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## Executive summary

The Northern Rural Network is an active learning network, founded in 2000 by the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University. The NRN's aim is to promote learning and understanding of contemporary rural development issues and to provide a forum for networking amongst rural development practitioners.

In April 2008, the NRN entered its' third phase in the form of a three year project, funded primarily by the Northern Rock Foundation, One North East (ONE), and Newcastle University.

In 2010 Women in rural Enterprise (WiRE), was commissioned to evaluate the impact of the NRN 3<sup>rd</sup> phase, 2008-2011. This evaluation has been undertaken in 2 stages, and combines an overview of previous studies and existing evidence, with an impact evaluation based on a membership survey and follow-up interviews.

The NRN has, since 2007, had five stated objectives:

- To provide an independent forum to promote learning and understanding of contemporary issues and challenges facing rural development in the North
- To showcase applied research from within the North and beyond, to inform analysis of the current state of rural economies and communities in the North
- To facilitate the exchange of best practice and highlight innovation in rural development
- To provide a forum for networking amongst rural development practitioners, including public, private and voluntary sector bodies, and including post graduate students
- To use the dialogue within the NRN to shape new academic and applied research agendas in the North and beyond.

This study looked for evidence that the NRN was meeting these objectives as well as the outputs required by the project; in addition to seeking to identify, characterise and quantify any impacts arising from its work.

## **Conclusions of the Review of Existing Evidence**

The review of evidence collected by the NRN for phase 3 shows it to be a highly successful learning network that has visibly met the targets and expectations of its three key stakeholders; the University, NRN funders and its membership.

For the University it has successfully created an influential outlet for strategically important Knowledge Transfer (KT) and forum for Knowledge Exchange (KE). The Network has heightened the profile of both the Centre for Rural Economy and the University in a positive way, showcasing high quality KT provision from within the University to and for its membership.

For the NRN funders, and particularly for ONE, the NRN has delivered the output requirements of increased membership and attraction of rural businesses in to the Network. It has also broadened its reputation and prominence both within and without the region as a Rural Development Centre of Excellence and adhered to the ONE requirement to do so by using the "latest research, theories and practise on knowledge transfer to the benefit of the rural economy".

For the membership, the NRN has delivered a programme of events which are held in high regard and rated by participants as well organised, with excellent content and giving access to high level information and expertise. This high satisfaction level is corroborated by the high attendance rates at most events and the number of people willing to travel to NRN events from outside the region.

## **Impact Evaluation Conclusions**

The online survey had a return rate of 17% and a sectoral profile broadly in line with that of the membership database. Additionally, although baseline data was not available and the on-line survey covered only the period 2008-11 in the detailed questions; respondents are likely to have drawn on their total experience of the NRN going back to their first contact in answering the more open-ended questions. This is especially valuable as ten years is a more realistic timescale than three in the search for ripples of neo-endogenous impact. As such, we feel confident in drawing some broad conclusions from the data provided by the online survey.

The survey provides abundant evidence of both the quantity and quality of the output generated by the NRN during the period 2008-2011.

NRN events are highly regarded and well-attended. Both through the events and the website the NRN gives access to academic research, reports and information and the survey demonstrates that members are making use of this access in downloading documents.

The membership feeling towards the NRN is very positive and they find the events to be of high quality. They attach high value to the access to high level information and current thinking on the subjects covered that the NRN provides.

The value placed by the membership on the NRN's role in providing a forum for cross sector networking is strikingly demonstrated by the Wordle word clouds generated from the narrative sections of the survey, an example of which forms the front cover of this report. The NRN performs an overarching role, particularly across the North East region, connecting "rural." It serves to provide rural practitioners from across all sectors, with networking opportunities and access to current thinking from leading academics and practitioners across regional and sectoral boundaries.

Successful knowledge transfer (KT), is clearly evidenced in the survey results. In addition to the KT taking place at events, over half of respondents claim to have read CRE publications and policy documents (63% and 50% respectively); and 17% to have engaged in R&D with the CRE (16% with the wider University).

As such it provides an ideal flagship for the CRE and the University. As a result of contact with the NRN 36% of these responding to the survey had accessed expert advice from CRE and 27% from other departments. Similarly 57% had attended other events across the University

In terms of the positive impact of the NRN activity and outputs, we have identified positive impacts of three types. These are benefit or gain to the individual, their employer or business which is: Financial, either directly or indirectly; Non financial but tangible and specific; Non financial, tangible but non-specific.

