

NHS EDUCATION FOR SCOTLAND RURAL FELLOWSHIP IN GENERAL PRACTICE



INFORMATION FOR
BENBECULA, NORTH & SOUTH UIST &
BARRA

February 2025

BASE: BENBECULA MEDICAL PRACTICE

Benbecula Medical Practice is an innovative remote and rural island practice in the Outer Hebrides, off the West Coast of Scotland. The practice looks after 2,300 patients on the island of Benbecula and part of the neighbouring island of South Uist. The GP mentor is Dr Kate Dawson, based at the practice. The Practice is now managed by Western Isles NHS Board, having changed to a 2c Practice in April 2024.

The medical team also covers the community hospital, serving the population from all three main island groups, just under 5,000 patients. There are some out-of-hours sessions available in Uist and in Barra. The GPs in the practice have extended roles and special interests, and there are opportunities for teaching sessions to cover these.

This is a stimulating post, with opportunities to experience different models of working as a GP, whilst getting experienced senior support.

RURAL FELLOWSHIP - BENBECULA

Educational component

- The Fellow will be based at Benbecula Medical Practice. When working in Benbecula Medical Practice, the Fellow will participate in the intermediate and community hospital level of care. The practice GPs will always be available to advise and assist in clinical care and decision-making. The Practice Quality Lead will be available to support any QI and Patient Safety projects during the year.
- There are opportunities to design and implement new work systems

Service Commitment

- For the service commitment part of the fellowship, the fellow will work for 22 weeks in the participating practices. These practices will be agreed at the beginning of the rural fellow year. A minimum of half of this time will be in Benbecula
- Part of the service commitment will include service development and quality improvement.
- Participating practices are based on Benbecula, North Uist, South Uist and Barra. Fellows may work in more than one of these practices, taking into account any annual leave and study leave.

Duties

- Duties will include the full range of general practice duties during the Rural Fellow's time in any General Practice, including working in the local Community Hospital. The underlying principles will be that the Fellow will have a similar work pattern to the principals in the practice.

OOH

- As part of their educational program, Fellows are expected to gain experience in unscheduled care, which is organised by the health board. In Uist, the on-call GPs are based at home, covering the community hospital and the patients from three practices (North Uist, South Uist and Benbecula).

RURAL FELLOW FEEDBACK

Recent fellows tell us:

I have found the rural fellowship in Benbecula extremely varied, fulfilling and educational. It's allowed me a taste of many different sides of rural GP work - working in very well organised, friendly and supportive teams at Benbecula Medical Practice and the Uist and Barra Hospital as well as building my confidence up to try out being a single-handed GP in Barra.

There are some inspiring and experienced GPs and other MDT members to learn from in the Western Isles and there is a great culture of learning and keeping up to date with practice.

Living in Benbecula has also been great for both me and my partner, despite the occasional wild weather and ferry disruptions. I've enjoyed lovely walks, swimming, kayaking, seeing eagles and otters, knitting with local wool, attending ceilidhs (and dancing poorly). **Dr Laila Morris, rural fellow 2022-3**

While the base practice is in Benbecula, I also work routinely in North and South Uist. My time in Benbecula is split between GP and the hospital in Balivanich. I have also spent 2 weeks in the beautiful island of Barra, to the South. It's a wonderful opportunity to experience the Outer Hebrides and mix GP and acute skills in a truly welcoming, traditional Gaelic community.

I moved here with my family, and this has proved an equally exciting prospect. My children enjoy the school and Gaelic nursery. We continue to explore on weekends; camping, kayaking, bodyboarding and hill walking.

This is a stunning place with different sea and sky to welcome every day and a well-supported, varied start to my career as a GP. **Dr Jon Anderson, rural fellow 2023-2024**

BENBECULA PRACTICE: SMALL PRINT

- The practice has recently become a 2C practice, being run by the healthboard.
- All staff have a say in the running and planning of practice services. The nurses manage all chronic disease clinics. They are experienced with two having advanced clinical assessment and prescribing.
- The branch surgery, in Daliburgh, South Uist, is open two days a week.
- The practice currently uses EMIS PCS. We will be changing from EMIS PCS to Vision in the summer of 2025. Incoming mail and documents are managed using Docman7. This will be changing to Docman 10 in the spring of 2025.
- The practice uses Microsoft Teams to allow island GPs to access meetings, and educational events.
- We have an experienced community primary care team, with good support from AHPs, Social work, third sector and others. We also have an Urgent Care Team who carry out home visits for the Practices. Three members of staff are employed on the team, two ANPs and a Paramedic.
- Additional roles are supported by training in emergency medicine, pre-hospital care, etcetera. Fellows will have access to this training through the fellowship. The Skills Bus visits the Island yearly.
- Because of our remote location, we provide a full range of services within the practice, often taking on community-based extended management to help patients avoid arduous trips to the mainland.
- The practice has a good working relationship with other practices in the area, namely the practices in Barra, South Uist and North Uist. We organise joint educational opportunities, and occasionally socialise together when the opportunity presents.
- <http://www.benbeculamedicalpractice.co.uk/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BMPPPG/>

UISTS AND BARRA HOSPITAL

Ospadal Uibhist agus Bharraigh (Uist and Barra Hospital) is a community hospital located in Benbecula. It provides a local service for the populations on Benbecula, North Uist, South Uist and associated islands. Benbecula Medical Practice holds a LES to provide the medical services at the hospital.

The hospital currently has a maximum of 16 beds. The hospital provides care of the elderly, GP Acute and midwifery led maternity services, with deliveries off Island. Consultants from the Western isles Hospital and Raigmore visit the Uist and Barra Hospital to provide outpatient services.



HOSPITAL: SOME DETAILS

- The hospital is the only source of in-patient and emergency medical care locally; because of the location, it is the first point of call for all and any clinical condition from ingrown toenails to acute ischaemic heart disease and road traffic accidents. Patients whose care needs exceed local resources are transferred on to higher level care facilities as dictated by their care needs and treatment escalation plan.
- The health board employ all the clinical staff who work in the hospital. Services include physiotherapy, general nursing, midwifery, endoscopy, minor surgery lists, and radiology.
- The community hospital is supported by consultants in Stornoway by telephone, and by the Ambulance and Air ambulance services and by the Emergency Retrieval Service. The health board intranet also provides a range of policies, guidelines and treatment pathways to support our in-patient clinical work.
- Patients with serious conditions can be stabilised before onward transfer, either by air ambulance, or retrieved by the Emergency Medical Retrieval Service, who provide in-flight medical support. Resuscitation, stabilisation and emergency transfer of acutely unwell & trauma patients falls within the scope and remit of the GPs.
- The hospital and practice are also central to the management of major incidents and as a result the practice has input into local emergency planning.

OUT OF HOURS: SOME DETAILS

- Between 6pm and 8am, when the surgeries are closed, the medical cover for all clinical activity on the islands is provided by an on-call OOH GP. This is mostly staffed by regular locums, supported by the local GPs.
- Many of the OOH locums have undertaken the rural fellowship, or have had interesting careers before General Practice, and it is worth making time to meet them to find out more about their clinical experience.
- The OOH is currently supported by an on-call CPN, a Community Nurse, and the Urgent Care Team.
- The Scottish Ambulance service locally has a well-established and experienced team, and most crews have a paramedic on board.
- Three of the local GPs provide a 'second on' service and are contactable for additional advice and support.
- The rural fellow may also undertake cover for the island of Barra, with telephone support if required.

NEIGHBOURING PRACTICES

North Uist Medical Practice:

- North Uist Medical Practice is a dispensing practice based in Lochmaddy, providing general medical services to the population of North Uist and associated islands.
- Currently one principal GP, and a salaried GP.
- Practice population around 1,400
- OOH is covered by a team of locum OOH GPs, many of whom return regularly.
- <http://north-uist-medical.co.uk/wordpress/>

South Uist Medical:

South Uist Medical is a dispensing practice based in Daliburgh, at the south of South Uist, and provides general medical services to patients in South Uist and Eriskay.

- Currently one principal GP
- Practice population around 1,000
- OOH is covered by a team of locum OOH GPs, many of whom return regularly.
- <http://www.southuistmedical.co.uk/>

Barra Medical Practice:

Barra Medical Practice is a dispensing practice based in Castlebay. Barra is not connected to the other major islands. The practice is managed by the health board, and medical support is provided by a team of salaried GPs and occasional locums. There is scope to innovate and set up service development projects.

- St Brendan's Hospital, a small acute medical unit of three beds, which is where the Barra unscheduled care services are based. The unscheduled care and OOH is under review.
- Practice population around 1,200
- <http://www.barramedicalpractice.co.uk/>

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Cluster: There is a regular cluster meeting to which you will be invited. This might be a good forum for you to present your quality improvement project, and to gain support across the health board, if desirable.

Quality improvement: One of the GP partners has additional training in Quality Improvement methodology and will be available to support a QI project during the course of the attachment.

Local courses: Courses such as BASICS, European Trauma Course, SCOTTIE and EPALS are provided on the islands. There are also opportunities to link into BASICS distance learning and portfolio teaching. The Skills Bus also visits annually to the Uist and Barra Hospital.

Practical learning: There will be opportunities to get involved in GP led acute care, care of the elderly, midwife-led obstetrics, and palliative care. Consultants undertake a range of clinics, in person or by Near Me, including respiratory medicine, ENT, psychiatry, obstetrics and gynaecology, ophthalmology, orthopaedics, general surgery and general medicine. Some clinics are entirely virtual, for example neurology. Unscheduled care sessions will allow for observation and participation in aeromedical evacuation. There are also endoscopy and minor surgery sessions led by a visiting surgeon. The Fellow will also have an opportunity to participate in the annual MAJAX exercise.

Protected educational time: This will be organised in conjunction with the service elements of the posts and with the Rural Fellowship Co-ordinator. Fellows will have the opportunity to negotiate additional experience in secondary care, remote practices and to undertake specific course activity as available. Fellows will also be expected to attend the meetings of the Scottish Rural Fellows Group three times during the year.

Links with Western Isles Hospital: We are able to build in educational attachments at the Western Isles Hospital depending on the learning needs of the fellow. We have also arranged attachments in Raigmore hospital and rural fellow exchanges.

If you have any specific learning needs or knowledge gaps, the lead GP will facilitate access to training and clinical experience. This will be reviewed throughout the fellowship.

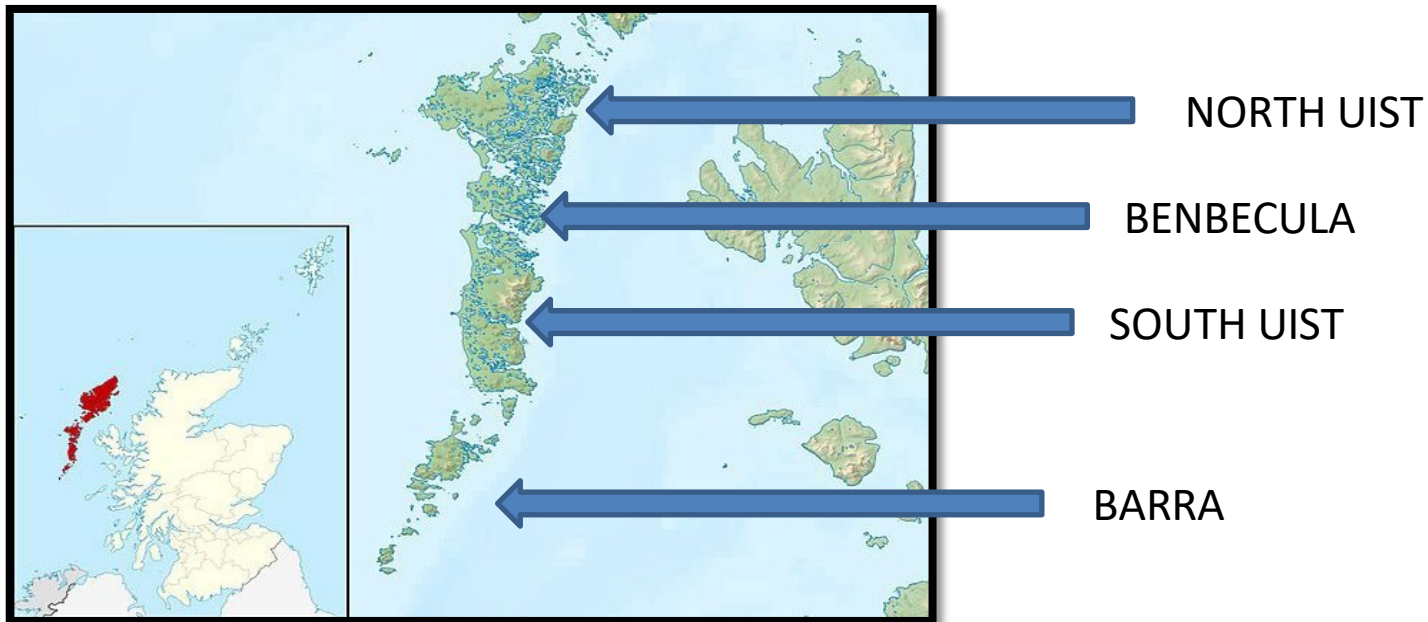
AT THE TOP OF BEN MOR IN SPRING



SEA EAGLE AND GOLDEN EAGLE

LOCATION

The Uists and Benbecula form part of the Western Isles. The islands are located 40 miles off the Northwest coast of Scotland, 130 miles long from the Butt of Lewis in the North to the Isle of Barra in the South. The population of the Western Isles is approximately 26,500, spread over 280 townships. Around 26% of the population are over 65, proportionately one of the most elderly populations in Scotland. Travel to and from the islands is by air or ferry. There are causeways between the islands in the Uist chain, and a ferry from South Uist to Barra.



LIVING ON OUR ISLANDS

This is a wonderful place to live and work, and to bring up children. We have a supportive community, a diverse and rich natural environment, and a strong cultural heritage. Here are the highlights.

Arts: There is a strong musical tradition with summer feisean for children, and an internationally acclaimed traditional music summer school, Ceolas, www.ceolas.co.uk. Piping is popular, and there are several traditional dancing clubs and dancing schools. The local college supports diploma and degree-level courses in art, archaeology and music. The local art association also has a gallery in North Uist, and is very active, planning events and classes.

Economy: The local economy depends on a mixture of traditional lifestyles combined with service industry jobs. Large local employers include the NHS, the local council CnES and Qinetiq, who run a military research and training range. Fish farming is a source of employment for many. Traditional jobs include crofting and fishing. Tourism is also important to the economy in the summer. There are several excellent hotels and restaurants.

History and archaeology: The Uists and Benbecula are covered in archaeological sites dating back to a thriving neolithic community. There are beaker sites, bronze-age hoards, roundhouses, brochs, cairns and viking settlements, medieval longhouses and ancient churches. There has been increasing local interest in developing access and interpretation to local sites. The University of the Highlands and Islands run an archaeology degree course.

Recreation: There are many opportunities for out-door recreation, excellent fishing, windsurfing, sport diving, horse riding, climbing, cycling, walking and running. Organised sports are not so common. The most popular is football, with six local teams. There is an athletics club, and a coastal rowing society. The local secondary school has a sports hub with a swimming pool and a fitness suite. There are three golf courses as well.

Environment: The islands provide unique wildlife on the background of amazing scenery. Despite the northern latitude the weather is heavily influenced by the warming North Atlantic Drift. The islands are an ornithologist's dream with many waders and raptors, including golden eagles, sea eagles, hen harriers. Corncrake and corn buntings breed here, there are large flocks of greylag geese, and ravens are a frequent sight. The sandy grassland behind the dunes, known as machair, is packed with wild flowers and bumble bees. The rocky hills along the east coast provide spectacular views of the islands, and of Skye to the east. There is an active natural history society.

Shopping: There is no high street shopping; if this is your thing, then trips to the mainland will be particularly exciting. Just about anything can be bought online, and the local shops provide a good range of groceries etcetera.

Education: There are several local primary schools and a secondary school. There is also a local college that is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Class sizes are small, and offer Gaelic medium as well as English-based education.

MIST & SUNSET, BALIVANICH



NORTH UIST

- North Uist has a population of around 1,300 people, with one main island and three smaller islands all connected by causeway. It is the northernmost island in the group. The main towns are Lochmaddy, Carinish, Sollas and Bayhead.
- There is a primary school based in Bayhead, as well as a nursery in the same general area.
- There is a Scottish Co-op in Sollas, and local shops in Bayhead and Lochmaddy.
- Taigh Kersavagh is a large third sector arts organisation based in Lochmaddy, with galleries displaying art and local history.
- The Claddach Kirkibost Centre hosts community regeneration, arts and employment initiatives
- There is a council-run care home called Trianaid, in Carinish.

