



The East of England Rural Forum & East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum

Conference Report on:

‘Regenerating Rural Communities by Focusing on Skills’

Wednesday 1st March 2006

at the East of England Showground, Peterborough



1. Executive summary

The conference addressed a wide range of issues in relation to rural skills development and how a positive attitude can support the regeneration of rural communities. From how new high tech rural businesses and employers can create demand for new skills, to how existing land based businesses can use skills to unlock new opportunities. The conference also sought to challenge accepted views about the rural economy which too often still see it as traditional, lacking dynamism and reluctant to change.

The issues raised at the conference are grouped into a five point agenda for change which the East of England and East Midlands Rural Forums will take forward in their respective regions and nationally. The five point agenda sets out challenges for the government, business, skills providers, funding agencies and rural communities, to collectively address the problems and opportunities facing rural communities. The five challenges are to:

- 1.1. **Make Funding More Flexible** - Government and funding bodies must make funding more flexible and responsive to rural needs. It is therefore important to:
 - i Challenge the current focus of funding on 16-19 formal qualification outcomes and longer courses, as this is not the only area of need in the rural economy;
 - ii Support funding methodologies which recognise the costs of delivering skills in areas of population sparsity;
 - iii Support longer term funding regimes and avoid initiative overload which businesses, communities and providers all find hard to deal with.
- 1.2. **Embrace New Opportunities** – there is perceived to be a significant problem in how the rural economy is defined and portrayed, with most stakeholders not fully appreciating the magnitude of change which has already occurred, or the many opportunities in the rural economy of the future. It is therefore important to:
 - i Develop better intelligence on the rural economy;
 - ii Identify future growth opportunities in the rural economy and to see rural areas as economically dynamic and not just as environmental playgrounds;
 - iii Ensure skills provision supports new opportunities with appropriate provision.
- 1.3. **Celebrate and Support all Learning** - funding bodies must recognise that for many potential learners in rural areas, long course and a formal qualification are not appropriate to their needs. It is therefore important to support:
 - i Flexibility in delivery which recognises the broad diversity and differing needs of different parts of the rural community;
 - ii Bite size courses which help to get new learners engaged in learning again;
 - iii Community based provision and volunteering which can often help those outside the official training system to gain new skills and subsequently progress to more formal learning situations;
 - iv Businesses and learners to embrace skills development which have longer term payback such as sustainability and community capacity;
- 1.4. **Increase Accessibility** – many rural communities still suffer with accessibility problems to the diversity and quality of educational opportunities expected in urban areas, and thus suffer a 'skills divide'. It is important to support:
 - i More remote access, but to recognise that broadband is not a panacea;
 - ii Improved integration of transport and educational to improve rural access and to recognise the costs this implies;
 - iii New rural provision in Further and Higher Education to support the development of aspirations, employment and communities;
 - iv Provision outside the formal 'state' system e.g. local training groups.
- 1.5. **Build Business Engagement** – many rural businesses are not engaged in workforce development or using new skills sources. It is therefore important to:

- i Help businesses to understand the benefits 'new' groups of workers can bring to their businesses e.g. migrants and older people;
- ii Support business mentors and case studies which demonstrate how a positive approach to skills development can drive business performance.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. With 160 registered delegates this conference was the first joint conference to be held between the East of England Rural Forum (EERF) and East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum (EMRAF).
- 2.2. The subject of rural skills was selected for the conference because the need for skills development and the barriers to individual, community and economic success which poor skills create, are constant themes of all consultations on the future of rural communities in both regions. In a rapidly changing World, with new economic pressures, increasing global competition and environmental imperatives the ability for rural communities to obtain appropriate skills will have a major impact on their ability to survive and prosper.

3. Conference Programme

The conference was split into a morning session which focused on a range of speakers with the afternoon dedicated to a series of round table discussions.

All speeches and/or slides used by the speakers are available to download at www.eerf.org.uk/learning and are therefore not included in full in this report.

Below are three key issues raised by each speaker and this is followed in section 4 by the outcomes of each table discussion.

