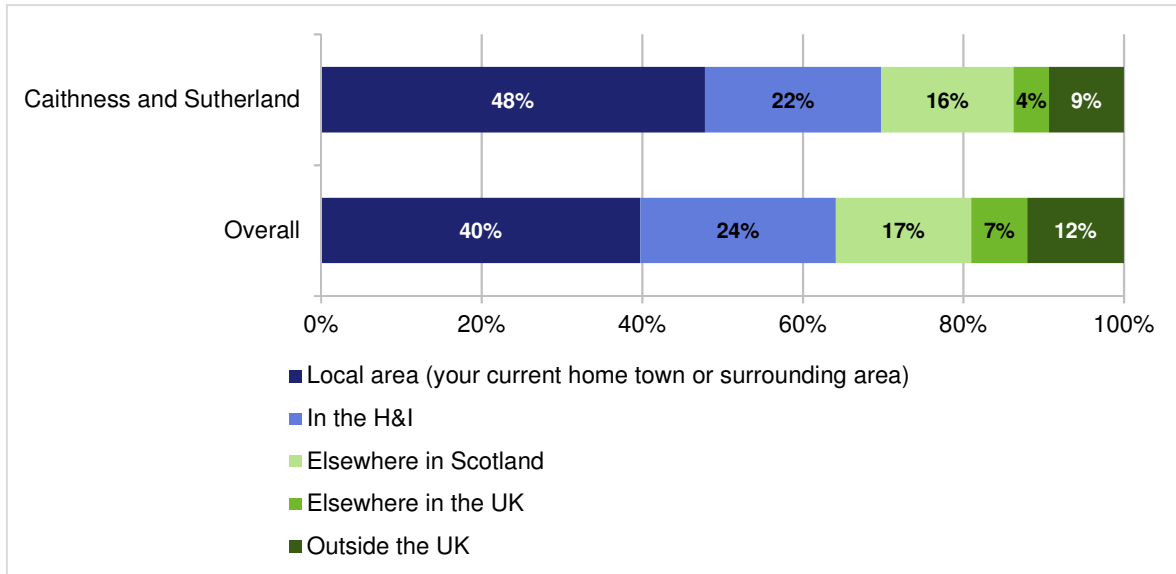


Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=180, H&I overall n=2,106)*

3.21 Young people from Caithness and Sutherland are more likely than average to want to work somewhere in the Highlands and Islands in future (70% compared to 64%) (Figure 3.7). The difference is driven by the higher proportion in Caithness and Sutherland who want to work in their local area (48% versus 40% overall). This is a marked increase from 2015, when 36% of respondents wanted to work in their local area. Just over a fifth (22%) want to work elsewhere in the region compared to 24% overall.

3.22 As in 2015, young people from Caithness who want to work in the Highlands and Islands are more likely to want to do so in their local area (53%) than elsewhere in the region (15%). By comparison, 39% of young people from Sutherland want to work in their local area, whilst 33% want to work elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands.

**Figure 3.7: Ideal work locations of young people**



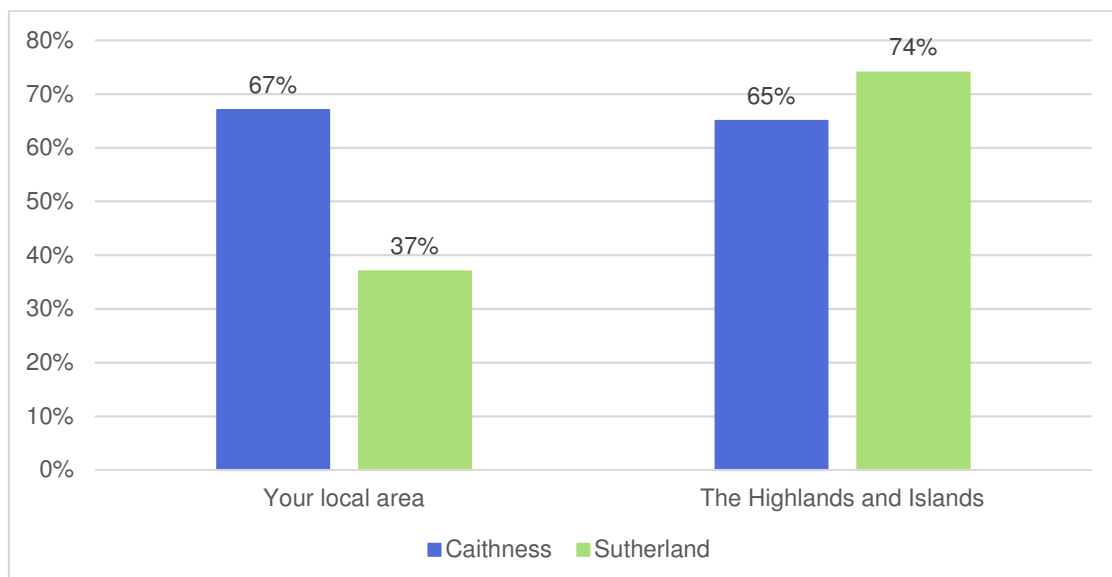
Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=182, H&I overall n=2,129)*