BENBECULA

- Benbecula has a population of around 1,300 people and lies between the islands of North and South Uist, connected by causeways. The main township is called Balivanich, on the northwest of the island. The council offices, airport, main bank, post office and the headquarters of the military rocket range are all based there.
- Further south on Benbecula, at Lionacleit, is the secondary school, which also includes a public swimming pool, library, sports facilities, fitness centre, and a small museum. The Lionacleit campus of Lews Castle College and University of the Highlands and Islands is based next door, as is the local office of Highlands and Islands Enterprise.
- There are three supermarkets in Benbecula; two local shops in Balivanich, and the Scottish Co-op in Creagorry, at the south of the island.
- Tagsa Uibhist is a local third sector organization based in Benbecula that provides support services to many groups of patients, including a befriending service, community dementia support, transport for the disabled, respite care, a sitting service, personal care, as well as facilitating self-directed care packages.

HOWMORE BEACH, SOUTH UIST



SOUTH UIST

- South Uist is connected to Benbecula and Eriskay by causeways. It is a long island with mountains in the east and sandy beaches and machair land to the west, with lochs and rivers in between. There is a population of around 1,750 people, scattered along the island in at least thirty crofting townships.
- The north end has a supermarket, post-office and a primary school.
- The south end also has a supermarket as well as a primary school, two post offices, South Uist Medical Practice, and a branch surgery run from Benbecula Medical Practice.
- Eriskay has recently been connected to South Uist by causeway. It has its own shop and community hall.
- There is a care home in Daliburgh with a dementia care unit run by the local authority.
- Cothrom, a local third sector organization, is based in the middle district of South Uist. It provides opportunities for people who would otherwise struggle to find employment and supports people into work.
- Cnoc Soilleir is a new purpose-built performing arts and heritage centre in Daliburgh.

BARRA

- Barra has a population of around 1,200 people. It is connected by causeway to the smaller island of Vatersay.
- Barra has a lively and independent population. Many local groups use island-related puns, creating events like the Barrathon, and headlines about Barradise.
- There is a Scottish co-op as well as several small independent shops on Barra.
- Barratlantic, a fish factory on the North of the island, provides employment locally.
- Barra's airport uses the beach as an airstrip. There are regular flights to Glasgow, and the flight is a tourist attraction for many. Travel to South Uist and onwards is by ferry.
- Cobhair Bharraigh is a local charity that provides day-care, home support for carers and a holiday respite service.
- St Brendan's is a combined social care and medical care establishment.
- Gaelic is widely spoken, and traditional music is popular, with accordion, fiddle and bagpipes.

LOCH SKIPPORT, SOUTH UIST



TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATION

Getting to the islands is either by air or sea.

- **Ferry:** There are regular ferry sailings between North Uist and Uig on Skye, and between South Uist and Mallaig. There are also regular inter-island ferries between Barra and Eriskay; and Leverburgh (Harris) and Berneray (North Uist). It is quite a long drive to the ferry terminals from Edinburgh and Glasgow. Services are provided by Caledonian MacBrayne.
- **Flights:** There are daily flights from Glasgow to Benbecula and Barra, and inter-island flights between Benbecula and Stornoway. Loganair operate services from Glasgow to Benbecula and Barra. Hebridean Air Services provide services from Benbecula to Stornoway.
- **Roads & driving:** The roads are a mixture of single and double-track. Most of the islands are connected by causeway. A car and driving licence are essential for work as a General Practitioner.
- **Telecoms:** Mobile phone coverage in the islands is improving, with a roll-out of 4G EE coverage almost complete. At present Vodafone and EE provide the best signal. BT broadband has improved connectivity in the last two years.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- **Further information at :** www.benbeculamedicalpractice.co.uk
- Applicants with a potential interest in the Benbecula post are encouraged to make contact for further discussion by phone, email, or arrange a visit to the practice.
- **Contact:**
 - Mrs Michelle Taylor, Family Health Services Manager
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