The programme included:

- 3.1. **Chairman's Introduction – Richard Powell OBE**, Chairman of the East of England Rural Forum
- 3.2. **Keynote Address – Alison McLean**, Board Member Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) and member of East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum, key issues included:
 - i Under its new constitution the CRC has three key roles: rural advocate, independent rural advisor and rural watchdog. One key role has been to rural proof delivery in rural areas across all government departments including skills provision. The CRC will continue to work with public bodies and others to encourage the wider application of rural proofing concepts to ensure that the needs of rural communities are fully considered when new policies or programmes are implemented.
 - ii Moving forward CRC is working with Sector Skills Councils to help them develop Sector Skills Agreements which help our collective understanding of where the key challenges lie in the rural economy. This is being done by commissioning some specific rural analysis of the National Employers Skills Survey. The CRC is also working with the National Audit Office to undertake an enquiry into the impact and effectiveness of policies and programmes designed to address low income and low skills in rural areas.
 - iii The need to project rural skills issues into mainstream skills debates is a key challenge for everyone. Too often the rural community talks to itself rather than the main skills debates and/or we fall into the trap of allowing others to see rural as only being about the 'traditional' rural employment sectors in farming and tourism. The truth is the rural economy is now much more diverse but we have not been good at getting this message across. We have also failed to project

how these changes in the rural economy require new skills for which we need mainstream educational funding.

3.3. **Regional commitment to rural skills – Pat Holtom**, Rural Board Member of the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), key issues included:

- i EEDA recognises and seeks to address rural skills issues as a key underpinning issue supporting the development of the whole region. In doing this EEDA seeks to use its strategic role to influence other funding bodies, its budget flexibility to pilot new approaches and its influencing role to support other providers in developing appropriate delivery to address new challenges.
- ii Within EEDA's corporate plan, and the region's Regional Economic Strategy, skills development supports to a greater or lesser extent all the objectives. In common with other RDAs much of EEDA's delivery is carried out by sub regional partners within a regional agreed framework. In the skills arena the key body is the Regional Skills and Competitiveness Partnership which works to co-ordinate all skills investment in the region.
- iii Whilst EEDA has funded some specific rural projects it works mainly through collaborative projects with other bodies to support long term change. This includes for example supporting and sometimes contributing to new infrastructure developments (e.g. new College and University campuses) or supporting the delivery of pilot skills programmes which are then mainstreamed within existing structures.

3.4. **Mike Appleyard**, LANTRA – the skill needs of the rural workforce in the East Midlands and East of England, key issues included:

- i In looking at the skill needs of rural businesses we must look at the longer term trends and drivers to which they are responding. In both regions drivers such as CAP reform, globalisation, demographic change and demands for a multi-functional countryside are clear for everyone to see. Add to this the challenge of significant growth areas and the infrastructural demands this creates and it is clear that we also have some interesting business opportunities if we can develop new skills in our rural communities.
- ii The rural business community is composed mainly of small businesses with over 90% employing less than 10 people. Interestingly even with this very small business size more than half carry out some training each year, with 30% sending staff on specific courses. Amongst the most important areas basic life skills emerges as the top priority closely followed by communication skills. Other key areas included technical, marketing and general business skills. Across all business types and skills areas employers are anticipating the need for higher level skills over the next few years.
- iii Delivery is another area of concern amongst businesses. Almost universally businesses are keen to be able to access provision which is more tailored to their needs. In particular they highlight the need for provision to offer more scope for bite size more flexible provision, to be better linked to the workplace, not purely driven by qualifications as these are often not relevant, and to be vocationally relevant at all levels. Overall it is important for skills providers to take more account of businesses views in designing courses, and it is hoped that the new Sector Skills Agreements can play a key role in bridging this gap.

3.5. **Val Braybrooks** – Director of the Holbeach (Food Technology) Campus, University of Lincoln, key issues included:

- i The food sector is currently facing a series of major challenges all of which will require a skills response as part of the answer. Food producers are faced with increasing global competition in a highly competitive and dynamic market. Increasing regulation and demands for higher standards are going hand in hand with downward pressure on prices. Businesses need to develop both their technical and managerial skills to do existing jobs more effectively whilst also focusing continually on new product development and innovation. In economies at or near full employment this is leading to wage inflation and competition for

the best staff, many of whom move on rapidly as their career progresses leaving hard to fill skill gaps in their wake.