3.23 As with elsewhere in the region, the factors young people most commonly sought in a job were a good work-life balance (72% cited this as essential) and a steady job (71%). Opportunities to progress, good terms, conditions and benefits, an understanding employer and a good salary were also factors cited by more than half.

3.24 A similar proportion as regionally feel that the factors they are looking for in a job are available locally (56% compared to 58%). A higher proportion feel that what they desire is available in the region overall (68% compared to 59%).

3.25 Young people from Caithness are far more positive than their counterparts in Sutherland about the availability of desired job factors in their local area (Figure 3.8). Two-thirds (67%) feel they are available to at least to some extent, compared to 37% in Sutherland. Conversely, respondents from Sutherland are more likely to feel that the factors they are looking for are available elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands (74% compared to 65% of those in Caithness).

**Figure 3.8: Extent to which employment factors sought by young people are available in the Highlands and Islands (% who agree to some extent/very much so)**



Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness n=144, Sutherland n=69)*

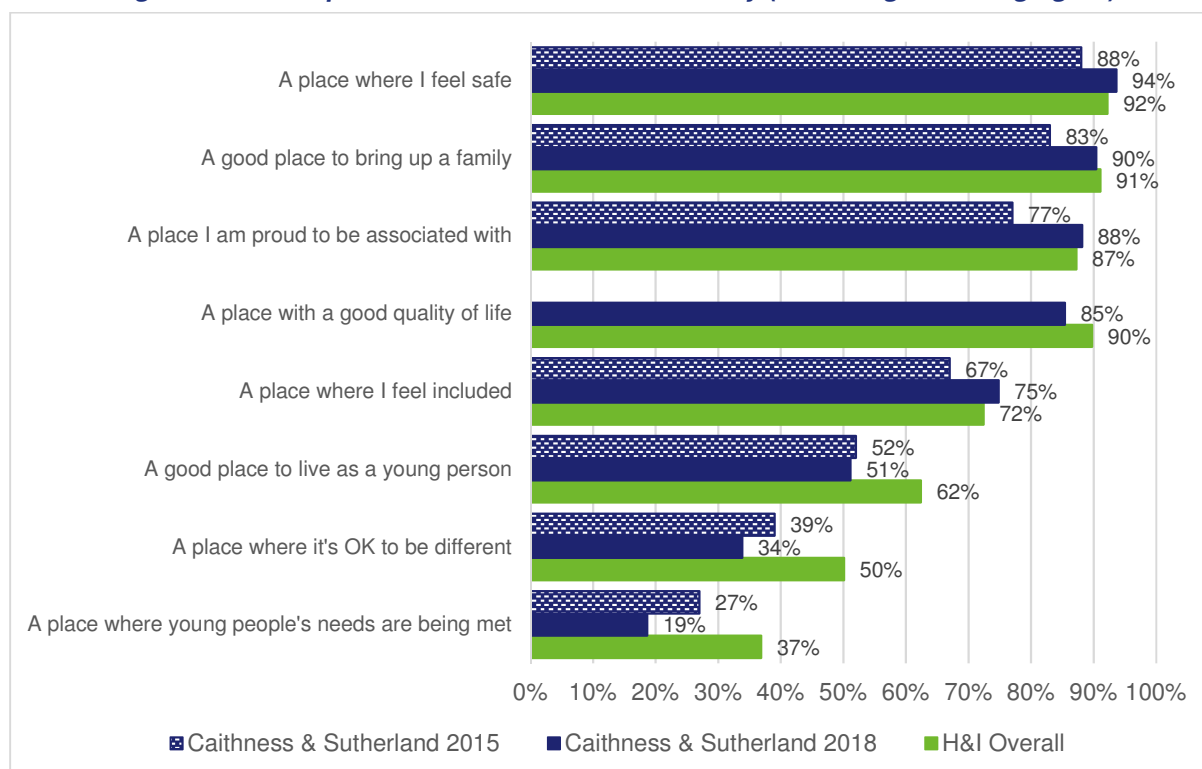
## COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

