

ROLE DESCRIPTION FOR A RESEARCH DIRECTOR: RURAL ENGLAND COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY (CIC)

Rural England CIC is an independent and not-for-profit research body, which was set up six years ago. It seeks to:

- Produce research that improves the rural evidence base;
- Build networks among those with an interest in rural evidence;
- Support the exchange of rural evidence held by other organisations; and
- Ensure rural research engenders policy debate and informs policy making.

Our ambition is that rural evidence should improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of rural areas in England.

Outline of the role

Rural England CIC is seeking to appoint a Research Director, who would commence work in that role around April 2022. This note provides a description of the role and (at pages 5-6) a description of the organisation (Rural England CIC).

There will be two primary aspects to the Research Director role:

- Leading research projects which Rural England CIC carries out in-house; and
- Overseeing research projects which Rural England CIC commissions from its associates.

The Research Director will also help to seek and develop new research opportunities.

Rural England CIC is looking for someone who has both relevant research skills and the ability to feed that research into the policy environment. This will be underpinned by an interest in rural policy issues and an aspiration to contribute positively to the wellbeing of rural communities.

Main work areas

Every year Rural England CIC carries out at least one research project in-house. Every third year that is its flagship State of Rural Services (SORS) report. During intervening years, the project is likely to be on a policy topic related to findings from the previous SORS report. For these projects the Research Director will be expected to carry out most of the core tasks, including project design, project management, research/analysis and report writing, as well as playing a key part in their launch and dissemination.

In any year there will also be at least one and probably two projects which Rural England CIC will commission from an associate or partner organisation. The topics and scope for these projects are generally negotiated with our funders. For these, the Research Director will be

expected to develop an outline project specification, assist our Company Secretary with commissioning and oversee progress with project delivery by associate(s), to ensure that the output is an agreed report which can be disseminated as appropriate.

From time to time, Rural England CIC is also asked by an external commissioning body whether it could carry out research for them. Depending on capacity and availability, such projects could either be carried out in-house or commissioned from associates. Part of the role will be to maintain and expand the associate base. The Research Director should help to promote and look out for appropriate commissioning opportunities, which have the potential to expand the profile and reputation of Rural England CIC.

The appointed person will be expected to attend Rural England CIC Director meetings, which generally take place online and about five times per year. They will also be expected to attend Rural England Stakeholder Group meetings, which generally take place online and about three times per year. Should travel be involved for meetings or events, reasonable costs can be reclaimed.

Contractual matters

This is a part-time post which requires some flexibility, as there will inevitably be peaks and troughs in the workload. A basic sum of up to £20,000 per year can be guaranteed to the Research Director, to be paid at a day rate and to cover a minimum number of working days which is to be negotiated. This sum would cover delivery of all main aspects of the role, including direct research and general management.

However, as indicated above, there is scope to develop and expand the role by finding additional, externally commissioned projects. The Research Director could thus earn further income either by carrying out such projects themselves, at their day rate, or by having associates carry them out and taking a management fee.

The person in the role will be contracted by Rural England CIC as a freelance consultant, with an agreed baseline work programme for the coming year. Arrangements must be IR35 compliant to meet HMRC requirements. This work programme could be expanded within year – subject to agreement by both parties – if additional funded research opportunities arise.

The role will initially be contracted for a period lasting one year and it will be extended, thereafter, assuming both parties agree. There will also be a six-month review during this first year, when Rural England CIC reserves the right to give notice. The contract will need to stipulate a reasonable notice period that would apply to both sides.

The Research Director will report to the CIC Directors and, in particular, to the Chair of Directors. They will need to be a self-sufficient individual who can progress projects, whilst

recognising when decisions need to involve others and where consulting interested parties is appropriate.

Skills and experience

The person we are looking for must be able to demonstrate the following skills and/or experience:

- Quantitative and qualitative research methods and their application to socio-economic issues or policy topics.
- Research project management, within resources and budget, to deliver objectives and meet dissemination plans.
- Research report writing and presenting the findings, in ways suited to key audiences and those with a policy interest.
- Broad knowledge of the sorts of issues, trends and policy concerns that are impacting upon rural communities and rural economies.
- Broad knowledge of the public policy environment which forms the backdrop to the work of Rural England CIC, such as government structures, policy documents and policy making processes.

