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Ross and Cromarty Enterprise continued to **invest** in the area's future in 2003-04, launching **innovative** skills and community projects, while supporting new **opportunities** in the fast-growing **renewable** energy sector.

In contrast to national trends, the 2001 census results confirmed that population numbers increased in Ross and Cromarty, particularly in some west coast communities. East Ross, the Black Isle and towns along the Cromarty Firth also experienced growth as people working in Inverness moved north to enjoy a more rural lifestyle.

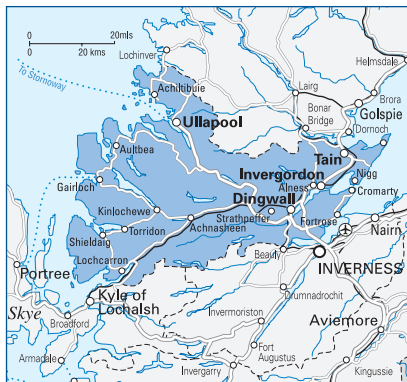
Confirmation of the area's popularity as a place to live was encouraging, and the local enterprise company continued its commitment to infrastructure improvement, evidenced by the regeneration of Invergordon High Street.

The appointment of four project officers to work in the EU-funded Community Economic Development (CED) programme, as part of Ross and Cromarty Enterprise's (RACE's) commitment to community development, was also highly rewarding. More than 80 projects were progressed to develop some of the area's more fragile locations, ranging from upgrading public access routes to enhancing leisure and public amenity facilities.

The traditional engineering and fabrication sector showed some signs of recovery in 2003-04 and the area's natural assets and infrastructure make it well placed to bid for further work in the renewable energy technologies of wind and wave power.

Improving the local skills base continued to be a key priority for RACE, which worked with Ross County Football Club on a project using sport as a means of encouraging young people to take part in learning. This innovative project was designed to assist young people throughout the Highlands and Islands and attracted international attention.





Sunrise in Glen Torridon, West Ross.



Area profile

Stretching from coast to coast across the Highland mainland, Ross and Cromarty is an area of geographical and economic contrasts, from the mountainous terrain of Wester Ross to the flat lands of Easter Ross. It covers almost 500,000 hectares and has a population of over 50,000.

The majority of the population live around the northern shores of the Cromarty Firth, where the main towns are Dingwall, Alness, Invergordon and Tain. Many of the challenges which the area will have to face in the coming years are common across all its communities, however.

2003-04 targets and out-turns

	Target	Out-turn	%
Strengthening communities			
Enhanced community facilities	25	31	124
Percentage of community investment in priority areas	25	32	-
Jobs supported in the social economy	10	4	40
Projects enhancing environmental quality	15	14	93
Cultural and arts projects supported	20	16	80
Developing skills			
Modern Apprenticeships (MA) starts	130	202	155
Mainstream Skillseeker starts	100	76	76
Modern Apprenticeships completed	60	142	237
Get Ready for Work (GRfW) starts	45	85	189
Get Ready for Work outcomes	18	18	100
Training for Work (TfW) starts	120	167	139
Positive outcomes*	102	143	140
Businesses engaged in workforce development activities	55	68	124
Businesses engaged in management and leadership development	35	36	103
Growing businesses			
New business starts	60	68	113
Percentage of new business starts achieving a 3-year survival rate	70	94	-
Farm businesses supported to improve economic sustainability	5	7	140
Organisations supported to apply business improvement tools	95	73	77
Businesses supported to achieve business benefits through environmental initiatives	5	0	0
Organisations supported to make progress up the e-adoption ladder**	30	26	87
Businesses/research institutes supported to engage in research/innovation activity	15	3	20
New products/processes developed	5	5	100
Businesses supported to achieve productivity improvements	5	26	520
Making global connections			
Businesses supported to progress on the international trade ladder	15	6	40
Percentage of business investment in priority areas	10	42	-
Jobs supported	230	370.5	161
Quality Index ***	107	123	115

* Positive outcomes: Jobs and other outcomes reflect the numbers leaving training and entering a job, self-employment or further education.
 ** E-adoption ladder: Measures how Highlands and Islands firms are engaging in e-business activities.
 *** Quality Index: This expresses wages in assisted projects relative to average wages in the local area. A value over 100 indicates higher than average wages.

2003-04 highlights

- In partnership with The Highland Council, RACE began a £550,000 environmental renewal project to improve the central area of Invergordon High Street.
- 80 projects developed in four EU-funded Community Economic Development (CED) partnership areas.
- Two major community assets supported: Highland Football Academy Trust and the restoration of the Strathpeffer Pavillion.
- Life Skills Through Sport project established.
- More than 50 business cases approved, leveraging in excess of £8.3 million of private sector investment.
- 26 organisations helped to progress with e-business.
- Third office development completed at Alness Point Business Park.

