CROFTING COMMISSION
COIMISEAN NA CROITEARACHD

CROFT SUCCESSION

Survey Results 2025 and 2026

October 2026

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Executive Summary

The Crofting Commission undertook a project on croft succession in 2025 and 2026 to raise awareness of croft succession, to learn more about crofters' current approaches to it and to gain insights into chosen croft successors. This work expanded on an initial pilot study involving crofters in Uist, Barra and Northwest Highland in 2023.

The succession work presented in this report began in 2025. This involved sending 11,796 information packs and surveys to crofters across island regions (Shetland, Orkney, Lewis and Harris, Skye and the Small Isles and Argyll Islands) and mainland regions (Caithness, West, East and Argyll mainland). These succession packs contained information about croft succession, alongside surveys for crofters to complete.

Key findings from the 2025 survey found that 82% of the respondents have at least one form of succession plan in place for passing on their croft (a will or chosen successor) or plans for the potential loss of ability to manage their affairs (power of attorney). Having a chosen successor was the most common form of succession planning (73%), followed by those who have a will (60%).

A follow-up survey was distributed alongside the Crofting Commission Annual Notice, which went out to crofters in early 2026. This follow-up survey was to evaluate the impact of the succession project. The results were very positive. 94% of respondents who confirmed receiving the information packs, had taken, or intended to take, at least one form of succession-related action. Of those, 23% reported that they have updated or created a will since receiving the succession packs. In addition, 89% of respondents reported that the information contained within the succession packs was helpful.

These findings highlight the success of the succession project in terms of providing insights into the succession plans of crofters and prompting crofters to engage with the succession planning of their crofts. Other trends were identified in the results, including findings that the proportion of crofters with a will increased as the age bracket increased. Geographical trends and variations were also noted, as well as information about future crofters.

1. Introduction

Succession planning for crofts refers to taking action to ensure that the croft is passed on in the manner that the crofter wishes. It can also involve taking action to ensure that there will be continuity of management of the croft even if the crofter were to lose capacity. Succession planning for crofts plays a key role in the sustainability of crofting and the continuity of active croft use. This is particularly important because the population of crofters has an older age profile than that of the general population and is also an ageing population.

Croft succession plans can be enacted on death (by specifying a successor in a will) or during a crofter's lifetime (living succession[1]). Future planning can be done by putting in place a power of attorney,[2] which is valuable if a crofter should lose their ability to manage their affairs (including their croft). Succession planning ensures clarity of successor(s) and avoids potentially lengthy processes of intestate succession. Taking action to transfer[3] or assign the croft during the lifetime of a crofter is known as living succession. Living succession is one way to ensure continual active use of crofts, the passing on of crofting skills, and ensuring succession plans are carried out as intended.

The Crofting Commission (the Commission) undertook a project on croft succession in 2025 and 2026 to raise awareness of croft succession, to learn more about crofters' current approaches to it and to gain insights into chosen successors to crofts. The project included posting an information pack and survey to crofters in mid-2025.

This was followed up with an evaluation survey to crofters, as part of the 2025 Annual Notice, to monitor the effectiveness of it. This report presents findings from the two surveys. The findings will inform the Crofting Commission's work to promote active crofting and strengthen succession planning across the crofting counties to ensure crofts remain occupied, active and embedded within their communities.

The work was carried out following a pilot project in areas in the Western Isles and northwest Highland in 2023. The 2025-26 project was run by the Commission. Its islands component delivered on one of the commitments included in the Scottish Government's 2026 **National Islands Plan**. The project involved sending the information packs and surveys to all crofters who were not included in the 2023 pilot project. The follow up survey was issued to crofters in all areas. The map below shows the areas included in the 2023 and 2025-26 succession projects. The information packs and surveys were sent to crofters in island regions and mainland regions. When isolated by island areas only, 6% of returned surveys were Gaelic versions of the survey. The areas that received both the English and Gaelic versions of the survey included crofters in Skye, Argyll Islands, Lewis and Harris.

1 This can also be referred to as a 'lifetime transfer'.

2 In this report, power of attorney is referred to as succession planning in the broadest sense in that it is a form of future planning for any eventuality. It is not a way in which the croft would be transferred upon the death of the crofter but instead allows for crofters' affairs to be managed during their lifetime in the eventuality that they lose the ability to.