- ii The Holbeach Campus was developed as a proactive response to both these challenges in the food sector and the long term reduction in farm employment. It focuses specifically on meeting the needs of employers and their staff in the food sector and its strategic position in the heart of the greater Fens food area has been important in its success. It provides a wide range of services from formal qualifications, to tailor made short courses, new product development support and start up space. It has very good links with businesses across the sector and has managed to persuade them to sponsor and or donate significant capital equipment for training. As a result of being very focused on employer/business needs it has grown rapidly and is currently looking at how to facilitate the next stage of development.
- iii Despite its success the Centre recognises a range of key challenges for the future. One particular issue has been the rapid growth in the demand for courses for migrant workers, with 33 nationalities studying at the centre in 04/05. Only 6% of the Campus's enrolments are under 19 which makes changes to LSC funding to focus on this age group problematic. It has embarked on an ambitious programme of strategic employer partnerships and has found this to be very rewarding both to the businesses and to the Campus. Looking forward there are particular concerns about whether current funding priorities are appropriate and whether moves to agree 'top down' strategies to engage employers will constrain the ability to meet the true needs of employers.

3.6. **David Wood** – Regional Development Officer, Rural Action East - developing skills in rural communities, key issues included:

- i Rural communities are changing fast, and in both regions are home to large numbers of people and cover most of the regions' area. Many of the remoter communities are insular, remote from political influence and often suffer from a lack of service provision and poor transport. Whilst many young people leave rural areas, the overall trend is for population growth as older people move in. Unemployment is low in most rural areas but this hides many low skill low paid jobs. Rural Community Councils (RCCs) believe that the development of rural communities needs dynamic participatory communities which value their diversity and social enterprise in addition to more traditional economic activity. This would allow us to create communities in which people want to live and in which they see a real future.
- ii Volunteering and community development is central to the development of new skills amongst the rural population. It has the potential to help develop self worth, skills and to instil the routine of work and thus acts as an effective route into employment. Across the East of England the Voluntary and Community Sector employs over 50,000 people and also uses the input of another 600,000 volunteers each year. Its contribution to UK GDP at £27bn per annum (2%) is greater than agriculture or textiles or the automotive sector. The RCCs are keen to encourage more people to become community activists to build on this success and to help them develop their lives.
- iii Barriers and potential solutions to training provision in the community sector are not very different to other areas. Common complaints include poor access to information on course provision, the challenge of admitting that you have learning needs and practical barriers such as transport, cost and the lack of time especially in smaller organisations. Some providers also make too many assumptions about the needs of potential learners and provide courses at the wrong time, in the wrong place or at too high a cost. If provision can address these concerns, e.g. transport access schemes, then participation does increase. To move forward it is essential to create more flexible provision when and where people most need it. Often this will mean provision being located within the community rather than in formal situations such as Colleges, thus using facilities with which local people feel comfortable to reduce barriers to participation. Broadband and CD packages are making this provision more viable all the time.

4. Conclusions of the Round Table Discussions

The afternoon conference session was chaired by Pam Smith, Chairman of the East Midlands Rural Affairs Forum.

Each table discussion was challenged to identify 3 key issues which need to be addressed to have a positive impact in rural areas. For each key issue delegates were further asked to suggest one action which could help to address the issue raised.

In some topic areas two table discussions took place due to demand, and thus the key issues highlighted below may include more than 3 priorities under some topics.

4.1. Skills for 'new' rural industries

- i It was felt that in general there is poor level of understanding about how changes in the rural economy and marketplace are creating opportunities for new businesses and the associated skills which need to be developed. Delegates believe the rural business mix is changing fast, but believe research often lags behind the reality, making it hard to create the solid evidence needed to precisely focus provision.
 - *Action needed* – focus on flexibility in designing the delivery of skills so that provision can be flexed to meet the wide diversity of needs require to support economic diversification.
 - *Action needed* – improve data collection about the rural economy to allow new and emerging sectors and skill needs to be recognised and supported.
- ii There is a need to recognise that different groups in the rural community can bring different skills and thus help to support new industries in the countryside. It is therefore vital that we do not pick a list of winners in thinking about the new industries and who can benefit from each one. We need to ensure that the new industries which we support can bring benefits to the indigenous population, migrant workers and also attract highly qualified UK graduates and young people to see the rural economy as an exciting proposition with modern progressive employment opportunities.
 - *Action needed* – focus on awareness raising to ensure that everyone understands where the opportunities are to build partnerships to deliver.
 - *Action needed* – target young people in particular to dispel the myths about the nature of the rural economy.
- iii We need a more joined up approach to development of the rural economy including planners, RDAs, the LSC and public sector employers. If successful we could help to move the rural economy forward with all the components of support in place.
 - *Action needed* – build better working relationships between agencies to create true co-ordinated action between rural economic development and skills development.
- iv Broadband is recognised as driving a fair proportion of the change in the economic base of rural areas, but is unclear exactly where the impact is being felt, and there is an associated concern that many people and businesses are failing to gain the benefits promised by broadband due to poor IT literacy and a lack of appreciation of how to use broadband strategically.
 - *Action needed* – provide more support to help rural businesses and employees understand how broadband can help them to achieve greater productivity or to access new markets for their products and services.