3.26 Community participation is higher among young people in Caithness and Sutherland than for the region overall – 68% participate compared to 62% regionally. However, reflecting the overall trend, community participation is lower now than in 2015 (77% of young people in Caithness and Sutherland participated in 2015, 71% regionally).

3.27 Views on their local town or community are more mixed amongst young people in Caithness and Sutherland than they are regionally, but they are broadly more positive than in 2015. The vast majority feel their local town/community is a place where they feel safe (94%), a good place to bring up a family (90%) and a place they are proud to be associated with (88%). Three-quarters also agree that it is somewhere they feel included (75%). On these factors, views are in line with the regional average and have improved markedly since 2015 (Figure 3.9).

3.28 However, young people in Caithness and Sutherland are less likely than average, and in 2015, to agree that their local town/community is a good place to live as a young person (51% compared to 62% regionally and 52% in 2015) and that it is OK to be different (34% versus 50% regionally and 39% in 2015). Only 19% feel that their needs are being met (81% disagree), down from 27% in 2015, and markedly lower than the regional average (37% agree regionally down from 41% in 2015).

**Figure 3.9: Perceptions of local town or community (% who agree/strong agree)**



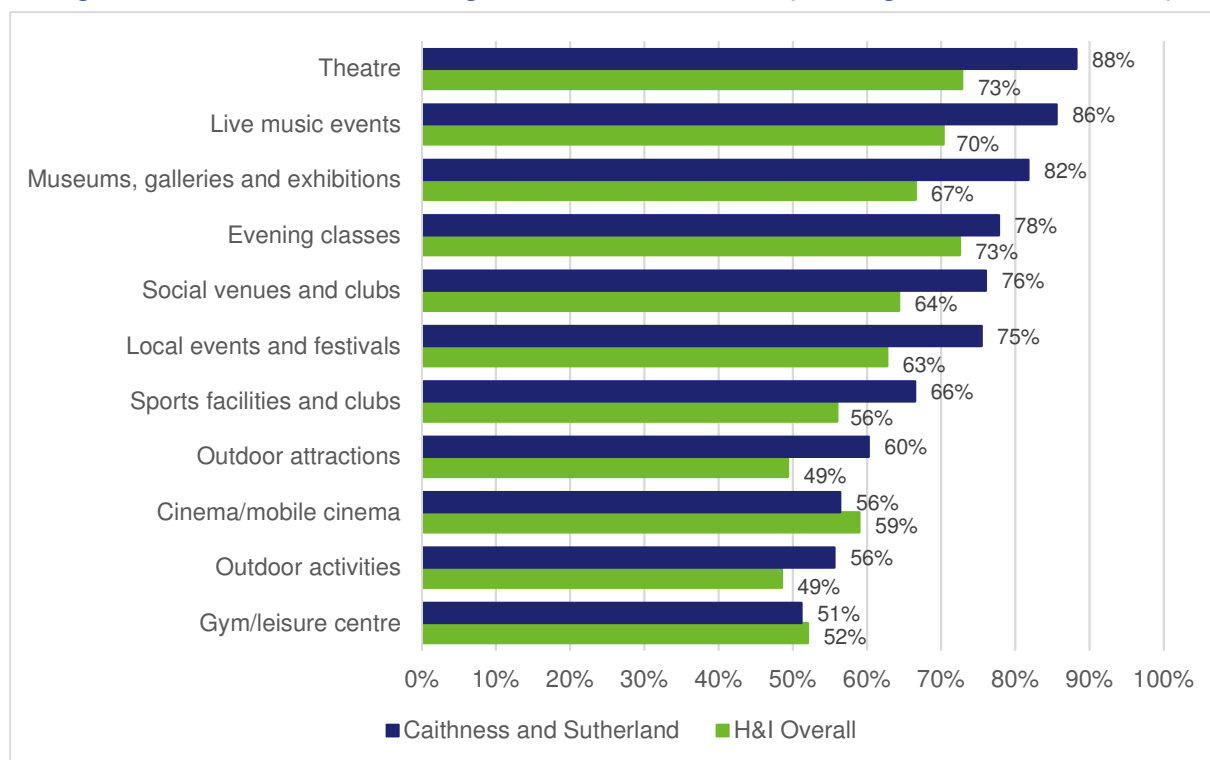
Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018* (Caithness & Sutherland n=171, H&I Overall n=1,965)