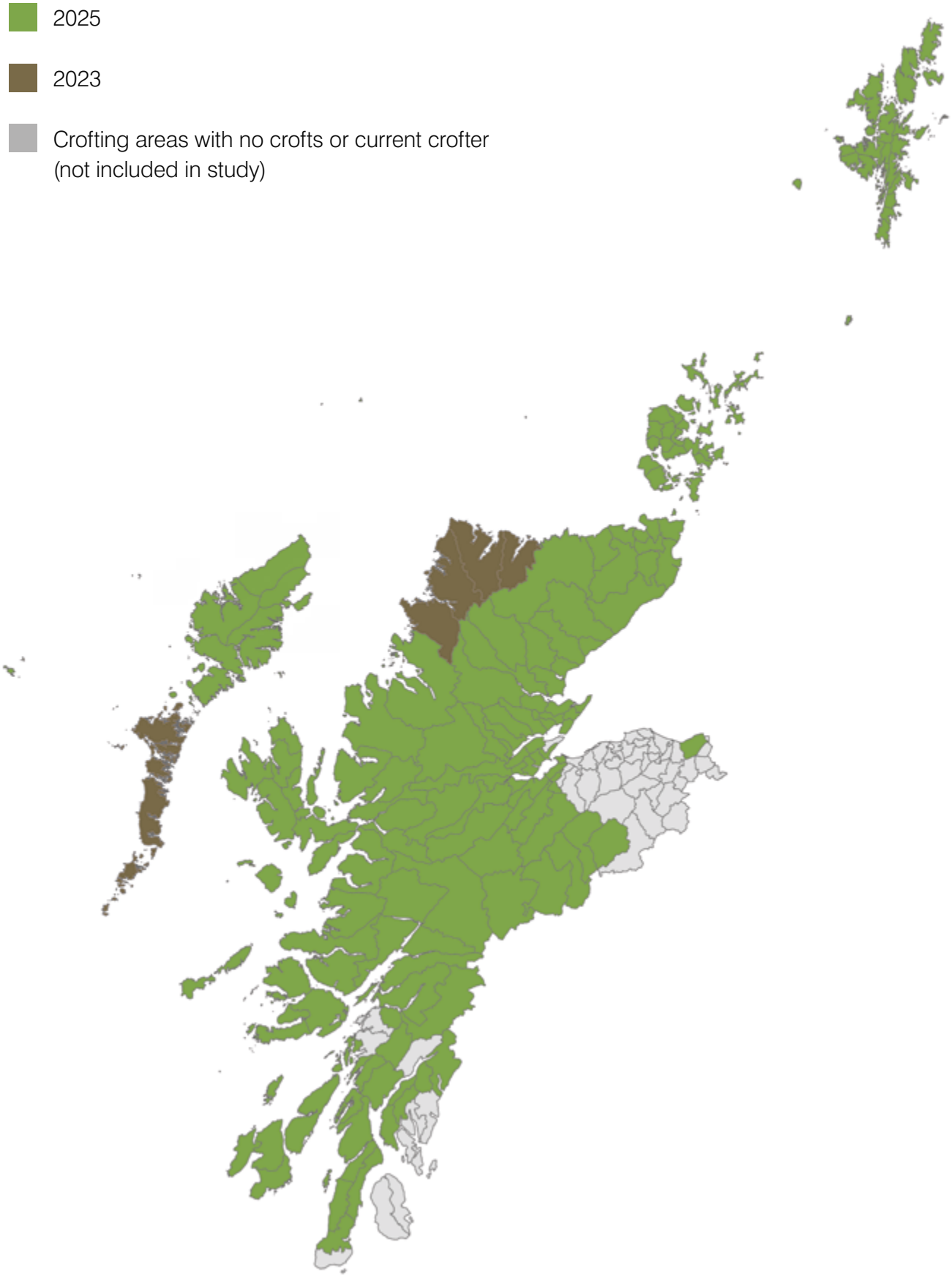
3 A transfer in legal terms is the act of moving ownership or title of property or an asset from one person or entity to another.

Map of the Crofting Areas Surveyed in 2023 and 2025

2025

2023

Crofting areas with no crofts or current crofter (not included in study)



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1.1 Background

The population of crofters[4] has a higher proportion of those aged 61 and over, as compared to the general population. The 2022 census[5] figures show the median age for Scotland was 43 years. A narrower focus shows the median age for those in the Highland Council area was 48 years, in Shetland it was 45 years and in the Western Isles it was 51 years (National Records of Scotland, 2022). Commission data shows that the median[6] age for crofters is 62 years as of May 2026, which is notably higher than that of the general population.

In addition, the population of crofters is ageing. This is defined as a trend whereby the proportion of older crofters is increasing relative to the proportion of younger crofters over time. This is shown by Commission Annual Reports, which indicate that the proportion of crofters aged 61 and over increased from 42% in 2013/14 to 49% in 2016/17. The Commission's 2024/25 Annual Report showed 54% of crofters were aged 61 years and over, and only 9% of crofters were 40 years and under[7]. This shows the age distribution of crofters is increasingly skewed towards those aged 61 and over.

The age profile of the crofter population has implications for the future of crofting. If effective and formalised succession plans are not in place, there is an increased risk of crofts becoming vacant, underutilised or falling out of active management in fragile rural and island communities. The succession project run by the Commission aimed to raise awareness of succession planning and to better understand this in the current population of crofters.

1.2 Survey Overview

The main succession survey was carried out in summer 2025. The 11,796 succession packs were posted to crofters, alongside surveys about croft succession. This was an anonymous survey that asked questions about the crofter, their succession plans (how they intend to pass on their croft), whether they have a power of attorney, information about their chosen successor (if any) and possible barriers to succession planning (such as access to information or concerns about the process). Respondents returned the completed survey by post.

The follow up survey on succession was included with the Commission's Annual Notice. The Commission's Annual Notice was sent by post to all registered crofters (13,635 crofters[8]) at the start of 2026, which all crofters are legally required to complete. It could be completed online or over the phone between January and early April 2026. The follow up survey on succession appeared after the Annual Notice questions as an optional survey. It asked five questions about whether they received the succession information pack, how useful it was and details of any actions taken since receiving it.

Further information detailing the steps and methods used are outlined in the appendix.

4 'Crofters' referred to in this report includes tenant and owner-occupier crofters as defined in section 3 of the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993. The majority of crofters are aged 16 and over.

5 Rebased mid-year population estimates.

6 This is the middle value in the dataset.

7 This has been calculated based on the 13,158 crofters with known date of births in the Crofting Commission's 2024/25 Annual Report. The total number of those over 61 years old is 7,075 (54%) and 1,230 who are 40 and under (9%).

