

## **Brief note of UKRPPRG, HEI and Rural England CIC meeting**

**Held on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (am) at Warwick Business School suite, London**

**Present:** Brian Wilson (Chair of Rural England CIC Directors); Professor Janet Dwyer (CCRI, University of Gloucestershire and RE Director); Dr Jayne Glass (Scotland's Rural College); Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle); Professor Martin Phillips (University of Leicester); Professor Stephen Roper (WBS, University of Warwick); Dr Rebecca Wheeler (University of Exeter); Dr Steve Emery (University of Birmingham and RE Director); Graham Biggs (Company Secretary, Rural England CIC); David Inman (Rural England CIC Director); Jane Hart (Rural England CIC Director)

**Apologies:** Dr Gary Bosworth (University of Lincoln); Professor Michael Woods (University of Aberystwyth); Professor Jeremy Phillipson (University of Newcastle)

The Chair welcomed those present, who introduced themselves. Warwick Business School were thanked for making the venue available.

As context for the meeting, the role, ways of working and research activity by Rural England CIC were described. RE is a not-for-profit organisation which undertakes some research itself, seeks to encourage rural research and looks to disseminate research to policy makers or practitioners. To that end it is steered by a Stakeholders Group comprising a wide range of rural interest organisations and others, who have proved a real resource in terms of enabling and disseminating research. RE also runs an annual Rural Vulnerability Day in Parliament and those present will be invited to the 2020 day. RE's work is financially supported by mainly small sums offered by private sector businesses with a rural interest, such as utility companies. It was stressed that RE's focus is evidence and not lobbying (though some stakeholders may of course use research findings that way).

A UK Rural Policy and Practitioners Research Group (UK RPPRG) had been set up some years ago to encourage the sharing of information about rural policy developments and rural research across Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Whilst this had enabled some useful learning, the Group had struggled to identify resources which could underpin any project work. Each year UK RPPRG has met face to face and made some presentations of recent research to the Rural England Stakeholders Group. This time round a decision was taken to widen the meetings to involve other HEI academics with a rural interest.

It was commented that the overall picture, regarding the funding of research about rural communities and economies, seemed to be improving with Defra and the Welsh and Scottish Governments now somewhat more active.

The joint bid made by the Universities of Newcastle, Gloucestershire and Warwick to Research England to establish a National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE) was described. A formal decision by Research England was awaited. It was noted the initiative should create opportunities to engage with other interested universities (including from the UK beyond England).

Steve Emery described a proposed workshop at Birmingham University tapping into the Impact Accelerator Fund. This would bring together some researchers and practitioners. It aims to involve academics from a range of disciplines who may not previously have worked on rural issues, but whose expertise could be of rural interest. If the workshop stimulates fresh research ideas it would be possible to seek follow-on funding.

Other topics or points discussed included:

- The scope for producing a rural cut on data from existing business surveys (including those managed by Warwick Business School). Data tends to be at Local Enterprise Partnership or other local geographic levels, but without a rural cut. A Growth Dashboard and Innovation Benchmark were mentioned. Stephen Roper will provide a link to some of this analysis.
- Martin Phillips mentioned a programme of work at Leicester University on landscape and climate change, modelling how land managers and other users of land might adapt and comparing that with real-world decisions.
- Articulating need around specific research topics e.g. rural isolation and clarifying what has already been done.
- A need to identify data areas that might usefully be developed e.g. in the context of resilience in ageing communities.
- The desirability of forging stronger links between practitioners and academics - a role that RE might be well-placed to assist with. Those present from the HEI sector indicated a general interest in being able to present research to the RE Stakeholders Group.

A number of other examples of current research interest were mentioned and several participants said it would help to have a better understanding what other organisations are doing. Previous attempts to find funding for extensive collection and cataloguing of rural research had proved unsuccessful, but Graham Biggs suggested it may be possible for RE to create a page on its website where researchers could display a short paragraph about ongoing rural research and links to existing research reports.

There was also some interest in having a facility which made it easier to ask questions of or seek information from each other about rural research and evidence.

It was agreed that some questions about future networking would be circulated after the meeting to help firm up these ideas and check if there are others.

Note: JH and BW, 24/01/20