Note: 'A place with a good quality of life' was not asked in 2015

3.29 Young people from Caithness and Sutherland are more likely than others in the Highlands and Islands to perceive barriers to participation in arts, leisure and cultural activities (Figure 3.10). This is in line with the 2015 findings in which young people from Caithness and Sutherland tended to be more negative about access to these aspects than those in other parts of the region.

3.30 A lack of availability was perceived as the main barrier to most activities. However, cost was cited most frequently in relation to use of gyms/leisure centres, and transport was seen as a barrier to accessing cinema/mobile cinema. As well as availability, lack of variety was reported in terms of social venues/clubs and participation in outdoor activities.

**Figure 3.10: Barriers to accessing services and amenities (% citing one or more barriers)**



Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=173, H&I Overall n=2,015)*

## MAXIMISING OPPORTUNITIES

### Compromises

**3.31** Most young people from Caithness and Sutherland believe that people must make compromises to live, study and work in the Highlands and Islands (90% compared to 87% overall). They are more likely than average to identify compromises across most aspects explored, particularly a lower quality of life (23% compared to 12% regionally) and limited access to events, services, amenities and leisure facilities (75% compared to 65% across all respondents). Accommodation was the only factor they were less likely to view as a compromise than regionally (22% compared to 27%).

**3.32** These young people are most likely to feel they have already compromised on transport (66%) and having limited access to amenities, events and services (62%) - more so than regionally (61% and 47% respectively). They are also more likely than their peers across the region overall to feel they have already compromised on digital connectivity (47% compared to 37% regionally), mobile connectivity (52% versus 45%) and having fewer courses on offer at college/university (37% versus 29%) (Table 3.1).

**3.33** Almost two-fifths (39%) stated that they would not be prepared to compromise on their salary, and around a third on other employment related aspects – career progression opportunities (35%), working below their qualification/skills level (32%) or job opportunities (31%) (Table 3.1). This is similar to the proportions citing each regionally and reflects earlier findings on a lack of local opportunities as a barrier to achieving employment goals.

**3.34** Quality of life (33%) and accommodation (32%) were also factors that around a third of respondents in Caithness and Sutherland would not be prepared to compromise on, although these are compromises that many in the area do not feel exist (44% do not see quality of life as a compromise and 34% accommodation).