8 This figure includes the crofters which were issued the Annual Notice which have been filtered out by those who have not been marked as deceased or where the address is unknown.

2. Key Findings

Key findings of the main survey on croft succession

2,330

responses were received (20% response rate).

82%[9]

of respondents have at least one form of succession plan in place for passing on their croft or plans for the potential loss of ability to manage their affairs.

73%

of respondents indicated that they have a chosen successor in place, suggesting this is the most common form of planning.

96%

of chosen successors are family members.

The main reason cited for not having a chosen successor was that the crofter had not given it any thought.

60%

of respondents reported that they already have a will in place.

As the age bracket got older, more respondents were found to have a formal succession plan in place and less respondents indicated they would consider living succession.

50%

of respondents would consider assigning or transferring their croft during their lifetime.

9 This figure is calculated based on the 1,917 respondents who responded 'yes' to at least one option to having a will, power of attorney or chosen successor.

Key findings of the follow up survey to evaluate the croft succession project

3,040

respondents indicated that they had received a succession information pack and survey (22% response rate).

89%

of respondents who reported receiving the croft succession information found it helpful.

Results indicate that the project was highly successful in raising awareness of croft succession and encouraging crofters to consider succession planning.

23%

of respondents reported updating or creating a will since receiving the succession pack.

94%

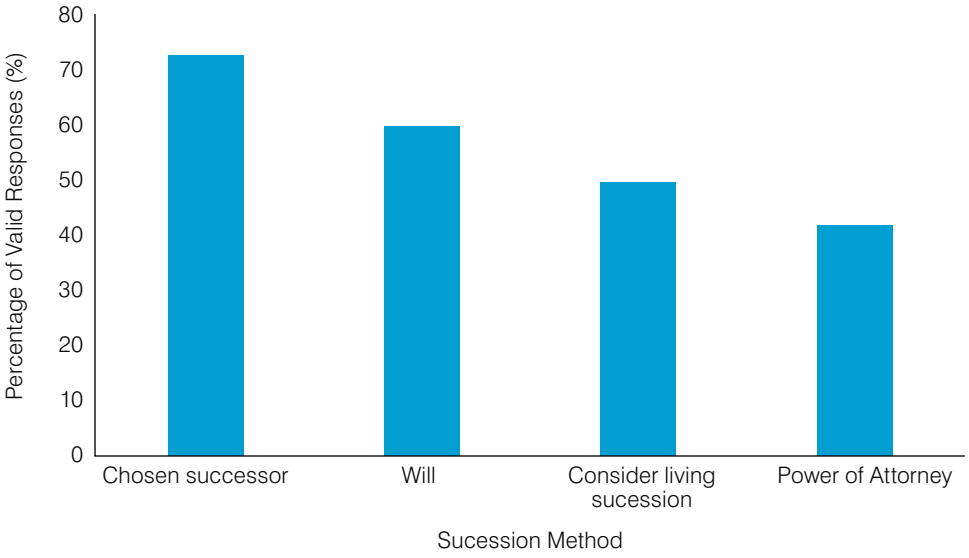
of respondents who confirmed receiving the succession information pack reported having taken, or intending to take, succession-related action since receiving the succession packs.

3. Trends in Succession Planning

3.1 Crofter Succession Plans

The majority (82%) of crofters reported having some form of succession planning in place for passing on their croft or plans for the potential loss of their ability to manage their affairs. Within this there is variation in the type and extent of planning in place. The 2025 survey showed that having a chosen successor is the most common form of planning (73%), followed by having a will (60%), followed by consideration of an assignation or transfer (also known as living succession) (50%). The survey also found that 42% of respondents have a power of attorney in place.

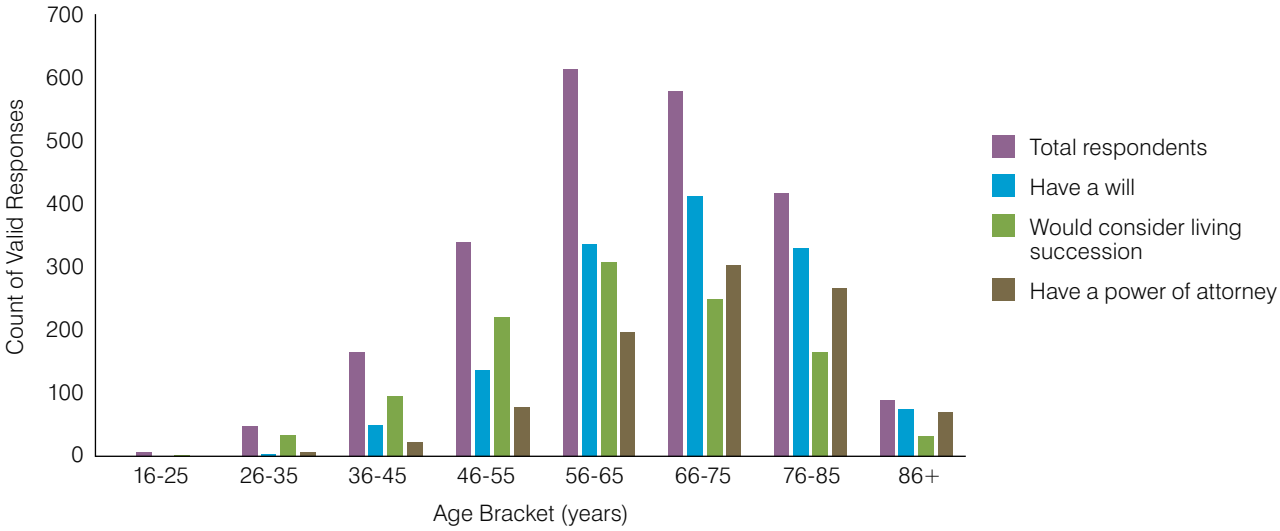
Chart showing the percentage of respondents with different forms of succession planning and future planning in place



Note: Respondents could select multiple types of succession planning options. It shows those who have selected 'yes' to having chosen successors (n=1,703), wills (n=1,389), who would consider living succession (n=1,142) and those with a power of attorney (n=971).

