



## NOTES OF THE RURAL HEI SECTOR/UK RPPRG On-line via Zoom

Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024, 11am – 12:30pm

### Present:

Graham Biggs, (Chair of Directors, Rural England CIC)  
Professor Janet Dwyer OBE (CCRI & RE Director)  
Professor Martin Philips (University of Leicester & RE Director)  
Dr Jane Atterton, (SRUC)  
Professor Michael Woods (University of Aberystwyth)  
Dr Paul Caskie, Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (Belfast)  
Artemis Pana, (Scottish Rural Action)  
Brian Wilson, (RE Director)  
David Inman, (RE Director)  
Kate Clifford, (NI Rural Community Network)  
Kerry Booth, (Rural Services Network)  
Kevin Mole, (Warwick Business School)  
Polly Gibb OBE, (WiRE & RE Director)  
Dr Rebecca Wheeler, (University of Exeter)  
Dr Steve Emery, (University of Exeter & RE Director)  
Tom Jones, (European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA) & Arsyllfa Rural Observatory)  
Vanessa Halhead, (Scottish Rural Action)  
Professor Stephen Roper, (Warwick Business School)  
Bethan Aldridge, (Minute Taker, Rural England CIC)

### 1. Chair's Welcome & Introductions

Professor Janet Dwyer welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### 2. Apologies for Absence

Professor Ruth McAreavey (University of Newcastle)  
Dr Jayne Glass (Scotland's Rural College)  
Dr Daniel Keech (CCRI)  
Duncan Carter (Calor & RE Director)  
Aidan Cambell (NI Rural Community Network)  
Meilyr Ceredig (Arsyllfa Rural Observatory)  
Professor Gary Bosworth (University of Newcastle)  
Professor Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle)

### 3. Minutes of Previous Meeting 16.01.2020 ([See Link to Attachment 1](#))

Minutes of the previous meeting 16.01.2020 were accepted as a true record.

### 4. Background to and purpose of the meeting. Briefing Note on the UKRPPRG

([See Link to Attachment 2](#)) and **Item 6. General Discussion: Potential for UK-wide rural networking with the HEI sector** were discussed jointly.

All agreed that this type of meeting was really important and valuable. It was good to raise awareness of research taking place, the breadth of the research and the knowledge exchange.

It also highlighted the differences in the types of research being done as well across the home nations.

Kerry Booth added that she would be very happy to share the Group's research as she attends the DEFRA Rural Impact Forum monthly meetings plus the Rural Services Network is the Secretariat for the APPG on Rural Services so there is a route the Group could use to share their work with Parliamentarians who are interested in rural issues.

Kate Clifford asked if it would be useful to map the connections/spread and functionality of the Groups (policy/networking/research)

**Action:** Janet Dwyer to investigate this with Martin Philips and Steve Emery.

**In conclusion**, it was agreed to continue to reconvene the Group on a more regular basis and that Rural England CIC would provide the administrative support. The Rural England CIC Directors are due to meet soon and will discuss in more detail how to progress this and how to financially sustain it by looking further into areas of potential funding.

**Useful Links shared/discussed in this section:**

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/the-uk-fund>

[Oxford Real Farming Conference](#)

## 5. Update on the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise and a report on the latest SORE (State of Rural Enterprise) findings (verbal report by Professor Janet Dwyer OBE)

Janet Dwyer updated the Group on NICRE's recent research which is focused on England. NICRE itself has been funded by Research England and has been around for five years now. The latest State of the Rural Economy (SORE) survey took place last year and NICRE is continuing to publish its reports and findings based on this survey.

The skills and labour shortages report was published beginning of March (see link below). The farm business report will be available in the next few weeks.

Kevin Mole commented that the SORE 2 on Net Zero work showed slightly more interest from rural businesses – over 50% of rural businesses are on a net zero journey as compared to urban counterparts.

Professor Stephen Roper is very happy to share data sets and questionnaires. NICRE would like to do more follow up work on qualitative/case study work as many of the businesses gave permission for this.

**Useful Links shared/discussed in this section:**

<https://nicre.co.uk/publications/>

<https://nicre.co.uk/news/2024/february/skills-and-labour-shortages-hinder-rural-business-performance-and-growth/>

[RUSTIK website](#)

[EPIC Futures NI Local Policy Innovation Partnership](#)

<https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/rural-poverty-the-impact-of-rurality-on-consumers-access-to-food->

**6. Discussed at Item 4.**

**7. Next steps and close**

Already proposed by Graham Biggs in item 4

**8. Any Other Business**

Vanessa Halhead is a member of the European Rural Pact Institute. European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA) has been involved in the development of this group which brings together national experts from the 27 EU members and includes the UK (as the only non-European Union member to have a National Expert – which is Vanessa). Vanessa thinks the UK RPPRG meetings will be very useful for research/reports to feed into this Group.

**Useful Links shared/discussed in this section:**

[European Rural Pact Institute](#)

[European Rural Community Alliance \(ERCA\)](#)

Meeting closed at 12:30pm.