The east coast area is a mixture of rich agricultural land and industrial development – much of which has been oil-related since the 1970s. There is also a growing hi-tech sector which extends from carbon fibre manufacture to e-business and tele-business centres. The deep harbour provided by the Cromarty Firth and the port facilities at Invergordon are major assets, not only in industrial terms, but also as an increasingly popular port of call for international cruise liners. Tourism remains one of the most important industries on both coasts.

The west coast of Ross and Cromarty stretches from Ullapool in the north to Lochcarron in the south. This mountainous area contains a number of vibrant communities and the 2001 census results show an increase in population in some areas. In addition to tourism, key industries include crofting, forestry, fishing, aquaculture, and the food and drink sector.



1. Gillies Fine Foods

Su Gillies started Gillies Fine Foods in 1999, manufacturing a range of quality Scottish produce from home, then at premises in Strathpeffer.

By 2004, and with Su's husband Ruari also on board, the business needed a new location which would enable further growth. A move to purpose-built manufacturing premises with a retail outlet in Dingwall Business Park was assisted by RACE and the Scottish Executive.

The new building was opened in March 2004 by leading food writer Sue Lawrence.

2. Renewable energy fabrication

One of the largest engineering companies in the Cromarty Firth, Isleburn Mackay and Macleod, won a share of a major contract for fabrication work relating to a large offshore wind farm. At its peak, work on this contract employed 340 staff in five different yards.

Significant investment in plant, with HIE network support, helped win the contract and put the company in a stronger position to bid for more work in a sector with excellent growth prospects.

3. Community economic development

Four areas of Ross and Cromarty qualify for the Community Economic Development programme. Projects approved included 1.8 kilometres of new and upgraded public access routes on Flowerdale estate at Gairloch. The works developed paths and created view points, benches and interpretative material for locals and visitors.

On the Black Isle, Cromarty harbour will be deepened and mooring pontoons installed with CED assistance to attract leisure and commercial craft.

4. Fashioning new careers

A tailoring training programme, designed to increase employability in remote areas, took place in Ullapool between September 2003 and January 2004. To facilitate the programme, RACE bought six industry-standard sewing machines and designed two courses in conjunction with Cardonald College, Glasgow.

Participants took part in two-week courses, certificated by Cardonald College, and were then able to use the sewing machines at home.



2004-05 targets

	Target
Strengthening communities	
Enhanced community facilities	30
Percentage of community investment in priority areas	25
Community Economic Development (CED) projects supported	30
Projects enhancing environmental quality	25
Cultural and arts projects supported	20
Developing skills	
Skillseeker starts	80
Modern Apprenticeships (MA) starts	180
Get Ready for Work (GRfW) starts	65
Percentage of Modern Apprenticeship leavers completing	55
Percentage of Get Ready for Work leavers progressing to Skillseekers, education or employment	40
Unemployed adults starting Training for Work (TfW)	100
Percentage of adult leavers achieving employment	30
Businesses engaged in workforce development activities	65
Businesses engaged in management and leadership development	37
Growing businesses	
New business starts	65
Percentage of new business starts achieving a 3-year survival rate	70
Organisations supported to apply business improvement tools	90
Businesses supported to achieve business benefits through environmental initiatives	20
Organisations supported to make progress up the e-adoption ladder*	20
Organisations supported to progress to stages 4/5 of the e-adoption ladder	3
Research/innovation projects supported	7
New products/processes developed	5
Businesses supported to achieve productivity improvements	10
Making global connections	
Businesses supported to progress on the international business development ladder	11
Percentage of business investment in priority areas	10
Jobs supported	220
Quality Index **	108

* E-adoption ladder: Measures how Highlands and Islands firms are engaging in e-business activities.

** Quality Index: This expresses wages in assisted projects relative to average wages in the local area. A value over 100 indicates higher than average wages.

Life skills through sport

A project designed to strengthen links between sport and education, Life Skills Through Sport, was launched in December 2003 as a partnership between RACE and Ross County Football Club.

Life Skills Through Sport is an innovative project designed principally to engage young people in learning, using football to attract their interest. A series of youth and community initiatives encompasses both football excellence and education.

The project was designed to build on current activities undertaken by the club and reflected the success of similar initiatives at other clubs, including Ipswich Town, Norwich and Glasgow Rangers.

RACE's funding was targeted at new activities which send a clear message about the importance of learning, skills and qualifications to young people in the Highlands and Islands, including the 12,000 young people currently reached by Ross County's existing programmes each year.

The early months of the project focused on establishing the staffing infrastructure, and running initiatives such as 'Families and Football' and 'Stadium Learning' to develop numeracy and literacy skills for people disengaged from education.

2004-05 key priorities

Consolidate Life Skills Through Sport by enabling young people to build on the learning experience and make progress towards achieving their full potential.

Continue to support PICT as an ICT research and commercialisation centre, based in the RACE area.

Increase the numbers of businesses engaged in management training.

Increase the number of quality job opportunities including graduate level jobs.

Encourage local businesses to engage in the renewables and decommissioning sectors.

Develop the Community Economic Development programme to ensure wide coverage in the area.

Engage fully in the Ross and Cromarty Community Planning Partnership.

Ross and Cromarty Enterprise

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