The percentage of respondents indicating that they have a will (60%) is similar to the proportion of adults in Scotland who have a will (58%, The National Will Register, 2024). Findings in previous crofting surveys by the Commission and the Economic Condition of Crofting surveys reported the proportion of crofters with a succession plan in place to be between 43% to 60% (Scottish Government, 2022). There is not an obvious pattern over time in these results, which may be due to differences in the wording of questions. However, the 2025 survey results indicates that a high proportion of crofters have some form of succession plan (82%), suggesting that this has increased.

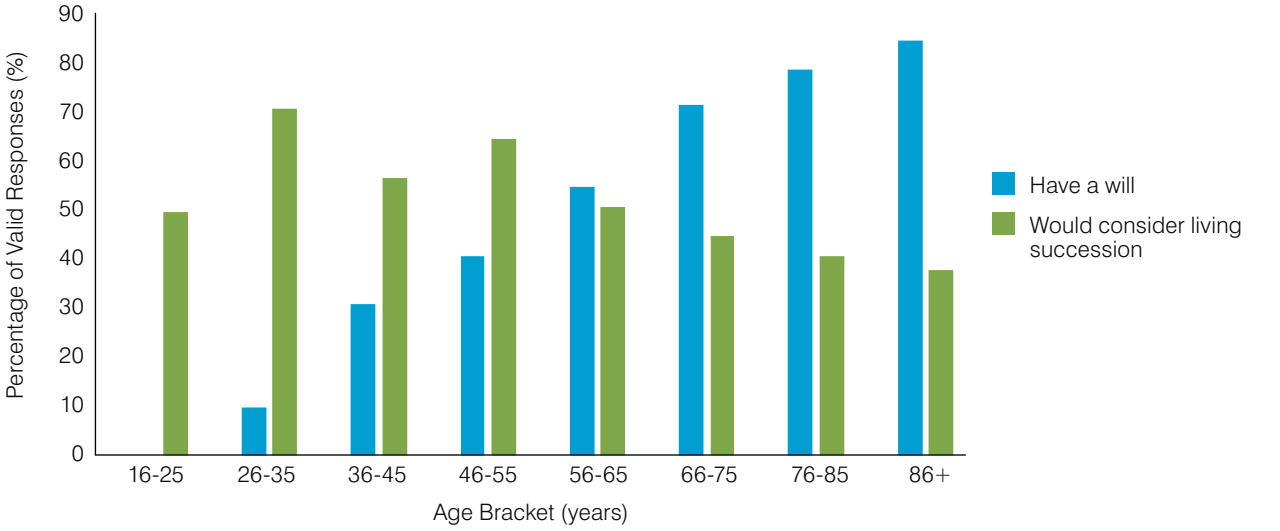
Chart showing those who have a will, who have a power of attorney and who would consider living succession by age bracket compared to the total number of respondents



Note: Questions for each succession method were presented separately. Respondents could answer 'yes' or 'no' to more than one form of succession planning. The number of valid responses varies between methods.

Some interesting trends can be seen when succession planning is examined against crofter age bracket. Succession planning in the form of a will or a power of attorney becomes more prevalent as the age bracket increases, indicating that these methods of succession planning typically occur later in life. Having a power of attorney in place could be beneficial for croft future planning by ensuring the croft would be managed by a chosen individual if they were to lose their ability to manage the croft. The proportion of crofters with a power of attorney increases by age bracket and peaks in the oldest age bracket of 86+. Respondents in the oldest (86+) age bracket have the highest prevalence of wills (85%). Conversely, 0% of respondents in the youngest (16-25) age bracket reported having a will. The chart below suggests respondents in younger age brackets (55 and under) indicated they were less likely to have a will but more likely to consider living succession.

Chart showing the percentage of respondents who have a will and would consider living succession by age bracket