4.2. Re-skilling 'established' rural industries for new challenges

- i The current perceived focus of provision on transferable skills, and in particular communication and ICT skills was not considered to be very robust. Whilst

these skills are needed they are not needed in isolation to other, and very diverse, skill needs. It was felt that the evidence base to argue the case for other (alternative) provision is weak.

- *Action needed* – funding must be more flexible and allow local access to appropriate training provision rather than being constrained by targets and central plans.
- ii There was a feeling that lot of current provision is not well targeted at actual needs or is delivered in a location which makes access difficult. There is therefore a need for more local and targeted provision.
- *Action needed* – providers need to do more to recognise and deliver provision which meets real needs.
- iii Concerns were raised that the first area needing attention for established rural industries was the need to raise their aspirations and to help them understand where the opportunities are. In particular there is a need to develop the innovation potential of established businesses by helping them to develop better market awareness and leadership skills. Currently lots of provision is not taken up because promotion is not undertaken in ways which appeal to much of the rural population.
- *Action needed* – action in this area needs to start amongst the young rural population in schools, and continue throughout people's working lives, to help the rural population and rural employers understand the options they have.
 - *Action needed* – business advice and skills provision needs to be promoted better in ways that rural people will connect with.
- iv Many established businesses have a small dedicated staff and employers are therefore often reluctant to allow employees time to attend lengthy courses due to the business disruption which this creates.
- *Action needed* – there is a need to create more bite size courses and to support flexible modes of delivery.

4.3. The skill needs of migrant workers

- i The recognition of migrant workers' qualifications and skills was seen as an issue, with some employers reluctant to accept the transferability of skills. This means that many skilled migrants are only doing semi-skilled or unskilled work and employers still have hard to fill vacancies.
- *Action needed* – we need to find ways to recognise migrants' qualifications more easily and skills funding must match needs and not just be based on previous academic achievement.
- ii Concern was raised that the evidence base on good practice in relation to migrant worker issues is poor. This is probably in part due to the fact that many parts of the public sector are developing responses to migrant worker issues separately. There is a need to create cross agency co-ordination or a single reference point to collate work. In some areas the migrant worker issue has also not yet been recognised.
- *Action needed* – need to create a good practice portal for those working to support migrant workers.
- iii Whilst many employers depend on migrant workers to meet significant parts of their staffing need, it was felt that many of them needed to do more to address basic issues such as Health and Safety induction. With non native English speakers this can create problems and potentially serious consequences. Anecdotally this may mean that some employers are put off employing good migrant staff due to these perceived problems.

- *Action needed* – generic basic health and safety literature in a wide range of languages needs to be produced so that employers can help to ensure all their workers truly understand their rights and responsibilities in this area.
- iv There is seen to be a need to build understanding between migrant communities and their host communities. The host community needs to understand how migrants can bring economic and social benefits which support everyone. Initiatives set up to support migrants must not be seen as exclusive as this can increase tension within the local host population.
- *Action needed* – need to undertake some work to develop models of best practice to build inter-community relationships;
 - *Action needed* – cross cultural events could be developed around food or sport to help create links and understanding. It may be possible to attract funding for this from the lottery, arts and sports councils.
- v A perceived problem was a tendency by some decision makers to see migrant workers as a problem. It was felt that to counter this much greater debate was needed to help develop a more ‘joined up’ approach to the issue and to stress the positives rather than the tendency to focus on the negative. This leads onto a need for funding allocation mechanisms to understand the needs of migrants and to make appropriate provision for them.
- *Action needed* – it is essential to get better evidence on the skills which migrants can bring to their host communities to convince sceptics of the contribution they can make. Whilst it was recognised that many migrants would be potentially concerned about responding to a formal audit, it was seen as a potentially powerful way to demonstrate the benefits they can bring to the community.