**Table 3.1: Compromises made by young people to live in the Highlands and Islands**

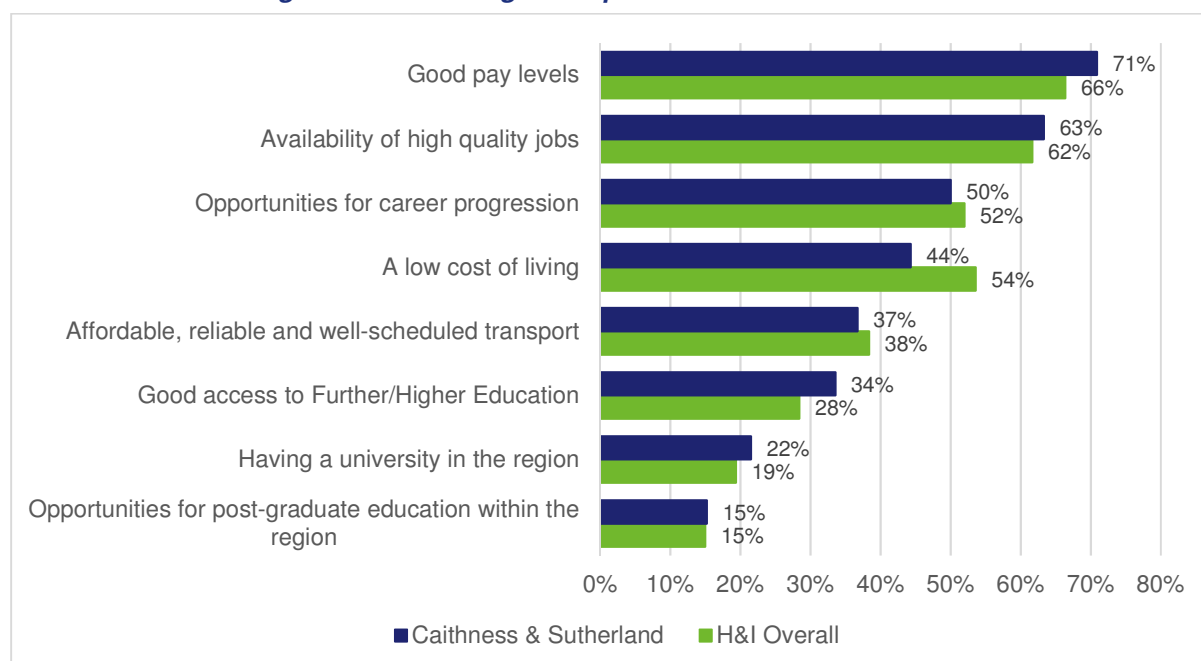
	I have already made	I would be prepared to make	I would not be prepared to make	I do not think this compromise exists
Accepting that transport and travel is more difficult and expensive	66%	16%	15%	3%
Having limited access to amenities, events, services and leisure facilities	62%	18%	14%	6%
Having limited mobile connectivity	52%	18%	10%	20%
Having limited digital connectivity	47%	16%	17%	21%
Having fewer job opportunities and choices	44%	19%	31%	6%
Having fewer courses on offer at college/university	37%	23%	28%	13%
Having fewer opportunities for career progression	30%	28%	35%	8%
Working below my qualification and skills level	26%	30%	32%	12%
Settling for a lower salary	25%	24%	39%	12%
Having a lower quality of life	17%	7%	33%	44%
Living in accommodation that doesn't fully meet my needs	13%	21%	32%	34%

Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (C&S n=134)*

## Enabling opportunities

3.35 Young people from Caithness and Sutherland have similar economic priorities as those elsewhere in the region, although ranking differs slightly (Figure 3.11). While good pay levels, high quality jobs, opportunities for career progression and a low cost of living were the top four factors for both, these young people rate opportunities for career progression above a low cost of living and were more likely than regionally to regard good access to FE/HE as an economic priority (34% versus 28%).