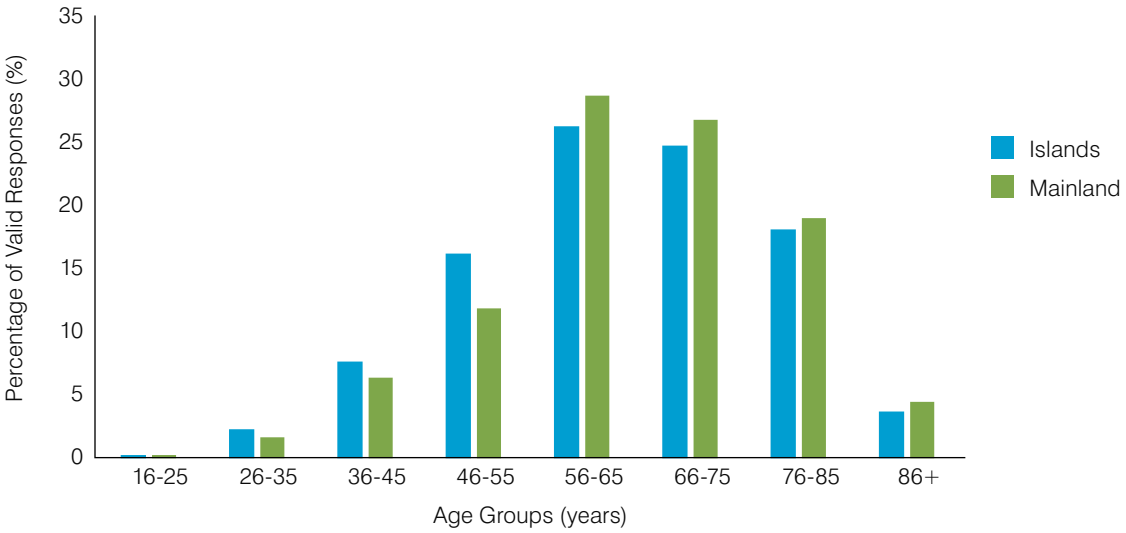
Note: The number of respondents to the survey in each age bracket as reported is: 16-25 (n=6), 26-35 (n=49), 36-45 (n=171), 46-55 (n=350), 56-65 (n=631), 66-75 (n=596), 76-85 (n=430), 86+ (n=92). Percentages shown are based on valid responses to each question.

3.2 Differences by Area

The 2025 succession survey achieved a good level of engagement with 2,330 surveys being returned (20% return rate). There are variations by area, with the highest return rates from those in Lewis, Harris, Skye and Argyll Islands (23%) and the lowest from those in mainland Argyll (9%). The geographical differences in engagement could be influenced by several variables, such as cultural differences, differing attitudes to succession, or differences in the age profile of crofters.

Differences in age demographics by area was evident. Geographical variations are also apparent from crofter date of birth data in the Register of Crofts, which shows differences between the age profile of crofters in different areas. The succession survey results showed that respondents from the islands[10] were proportionally more represented in younger age brackets (16-55) compared to those from the mainland[11], as shown in the chart below. In contrast, those from mainland areas consisted of a higher proportion of respondents in older age brackets (56+) compared to island areas. However, regional variations are seen within this overall trend. For example, north and west mainland areas have a higher proportion of crofters in older age brackets (65+) compared to those in Shetland and the Western Isles. In addition, southwest mainland areas, including Argyll, tend to have comparatively more younger crofters (55 and below).

Chart showing the percentage of respondents from the main survey by age category and split by islands (n=1,612) and mainland (n=712) areas



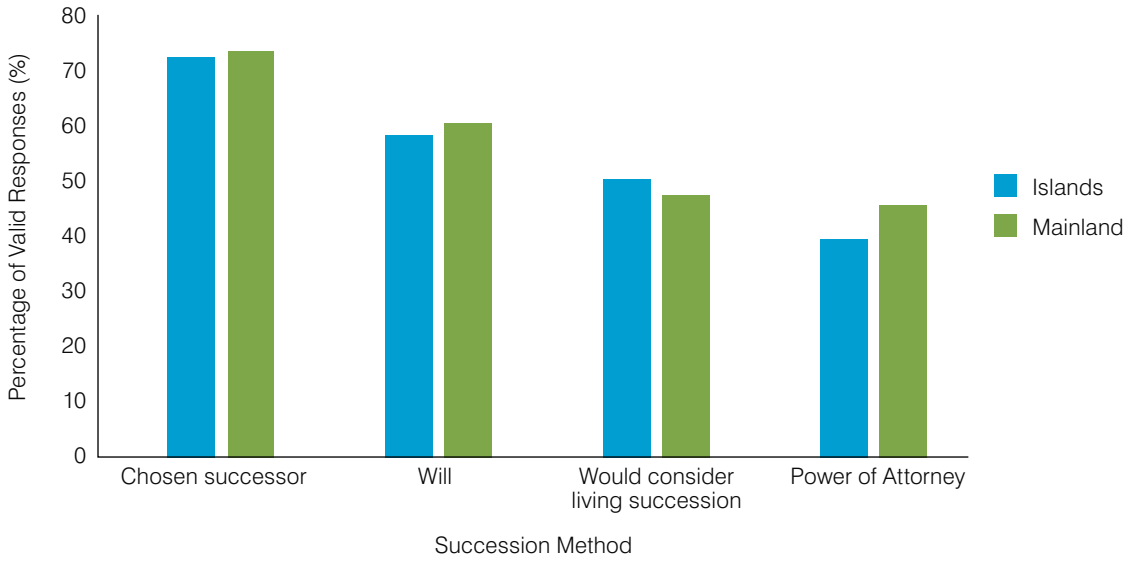
Note: Questions for each succession method were presented separately. Respondents could answer 'yes' or 'no' to more than one form of succession planning. The number of valid responses varies between methods and between island and mainland respondents.

10 Island encompasses Shetland, Orkney, Lewis and Harris, Skye and the Small Isles and Argyll Islands

11 Mainland encompasses Caithness, West, East, Argyll mainland.

Analysis shows some variation between responses from mainland and island crofters. Based on this it appears that mainland crofters are more likely to have a will and power of attorney in place. This may link to the trend that more mainland crofters are in the older age brackets (56-65 to 85+) as compared to island crofters.

Chart showing the percentage of respondents who have answered 'yes' to having different succession plans in place from the main survey, split into islands (n=1,612) and mainland (n=712) areas



Note: Questions for each succession method were presented separately. Respondents could answer 'yes' or 'no' to more than one succession planning. Total valid response numbers varied for each question.