4.4. Skills for life

- i Employer engagement was recognised as an issue, with some employers not being willing to help their employees to access skills for life provision. It was recognised that these hard to engage employers need help to understand the business case for developing skills for life, and in many cases need to be able to see concrete examples amongst their peer group of businesses which have gained benefits by focusing on this area.
- *Action needed* – need to develop ‘good’ employers as mentors and exemplars to help other businesses understand the benefits they can gain by focusing on skills for life.
 - *Action needed* – need to develop good business cases to show how focusing on skills for life improves business performance.
- ii Particularly in remoter rural locations there tends to be a culture of low aspirations which often crosses generations. This leads to a cycle of under-achievement with long term consequences. In tackling this issue it was recognised that changes will take time to occur and will need a concerted programme containing a broad range of actions to be taken. It is only when established cultures have been challenged and some quick wins have been demonstrated that real progress will be made. There is also a need for whole communities to be involved to create a mutually supportive peer group.
- *Action needed* – need to focus on long term concerted programmes which over time succeed in winning the support of businesses and whole communities.
- iii Provision has often not recognised that each local rural area often has different needs in terms of practical issues such as transport, childcare and access to information. This makes it hard for many rural communities to access the provision within skills for life which is meant to meet their needs.

- *Action needed* – there is a need to develop better communications and information using local routes to market including parish magazines, mailshots and newspapers. It was also stressed that it is important to have people to answer questions who understand local circumstances.

4.5. Skills for sustainability and the environment

- i A major perceived problem was the lack of robust careers advice and skills guidance in relation to the jobs available in the environmental sector. Too often the advice given to young people is stereotyped. This leads to them making ill informed choices and not even considering the wide range of environmentally related job options which exist. It was also felt that the terms 'sustainability' and 'environment' are poorly defined and often abused. As a result some businesses, young people and workers feel unclear about what these sectors can offer and the skills which are needed in these sectors.
 - *Action needed* – there is a need to make taster sessions available for young people and older workers to help them understand the diversity of jobs available in the environment sector. In selling the sector it is also important to avoid using jargon such as 'sustainability'.
- ii There is a general movement away from valuing practical skills amongst the general population and many jobs now contain no practical work. This can lead to young people not valuing more applied work opportunities which are often seen as low paid and with poor prospects.
 - *Action needed* – need to create the ability for young people to experience at first hand via either taster sessions or work experience the types of jobs that occur within the environment sector.
- iii Too much policy development does not value existing skills in the environmental field within existing rural communities. These existing skills need building upon and developing with encouragement being given to cross sector working and access to existing provision. Whilst lots of provision exists it was felt that many potential participants are not clear about what is available to them.
 - *Action needed* – it would be helpful to undertake a mapping exercise to identify what skills development provision exists to support the development of environmental skills, collate this information into an easily understood format and promote it widely.
- iv Concern was expressed that unless businesses see a commercial payback in developing skills in sustainability related disciplines they will be reluctant to invest in these areas. Too many actions businesses are encouraged to take do not produce any commercial benefit.
 - *Action needed* – there needs to be greater clarity in government policies and funding to support the development of environmental skills, with a recognition that non-commercial skills will not be embraced without support.

4.6. Active ageing and skills for older people

- i Many older people have problems with access to skills training and to employment opportunities. This maybe due to inadequate public transport or other accessibility issues. Skills provision is also seen as usually being delivered in main towns during the day – the issue is whether people already in employment or self employment have the time available to access this training. In some cases administrative boundaries can cause a problem, if potential learners are required to access training within administrative boundary, whereas, nearest their training facility may be in another District. It was also felt that the new social welfare regime that penalises people if they do not take

employment opportunities may have a disproportionately greater impact on rural areas.

- *Action needed* - We need more imaginative ways of delivering training at recipient's workplace or home, but it is recognised that this will require adequate funding. It will also need to be creative to engage interest and commitment and must recognise time constraints on those in employment.
 - *Action needed* - Consideration should be given to whether Section 106 funding from planning permissions be used for training? Whilst this may need a change to the legislation it would be a positive good for the local population.
- ii A big problem is the perceptions held both by potential employers and by some older people themselves. Some employers often consider older workers to be: inflexible; lacking in ICT skills; prone to ill health; not worth an investment in training as will soon be retiring and experienced in the wrong sort of skills (i.e. those associated with rural land based or declining industries). Older workers often consider that: they do not require any new skills or that they are too old to learn; they will not be treated the same as younger employees (e.g. will not get the same training opportunities or will be passed over for promotion). There is some evidence that prior to forthcoming anti-ageist legislation, some employers are pre-emptively making older workers redundant.
- *Action needed* – we need a campaign to re-educate employers about benefits of using older workers including facts such as older workers: no longer have child care commitments; can pass on experience and skills; may be well educated with a high skills level; can act as mentors to younger staff; are less likely to move to another job; often have better inter-personal skills – could be especially important for the tourism industry. It would be important to use big employers such as Tesco and B&Q (which have been positive about employing older people) as models.
 - *Action needed* - the opportunity to use older people's experience and skills in the social enterprise sector should be maximised.
- iii There is a divide between the older 'haves' and 'have nots' in the countryside. Many well-off people retire to rural areas and do not need or require skills training for work or leisure. However, the older segment of the indigenous population may not be in the same position. It is important to recognise the differences in ability and need within the older population and not to treat older people as a single, homogenous, group. One recent study showed that most people who claim benefits live in locations that appear, from the Index of Multiple Deprivation, to be least deprived.
- *Action needed* - There is a need to identify the pockets of 'have nots'. It may be possible to use information from PCTs as they undertake a lot of mapping of social deprivation. It is important to ask rural inhabitants about their needs and not to make 'top down' assumptions.

4.7. Keeping young people engaged in skills development

- i Low aspiration and poor job quality but plenty of low skill employment opportunities in some rural areas combine to create a feeling amongst young people that there is little reason to study hard. It is easy for them to believe that they can get a job with few qualifications and that if they studied much longer they would still be faced with only the same job opportunities. It can also lead to low self esteem, and anti-social behaviour.
- *Action needed* – there is a need to be much more young person friendly with some of the provision for 14-19 to ensure that those who are less inclined to stay engaged feel benefit in doing so. This could include using sport as a 'learning by stealth' route to skills development as has been tried with success by New Deal for Communities in NE England.

- ii Lack of sixth form provision and access to FE Colleges is seen as a particular rural limitation. Whereas urban youngsters will have choice at age 16 between several centres and many different courses, rural young people often have restricted choice and face long travel distances and transport costs to access provision. When the lack of provision sits alongside low community aspirations and support and poor public transport, it makes it very hard for even those that want to study to do so.
 - Action needed – much better dedicated transport provision is needed to get remote rural youngsters into 6th form provision, it must be both relatively quick and free.
- iii Lack of vocational and flexible provision was cited as potential turnoff to many young people in rural areas who find mainstream academic provision unsuitable. If they had more options and high quality vocationally relevant provision more would stay engaged in the system.
 - Action needed – there is a need for more ambitious and innovative vocational provision to be embedded in the school curriculum to help keep young people motivated and focused.
- iv Funding constraints on providers was cited as a particular issue in many rural areas as low population densities make it expensive to deliver an attractive range of provision. Whilst it is not feasible to provide all provision on a local basis everywhere there is an over-riding need to make alternative access provision (e.g. dedicated transport) where local provision can not be justified.
 - Action needed – a rural premium for providers who meet the needs of dispersed populations with the extra costs this implies should be the norm to give providers the confidence to invest for the long term in outreach provision.
- v Advice and guidance was considered to be poor to both young parents and their parents and families. There is a need for well informed honest brokers who can provide impartial advice and guidance. This advice must be easily accessible and not try to pigeonhole all young people into a few favoured career paths.
 - Action needed – young people's advice and guidance services still need more investment to ensure that they meet the needs of all young people in rural areas.

5. Next steps

- 5.1. In her concluding remarks Pam Smith explained the need for all participants in the day to take the conclusions forward and to ensure that the key issues raised at the conference are addressed. It was stressed that many of the issues will need changes in policy and potentially a different focus on funding priorities.
- 5.2. It was recognised that whilst some actions can be taken locally to address these issues, others will need to be addressed nationally with the government. Building on Alison McLean comments in her keynote address, it is important that everyone uses all avenues open to them to ensure this message reaches the government across all departments and not just in specific rural departments or interest groups.
- 5.3. Both rural forums will debate the outcomes of the conference and use its findings to progress their rural proofing role. This will occur both within the regions and with government ministers via the regular national meetings which rural forum chairs have.