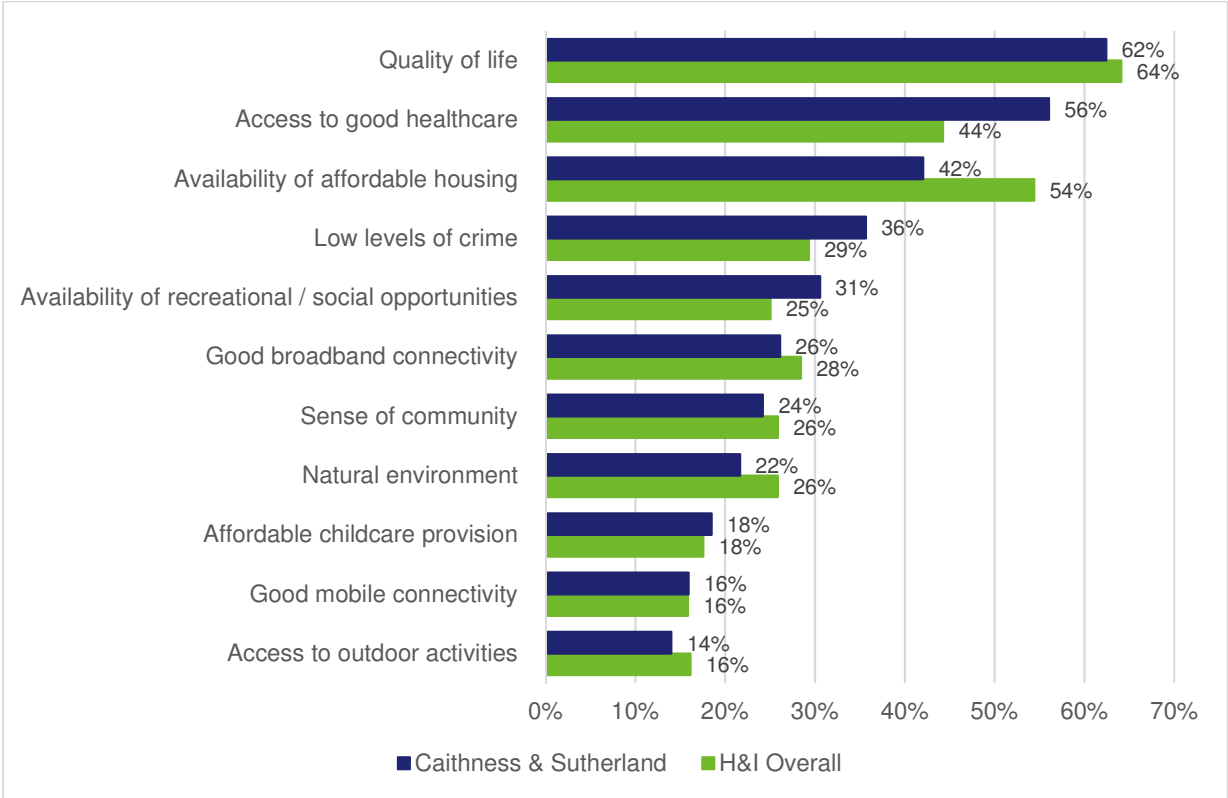
**Figure 3.11: Ranking the importance of economic factors**



Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=158, H&I Overall n=1,828)*

3.36 In considering social factors that would enhance the attractiveness of the Highlands and Islands to young people, the top three cited reflected those identified regionally, although the ranking differed. Quality of life emerged as key. However, those from Caithness and Sutherland place a greater importance on access to good healthcare (56% compared to 44% regionally) than on the availability of affordable housing (42% versus 54%) (Figure 3.12). They also placed more importance on low levels of crime (36% versus 29%) and the availability of recreational/social opportunities (31% versus 25%).

**Figure 3.12: Ranking the importance of social factors**



Source: *ekosgen survey of young people, 2018 (Caithness & Sutherland n=157, H&I Overall n=1,805)*

3.37 Young people in Caithness and Sutherland are less likely than their peers across the region to think that the Highlands and Islands is a better place to live now than it was five years ago (45% compared to 54% regionally), and this has declined slightly since 2015 (from 48%). Around two-fifths (41%) are unsure as to whether the region has improved in this time and 11% do not think it has.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

3.38 There have been positive changes in Caithness and Sutherland since the 2015 study. The proportion of committed stayers is notably higher than in 2015, and higher than regionally. Notably, however, those living in Sutherland are less likely to plan to stay in their local area. Perceptions of the educational provision in the region have also improved, although those from Caithness are typically more positive about what is available than their peers in Sutherland.

3.39 Young people from Caithness and Sutherland continue to perceive barriers to employment, particularly lack of local opportunities. This is higher than regionally (reflecting experiences in the Outer Hebrides and Argyll and the Islands), and higher still in Sutherland. While they are more likely than their peers across the region overall to participate in their community, levels have fallen since 2015. Views of their town or community are more mixed than elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands. While feelings of safety, pride and inclusion are marked, notably fewer perceive their needs as being met.



---

3.40 While the economic and social factors that need to be in place to make the region more attractive to young people broadly reflected those elsewhere, some variations were evident. Employment related factors and quality of life remained key. However, young people in Caithness and Sutherland placed a greater importance on career progression opportunities than on cost of living. Access to good healthcare, low levels of crime and availability of recreational/social opportunities were also a higher than average priority. Addressing some of these factors, and particularly the disparities between Caithness and Sutherland, will be key in enhancing attitudes and retaining a younger population.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

[hie.co.uk](http://hie.co.uk)

**T:** +44 (0) 1463 245 245

**E:** [hieresearch@hient.co.uk](mailto:hieresearch@hient.co.uk)

Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
An Lòchran  
10 Inverness Campus  
Inverness  
IV2 5NA



Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean