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The **Bank of Scotland Rural Quality of Life Survey** tracks where living standards are highest in Great Britain by ranking local performance across key indicators covering: the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education, health, and personal well-being. The survey is based on data at local authority district (LAD) level and examines all 121 rural local authorities. Data has also been gathered from a number of sources, including: Bank of Scotland, Point Topic (Broadband data), ONS, DEFRA, the Met Office, the Department for Transport, Department of Children, Schools and Families, the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the Welsh Assembly, and the Scottish Executive.

ORKNEY RETAINS THE TITLE FOR BEST RURAL QUALITY OF LIFE

The Orkney Islands has the best quality of life of any rural area in Scotland for the third year running, according to the latest Bank of Scotland Rural Quality of Life Survey. Orkney knocked Aberdeenshire off top spot in 2014 and has remained there ever since.

The Shetland Isles have also retained their title of second best place for quality of rural life, but took that position back in 2012 - dropping from first place in 2011 - and haven't quite managed to climb back up again.

Both areas regularly feature positively as places to live in Scotland due to their low burglary rates, small class room numbers and stunning scenery of course.

Movement in the top five

Over the last three years, the Western Isles have been steadily moving up the rural quality of life index. In 2014 it sat in sixth place and moved to fifth place the following year. It's now jumped two places to third, which knocks Aberdeenshire and the Scottish Borders down a place in rankings.

Part of this improvement is due to the area having the lowest traffic flows per square kilometer, just 69 cars which is way below the Scottish average of 3,236 cars per square kilometer.

Nicola Noble, Mortgages Director, Bank of Scotland, said, "The Orkney Isles have once more scored very well in our Rural Quality of Life Survey, especially the highest employment rate and lowest number of burglaries.

"Much of the appeal of the top three places to live is the quiet pace of life and stunning scenery - albeit with a bit more rain than the British average. In terms of personal well-being and general good health, Orkney residents score among the highest in Scotland. The area also performs strongly in terms of average weekly earnings and a high employment rate, long life expectancy and happiness."

Key facts

Labour Market

- **Employment** is highest in the Orkneys Isles (86.3%) and Aberdeen (84.7%). The Scottish average is 73.8%.
- **The highest weekly average earnings** are in Aberdeenshire at £705 per week, followed by the Shetland Isles (£631p/w) and Perth & Kinross (£605 p/w). The Scottish average is £608 per week.

- **The proportion of adults (16 years and over) with the highest level of qualification gained** (such as a degree, NVQ level 4 and above or professional qualification) is highest in Perth & Kinross (40.1%), followed by Argyll & Bute (37.7%) and Aberdeenshire (37.1%) – all significantly above the Scottish average of 35.1%.

Housing

- **The biggest homes** are in the Western Isles which has an average of 4.9 habitable rooms. The smallest homes are in the Orkney Islands, East Lothian, Highlands and Argyll and Bute (all with no more than 4.6 habitable rooms). The average number of habitable rooms in Scotland is 4.6.
- 100% of homes in East Ayrshire have **central heating**; the Scottish average is 95%.
- Only one Scottish LAD in the survey, East Ayrshire (3.9), had an **average house price to earnings ratio** which is below the national historical long-term average of 4.0. The only other area in Britain is Copeland (3.7). The highest ratios are East Lothian (6.4), Aberdeenshire (6.4) and the Orkney Isles (6.0). The current Scottish average is 5.0.
- **The area with the highest percentage of households with access to superfast broadband**, i.e. where download speed is greater than 2 megabits per second (Mbps) is East Ayrshire (77%), followed by Perth & Kinross (75%) and Moray (74%). All are above the Scottish average of 70%.

Urban Environment

- The Western Isles and Highlands share the top spot for lowest **population density**, with just nine people per square kilometre, compared to a Scottish average of 481. At the other end of the scale, the most populated rural areas per square kilometre are East Lothian (150) and East Ayrshire (97).
- The lowest **traffic levels** are found in the Western Isles with just 69 vehicles per square kilometre, Highland (102 vehicles/km), and Argyll & Bute (130 vehicles/km). The Scottish average is 3,236 vehicles/km.
- Orkney Islands has **the lowest burglary rate per 10,000 people (5.1)** followed by the Western Isles (7.0) and the Shetland Isles (10.8). The national average is 31.9 per/10,000.
- **The lowest CO₂ emissions** are in East Lothian and East Ayrshire (2.2), Moray (2.4) and Dumfries & Galloway (2.5). The Scottish average is 2.4 tonnes of CO₂ per household.