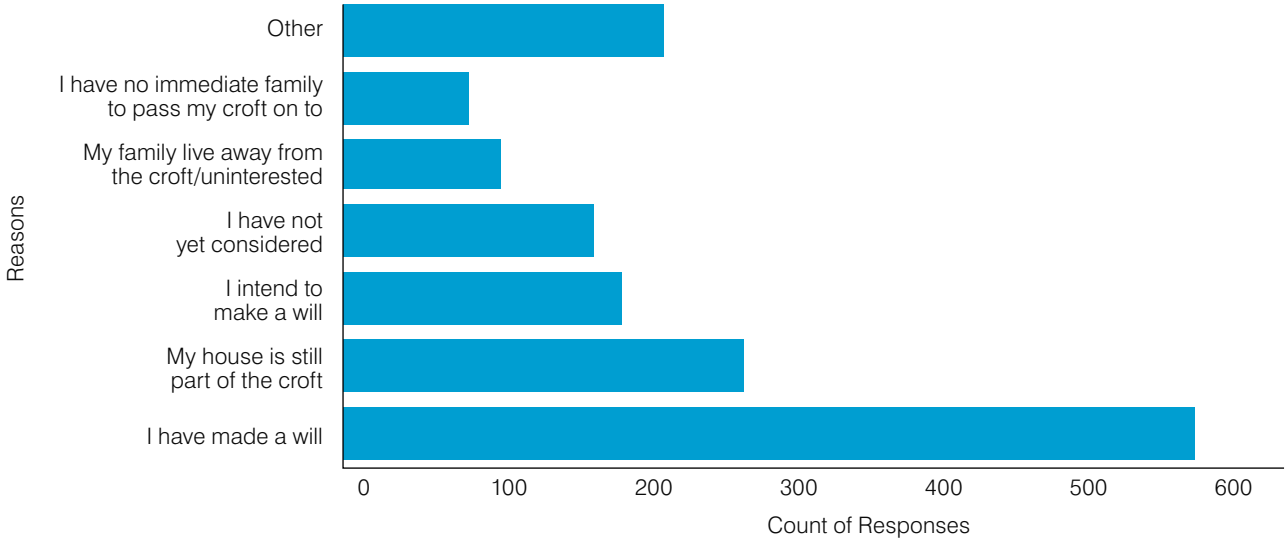
Further differences can be seen when the results are separated by individual area. For example, the highest rates for those with wills were from respondents in east mainland (65%) and Skye (63%). The lowest rates for those with wills were for Argyll mainland (49%) and Argyll islands (51%). This could be linked to the differences in age profiles across the different crofting areas.

4. Barriers to Succession

The respondents were asked about whether they would consider assigning or transferring their croft within their lifetime, also referred to as living succession. If they would not consider living succession, respondents were prompted to answer a follow-up question as to why. Of the 1,125 respondents who would not consider living succession, those in the younger (16-45) age brackets were the most likely to report that the reason for this is that they have not yet considered succession planning or that they intend to make a will. Some of these respondents commented that they were waiting for successors to come of age before formalising succession plans. This suggests the age of crofters could have an influence on the approaches to croft succession planning.

50% of respondents reported that they would not consider living succession and they were asked why. For those respondents, the most common reason for not considering living succession is due to already having a will in place (50%). This suggests that some respondents already have formalised succession plans in place and are not looking to change these. The second most common reason stated for not considering living succession was that the house was still part of the croft (24%). This suggests that there could be value in raising awareness about decrofting as a way to separate the house from the croft, in order to encourage crofters to plan for the succession of their crofts.

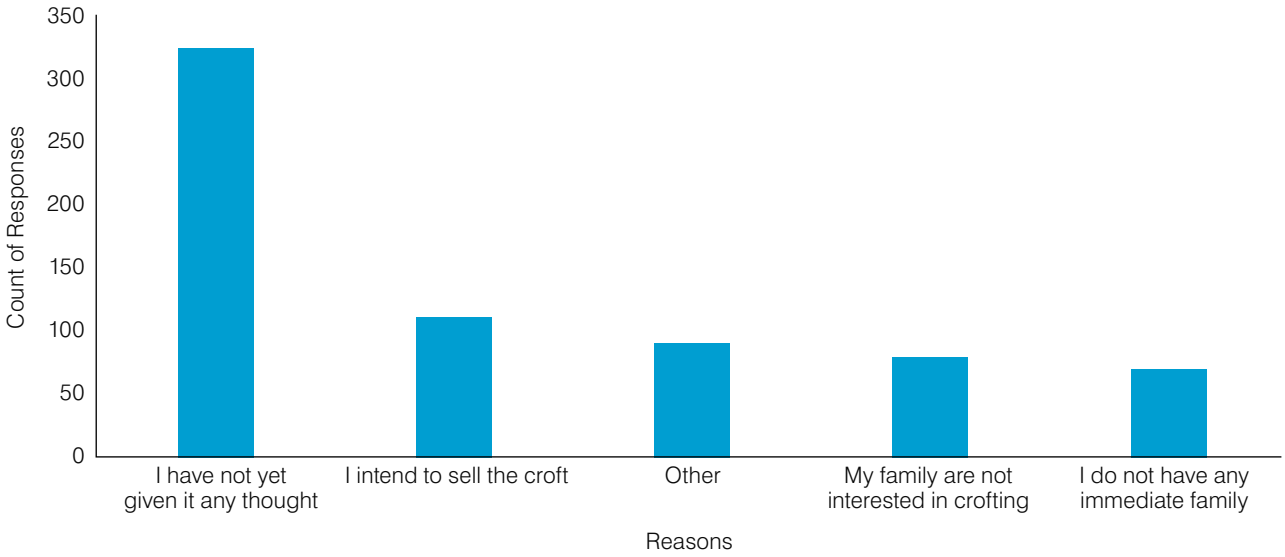
Bar chart showing respondents most common reasons for not considering living succession (n=1,125)



Note: Of the 1,125 respondents eligible to answer this question, 1,058 provided at least one response and 1,578 total selections were made (multiple options could be selected). Percentages noted in the narrative are calculated based on the 1,125 eligible respondents as the denominator. 'Other' includes the following responses: I have an informal arrangement, I am worried or fearful of losing the house or croft, I don't know where to start, I am not concerned, I can't or don't want to decide and I do not wish to go through the admin of the associated application process.