Whilst we would expect the Research Director to produce objective research findings, to maintain the CIC's credibility, we would also expect them to take a genuine interest in the wellbeing of rural communities, since that is ultimately what our research seeks to contribute towards. To that end, the CIC's reports should draw conclusions, based on the research, that will be of relevance to policy makers.

The following would be useful additional skills and/or experience to demonstrate:

- Some experience of working within a political environment, for example with Parliamentarians and Local Authority Councillors.
- Some experience of advocacy work, seeking to influence and inform public policy agendas.

Responding to this opportunity

Expressions of interest for the Research Director role should be sent to Bethan Aldridge (at bethan.aldridge@sparse.gov.uk) no later than Wednesday 1st December 2021. They should include a CV tailored to this opportunity and copies of or links to three examples of previous

research reports or output. We hope to be able to shortlist and interview a few candidates from the expressions of interest that we receive.

Prior to that date, any questions about the role can be sent to Bethan Aldridge.

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The context for this is an understanding that rural considerations are likely to be poorly addressed or overlooked altogether by national and local policy makers unless there is relevant evidence made available and accessible to them. In a predominantly urban country, such as England, policies have often been designed in ways which do not reflect rural circumstances and needs.

There are three key groups around which Rural England CIC has been formed:

Directors: the company (CIC) has a team of six Directors who are responsible for its forward or business planning, its financial management and its operation. They are the decision-making group for the company. Directors are assisted by the Company Secretary who manages its budget and oversees the production of its accounts. A part-time (average one day per week) Administrator works with the Directors to organise meetings, events and the like. Some further occasional support (for example, with the website) is received from the Rural Services Network. Directors carry out their role on a voluntary (unpaid) basis.

Stakeholder Group: representatives from around thirty organisations with an interest in rural affairs form this grouping. They provide advice to the Directors about the CIC's work programme. They often contribute to its research projects, for example by inputting their own evidence, by commenting on draft reports and by helping disseminate those reports. At their meetings members of this group keep each other informed of rural research they are carrying out. A Defra representative attends the group's meetings.

Supporters: these are financial supporters who provide Rural England CIC with most of its income (though some derives from profit from research commissions). Their support pays for our operating costs and core research costs. All supporters are private sector businesses which agree to contribute on a corporate social responsibility basis, recognising they have rural customers or rural interests. The largest group are utility companies (gas, electricity and water). The two specifically funding our core costs are Calor Gas and First Group Buses.

As noted in the role description, Rural England CIC has built relationships with some other academic and consultancy researchers with a rural interest, who can be (sub) commissioned as associates to carry out research on our behalf. There is roughly £10,000 available per year to spend on associate research, though this can increase if Rural England CIC is asked to carry out additional funded projects by external research commissioners. The associates give Rural England CIC both additional capacity, to manage peaks and troughs, and additional research skills e.g. an economist.

Our research projects to-date include:

- State of Rural Services 2016 and 2018 reports – which tracked trends in service provision in rural areas.
- Issues Facing Providers of Social Care at Home to Older Residents in Rural England.
- Unlocking the Digital Potential of Rural Areas across the UK.
- Housing and Employment: A Survey of Rural Residents' Experiences and Opinions.
- Challenges Facing 16-18 Year Olds in Accessing Appropriate Education and Work Based Learning.
- Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit – a guide to help the health and care sector.
- Rural Touring Arts Schemes: What they deliver and what they achieve.
- Opportunities and Challenges for Rural Areas from Net Zero Carbon Legislation.
- State of Rural Services 2021 – underway, looking at the impacts of the pandemic.
- Rural Vulnerabilities Project – underway, exploring implications for the utility sector's Priority Services Register.

Rural England CIC has hosted an annual Rural Vulnerability Day, which has been used for a report launch and to enable stakeholders or others to give related presentations. The 2021 event was online. The event the two previous years was held on the Parliamentary estate. These events have always attracted some MPs, Lords or their researchers.

More information is available on our website: <https://ruralengland.org/>

Version: 23rd September 2021