Physical Environment

- **The lowest average annual rainfall** (824 mm) is in East Lothian, while Argyll & Bute has the highest amount of annual rainfall (2,165 mm). The Scottish average annual rainfall is 1,311 mm.
- **The sunniest place in Scotland** is the Highlands where residents enjoy an average of 21.4 hours of sunshine a week. The Scottish average is 25.1 hours.

Health

- **The healthiest district** is Aberdeenshire with 96.8% of households rating themselves in good or fairly good health, followed by Orkney (96.6) and the Shetland Isles (96.5%). In Scotland 94.7% of households rate themselves as in good or fairly good health.
- **Life expectancy for males at birth** is highest in Perth & Kinross (79.5 years). The Scottish average is 77.5 years.

- **Life expectancy for females at birth** is highest in also Perth & Kinross (83 years). The Scottish average is 81.4 years.

Education

- **Out of Britain as a whole, primary school class sizes** are smallest in Scotland, with nine of the 10 local authority districts with the smallest primary school classes here. The Western Isles has the lowest in GB with 17.4 compared to a national average of 26.8.
- **Nine of the ten local authority districts with the lowest secondary school pupil teacher ratio areas are in Scotland.** The Shetland Islands has the lowest secondary school pupil teacher ratio of 8.6 compared to 15.5 across GB.
- **The best GCSE results** in Scotland are in the Shetland Isles (94.3%). The Scottish average is 83%, well above the GB average of 68.3%.
- **The highest average school (both secondary and primary) spend per pupil** is in the Shetlands (£10,821) – more than twice GB average of £4,559 - followed by the Western Isles (£9,277) and the Orkney Isles (£9,005). The Scottish average is £5,834.

Personal Well-Being

- **Personal well-being is based on four categories – life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety:**
 - Adults (16 and over) in the Western Isles have the highest average rating for **life satisfaction** in GB. Based on a score out of ten, the adults had an average rating of 8.4 compared with the national average of 7.7.
 - With a rating of 8.5 (out of ten) adults in the Western Isles believe what they do in life is **worthwhile**. The Scottish average is 7.9.
 - The **happiest** adults are in the Western Isles, having an average rating of 8.2 – significantly higher than the Scottish average of 7.5.
 - Adults in the Western Isles are also the least **anxious** in Britain, with an average rating of just 2.07. The average for GB is 2.8.

Table 1: 2016 Bank of Scotland Rural Quality of Life Rankings – the top 5 areas in Scotland based on annual data

Local Authority	Ranking 2016
Orkney Islands	1
Shetland Islands	2
Western Isles	3
Aberdeenshire	4
Scottish Borders	5

Source: Bank of Scotland

Table 2.../

Table 2: Rural with the Best Quality of Life in each region in 2016 (Great Britain)

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2016
South Oxfordshire	South East	1
Rutland	East Midlands	3
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	5
West Dorset	South West	17
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	18
Wychavon	West Midlands	24
Monmouthshire	Wales	35
Orkney Islands	Scotland	46
Ribble Valley	North West	49
Northumberland	North East	91

Source: Bank of Scotland

Table 3: Rural areas with the Best Quality of Life in each category in 2016 (Scotland)

Group	Variable	Local Authority District
Labour Scotland average: 73.8% GB average: 74.3%	Highest employment rate: 86.3%	Orkney Islands
Scotland: £608 per week GB: £633 per week	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £705	Aberdeenshire
Scotland: 35.1% GB: 35.6%	% of adults (16+) with highest qualification gained: 40.1%. This includes graduate and post graduate degrees, NVQ level 4 and above, and professional qualifications.	Perth & Kinross
Housing Scotland: 4.6 GB: 5.4	Highest average number of rooms in house: 4.9	Western Isles
Scotland: 95% GB: 97.2%	Largest % of houses with central heating: 100%	East Ayrshire
Scotland: 5.0 GB: 6.9	Lowest House price to earnings ratio: 3.9	East Ayrshire
Scotland: 70% GB: 86%	% of households with more than 2Mbps – and where more than half of household have chance of having superfast broadband: 77%	East Ayrshire
Urban environment Scotland: 481 per sq/km GB: 274 per sq/km	Lowest Population density per sq km: 9	Western Isles Highland
Scotland: 3,236 cars/km GB: 9,459 cars/km	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 69cars /km	Western Isles
Scotland: 31.9 per 10,000 people GB: 29.7 per 10,000 people	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 5.1 per 10,000 people	Orkney Isles

Scotland: 2.4 tonnes CO2 emissions per household GB: 2.1 tonnes CO2 emissions per household	Lowest Total Consumer CO₂ Emissions: 2.2 tonnes per household	East Lothian East Ayrshire
Physical environment Scotland: 1,311 mm per year GB: 1,311 mm per year	Lowest average annual rainfall: 824mm	East Lothian
Scotland: 25.1 hours per week GB: 29.8 hours per week	Highest average weekly sunshine hours: 21.4 hours	Highland
Health Scotland: 94.7% GB: 94.6%	Highest % of residents in good health: 96.8%	Aberdeenshire
Male life expectancy Scotland: 77.5 years GB: 79.5 years	Longest Male life expectancy at birth for males: 79.5 years	Perth & Kinross
Female life expectancy Scotland: 81.4 years GB: 83.2 years	Longest Female life expectancy at birth for males: 79.7 years	East Ayrshire
Education Scotland: 22.7 pupils per class GB: 26.8 pupils per class	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 17.4	Western Isles
Secondary Education Scotland: 11.8 pupils to teacher GB: 15.5 pupils to teacher	Lowest secondary school pupil – teacher ratio: 8.6	Shetland Islands
Secondary Education Exams Scotland: 83.0% GB: 68.3%	Highest % of S4 pupils with 5 awards at SCQF 4 or better: 94.3	Shetland Islands
Per pupil spending (primary and secondary) Scotland: £5,834 per pupil GB: £4,559 per pupil	Highest per pupil spend: £10,821	Shetland Islands
Personal Well Being Scotland: 7.7 from 10 GB: 7.7 from 10	Highest Life Satisfaction rating out of 10: 8.4	Western Isles
Scotland: 7.9 from 10 GB: 7.9 from 10	Highest Worthwhile rating out of 10: 8.5	Western Isles
Scotland: 7.5 from 10 GB: 7.5 from 10	Highest Happiness rating out of 10: 8.2	Western Isles
Scotland: 2.8 from 10 GB: 2.8 from 10	Lowest levels of Anxiety rating out of 10: 2.1	Western Isles

Ends

Notes to editors:

The Quality of Life index aims to quantify where living standards are highest in Great Britain by ranking local performance across a range of indicators covering the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education, health and personal well-being. The index has been produced at a local authority district level for all 121 Local Authority Districts in Great Britain.

The quality of life reading for each local authority has been created by summing scores across 24 variables within 7 broad groups.

Each local authority district is given a score out of 10 for each variable contained in the index. Scores within each of the broad groups are averaged and then the seven group scores are summed to create an overall quality of life score.

This analysis was undertaken using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Urban Rural classification. This classification defines an area as a Rural Area if it lies in a town or village of less than 10,000, or as an urban area if it lies in a town or city of 10,000 or more residents. A rural local authority district is one where the majority of these residents live in rural areas.

Group	Variable	Period covered
Labour	Employment rate %	Jul 2014-Jun 2015
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2015 (up rated by average weekly earnings index to September 2015)
	% of adults(16+) with highest qualification gained	2011 Census data
Housing	Number of rooms in house	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – Housing Conditions Survey 2009/11
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – housing Conditions Survey 2009/11
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to November 2015
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	Point Topic June 2014
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2014 – ONS
	Traffic flows per square km	2014
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	British Crime Survey 2014/15;
	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per capita	2013 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2012)
Physical environment	Average annual rainfall mm	Met Office Average 2009/2013
	Annual sunshine hours	Met Office Average 2009/2013
Health	% in good or fairly good health	2011 Census
	Life expectancy at birth for males	England, Wales & Scotland 2013/14
	Life expectancy at birth for females	England, Wales & Scotland 2013/14
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	England and Wales 2015, Scotland 2014
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2013/2014 England; 2013/14 Wales; Scotland 2013
	Average state school (primary and secondary) spending per pupil	England 2014/15, Scotland 2013 and Wales 2015/16
	Secondary school pupil teacher ratio	England 2015 (adjusted class size data), Wales 2014 and Scotland 2014
Personal Well-Being	Life Satisfaction	April 2014-March 2015 ONS
	Worthwhile	April 2014-March 2015 ONS
	Happiness	April 2014-March 2015 ONS
	Anxiety	April 2014-March 2015 ONS

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