The survey also asked about chosen successors. The majority of respondents (73%) had a chosen successor. Respondents who indicated that they did not have a chosen successor were asked the reasons why. Among the 623 respondents without chosen successors, over half (53%) reported that they have not given succession any thought. This finding was most prevalent among the 56-65 age bracket, therefore highlighting another difference between different ages. A further proportion identified reasons for not having a chosen successor was due to their intentions to sell the croft (18%) and a lack of family members interested in crofting (13%).

Chart showing respondents reasons for not having a chosen successor (n=623)



Note: Of the 623 respondents eligible to answer this question, 615 provided at least one response and 684 total selections were made (multiple options could be selected).

5. Future Crofters

The survey results give a unique insight into future crofters that will acquire a croft via succession. This is based on the answers to questions about chosen successors (73% of respondents had a chosen successor). Among the 1,703 of respondents who have chosen successors, 96% indicated that their successor is a family member. This strongly demonstrates the importance of passing on crofts within families. It suggests that crofting plays a role in maintaining cultural continuity in areas where crofting is prevalent. This reinforces findings from previous research of the importance of family ties in crofting for maintaining crofting heritage, as well as Gaelic language and cultural identity (BiGGAR, 2024). Of those who reported having chosen successors in the survey, 78% would be new entrants[12] to crofting, indicating that a considerable proportion of new entrants to crofting already have family links to the croft.

5.1 Male and Female Ratios

Previous findings have consistently shown that crofting has been a predominantly male sector. The Commission's 2015/16 Annual Report reported that approximately 68% of crofters were male and 32% were female. However, the survey results presented here (collected in 2025) found that respondents consisted of 61% male crofters and 39% of female crofters where crofter sex[13] was disclosed. This could suggest there is an emerging trend towards a greater balance of male and female crofters, which reflects broader trends identified within wider agricultural research (McKee & Sutherland, 2021).

Chosen successors are predominantly male. However, of those chosen successors for whom sex was disclosed, 57% were male and 43% were female. This suggests that the shift towards a more equal sex balance in the crofter population could continue as succession plans are enacted. However, it should be noted that crofts are also obtained through other routes, such as if a croft or croft tenancy is sold on the open market.

Table showing the changes over time of percentages of male and female crofters. Based on the Crofting Commission's Annual Reports and from the 2025 Succession Survey Results

	2015/16	2016/17	2025[14]	Future successors[15]
Male	68%	65%	61%	57%
Female	32%	35%	39%	43%

12 Defined by an individual who is not already a tenant or owner occupier of a croft.

13 'Sex' is defined in this report as per the physical state of being either male, female, or intersex (Cambridge Dictionary). The survey asked participants to indicate whether they were male, female or preferred not to say.

14 Calculated based on 1,401 answering 'male', 912 answering 'female' and 16 answering 'prefer not to say' in the 2025 succession survey. Percentages calculated to exclude respondents who did not disclose their sex.

15 Calculated based on those with chosen successors, with 877 answering 'male', 666 answering 'female' and 146 answering 'prefer not to say' in the 2025 succession survey.

5.2 Residency

The majority of chosen successors are already resident within 32km of the croft (73%). This is based on the respondents who indicated that they have a chosen successor and who responded to the question in relation to residency. 27% of chosen successors are not currently living within 32km of the croft, of whom almost 1 in 4 have not indicated a willingness to become resident. This means 5%[16] of crofters in the total sample have successors who have not indicated an intention to meet the residency duty. This is similar to the 2023 succession study findings and suggests ongoing monitoring regarding duties enforcement will remain important.

16 462 respondents of the 2330 have a chosen successor that isn't currently resident within 32 km of the croft, 112 of 2330 have a chosen successor that isn't resident or willing to be.

6. Impact of the Succession Project

The follow up survey returned 3,040 responses[17] (22% return rate). The results clearly demonstrate the overall success of the succession project. Of the 3,040 individuals who reported receiving the succession packs, 94% reported having taken or intending to take some form of succession related action since they received the pack. This is a very encouraging result and could have substantial benefits over coming years as croft succession plans come into play. It could help reduce the incidence of lengthy intestate succession cases which can leave crofts unused for many years and can cause uncertainty and conflict.

The majority of crofters found the succession information pack useful (89%). Following receipt of the information pack, 48% of respondents reported having taken some form of succession related action, while 46% reported that they intended to take action. Respondents reported having taken several actions, including:

- Creating or updating a will (23%)
- Discussing the succession of the croft with a proposed successor (23%)
- Contacting or using information from any of the organisations listed in the pack (1%)
- Submitting an application to the Commission linked to succession plans (1%)

It is evident that the project has not only increased awareness of succession planning among respondents, but it also suggests the project has contributed to positive behavioural change amongst respondents following receipt of the information packs. A minority (11%) of respondents reported that they did not find the succession information useful. However, it is useful to note that the most common reason for not finding the succession pack helpful was because 31% reported that the reason for this was that they were already well informed about succession. This may be linked to Commission efforts to raise awareness of croft succession in 2023 or educational information from other organisations, such as the Farm Advisory Service.

The results from those who engaged with the survey and reported receiving the pack gave useful and positive results. However, it is a limitation of the study that it was unable to measure the crofters who received the succession information pack but did not recall receiving it.

17 Valid responses defined as those who answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the follow up survey question: ‘If you received the information pack, did you find the succession pack we provided helpful?’. There was a ‘not applicable’ option for respondents to select, but these (n=3,543) were excluded from the analyses.

7. Conclusions

The succession surveys have provided insights into succession planning across the crofting counties. The key findings show:

- The majority (82%) of crofters have some form of succession plan in place for passing on their croft or plans for the potential loss of ability to manage their affairs. This includes those who have a will, power of attorney or chosen successor.

- 73% of respondents reported having a chosen successor and 60% reported having a will.

- Succession preparedness varied by age bracket. A clear trend was seen with the proportion of crofters with a will and crofters with a POA increasing as the age bracket increased.

- Consideration of living succession was most prevalent amongst respondents in the younger (26-35) age brackets, but consideration of this declined in the older age brackets (56+).

- Crofters are predominantly male. However, previously reported data and the survey results demonstrate a shift towards a greater balance of male and female crofters. Chosen successors give insights into future crofters, and the results suggest that the shift to a more equal balance in male and female crofters may continue.

- Some geographical differences are shown in survey responses. Results showed an overall pattern of a greater proportion of crofters in older age brackets (56+) in mainland areas and a greater proportion of crofters in younger age brackets (55 and below) in island areas. However, regional variations exist within this.

- The majority of crofters (94%) have taken, or intend to take, succession-related action since they received the information pack on croft succession. This has and should continue to result in an overall increase in the proportion of crofters with a succession plan.

The results also highlight potential areas for future work. A proportion of chosen successors have not indicated a willingness to meet residency requirements. This highlights the continued importance of duties enforcement work by the Commission. New entrants to crofting are likely to continue and increase as succession plans are enacted. This will impact crofting communities and may create an increased demand for development of crofting skills and knowledge.

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Appendix: Methodology

The work presented in this paper and analyses are based on responses to two surveys:

1. A postal survey issued in summer 2025 on croft succession, which accompanied an information pack about croft succession.

2. An online follow-up survey that was available from January to early April 2026. This was included as an optional survey alongside the Commission 2025 Annual Notice.

The postal succession survey was issued to crofters in the relevant areas. Recipients were tenant crofters and owner-occupier crofters, as identified in the Register of Crofts. The 11,796 surveys and information packs were sent to crofters in Shetland, Orkney, Lewis and Harris, Skye and the Small Isles, Arran, Bute and Cumbrae, Caithness, West Mainland, East Mainland, Argyll Islands and Argyll Mainland in July 2025. The only areas excluded were those that were already covered in the 2023 pilot study, thereby ensuring distribution of croft succession information to all crofting areas across the two projects.

Crofter address data was based on an extract from the Register of Crofts taken on the 13th of June 2025. This information is based on administrative records and crofters are prompted annually to correct any inaccurate information. However, it is subject to inaccuracies, which are typically due to crofters not updating their contact details. Respondents to the survey could complete it by hand and return it via a pre-paid envelope. The main succession survey was paper-based and therefore subject to several sources of error, such as user errors or data entry errors. Survey responses were anonymous. When the survey closed in December 2025, a total of 2,330 responses had been received.

The follow up evaluation survey was made available to crofters in January 2026 and closed on the 13th of April 2026. It was an optional online survey, which crofters were directed to after they had completed their Annual Notice. The Annual Notice is a legal requirement, issued to every crofter by the Commission and crofters are obligated to complete it. The follow up survey on succession was completed online. For crofters who did not wish to access it online, there was the option of completing it by phone.

For the follow up survey, respondents who selected ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question “If you have received the information pack, did you find the succession pack we provided helpful?” were included in the results. This included the calculation of the return rate and subsequent analyses. Those who left this question blank or selected ‘not applicable’ were excluded as the survey was optional and the option of ‘not applicable’ was included to capture those crofters that did not receive a survey (e.g. if there was a change of crofter). This also highlights a limitation of the study whereby the survey could not measure those who did not recall receiving the survey as they are likely to have selected ‘not applicable’.

Percentages presented in this report are based on valid responses. This means that only respondents who answered the question were included in the result for that particular question. Not all questions were applicable to all respondents and so, response sizes varied between questions. For example, questions relating to chosen successors were only answered by those who had an identified successor.

The age and sex profile of respondents is broadly representative of the general crofting population when compared with information from the Register of Crofts. The median crofter age was calculated by taking all unique tenant and owner occupier crofters in the Register of Crofts in May 2026 who had a date of birth recorded. Individuals aged between 16 and 103 years old were included, in order to remove likely errors. This left 12,876 out of 13,635 individuals (approximately 94%) of tenant and owner occupier crofters included in the calculation. The age was calculated from the date of birth. Age was defined as the number of completed years since their last birthday at the time of analysis. The number of individuals for each age were counted and the 50th percentile identified with a continuous distribution. Using that method, the resulting median age was 62.005380 (62) as of May 2026.

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