Financial impacts are reported at a low but consistent level. These include: time saved, new business gained, business growth and changes in work practice. It is interesting to note that even where there is a clear

financial value to the benefit reported (for example “new business gained”), this is not always recognised by the respondent (see table 15).

Non-financial but tangible and specific impacts included accessing information, helping develop or implement policy and helping research and development. Examples of these emerged in the narrative sections of the survey and three are presented as case studies (Knowledge Transfer, Neo-endogenous development, Research agenda and Knowledge Exchange).

The third category of impact, non-financial, tangible but non-specific is variously recorded by most respondents to the survey. Members of the NRN feel positive impacts in terms of professional development, making useful contacts and social benefits (personal and community). This positive feeling towards the NRN and feeling of having benefited – of knowing more and of being connected – is a striking feature of the survey responses.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this evaluation study has found the NRN to be meeting its own stated objectives and to have met targets and objectives set out by the funders of Phase 3. There is clear evidence of impacts and ripples of neo-endogenous development arising from the activity and outputs of the NRN.

The NRN has clearly been successful and should continue to be supported, championed at the highest levels and maintained. However the model that it currently operates may need to change, given that the political climate for public sector funding has changed. Precisely where and how this support will evolve remains unclear, but is likely to dictate the emphasis of any future alterations. Notwithstanding this, we would strongly urge that the key strengths of the NRN should be central to its next phase. The findings presented in this report should inform the future business model of the NRN. In particular the findings that members of the NRN value the network very highly, but not in financial terms and that the NRN creates substantial value in terms of Knowledge Transfer and reputation for both Newcastle University and the North East region.

## Introduction

This report is an evaluation of the activities undertaken by the Northern Rural Network (NRN) over its most recent phase from 2008 to 2011. The NRN is an active learning network, founded in 2000 by the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University. Its membership database currently stands at approximately 1300 individuals based locally regionally and nationally.

The NRN's aim is to promote learning and understanding of contemporary rural development issues and provides a forum for networking amongst rural development practitioners. The network serves to connect practitioners from the private, public and voluntary sector agencies, with leading academics and thinkers. The various forms of dialogue supported through the NRN are intended to facilitate the exchange of best practice and highlight innovation in rural development. The rationale is to influence and encourage changes in practice amongst both practitioners and academics through a process of both knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer.

During 2010, Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE) was commissioned to carry out a process and impact evaluation of this project. The overall aim of the evaluation that follows is to 'undertake an independent review of the impact and effectiveness of the NRN' (ITT Objectives of Evaluation). The study comprises two sections: firstly, a review of the activities of the NRN and the existing evidence and secondly, the main evaluation of impacts, based on an on-line survey of the membership and follow-up interviews.

## Background

The Northern Rural Network (NRN) represents a community of interest and comprises a network of individuals and organisations with some interest or stake in the economy and development of rural areas of the UK.

Its establishment by the Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) at Newcastle University in 2000 was borne out of a collaborative approach to research developed by the CRE. This approach initially included events convened by the CRE and held in rural locations across the northern regions. These events brought together researchers and those involved in the practice of rural development in a wide variety of contexts including; local and regional officials, people from voluntary organisations and charities, business people, development professionals and community leaders.

Since its inception, the NRN has been funded both by Newcastle University and through grants from external bodies. In the main, funding has come from the public and third sectors, with relatively little coming directly from the private sector. The NRN is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of funding within a three year project (2008-2011). One North East, the Northern Rock Foundation and Newcastle University being the main funders, with small amounts secured from Northumbria Larder, the Northumberland Uplands LEADER group, North Pennines Leader and sponsorship of specific events.

Membership of the NRN is free and open to anyone with an interest in rural development and people sign up either through the website or by attendance at an event. Membership currently comes mainly from across the three northern regions of England, representing the public, private, academic and voluntary/community sectors.

The NRN has, since 2007, had five stated objectives:

- To provide an independent forum to promote learning and understanding of contemporary issues and challenges facing rural development in the North
- To showcase applied research from within the North and beyond, to inform analysis of the current state of rural economies and communities in the North
- To facilitate the exchange of best practice and highlight innovation in rural development
- To provide a forum for networking amongst rural development practitioners, including public, private and voluntary sector bodies, and including post graduate students
- To use the dialogue within the NRN to shape new academic and applied research agendas in the North and beyond.

Throughout its existence, the NRN has pursued these objectives through a series of events and activities. Within the current phase there are three types of event.

1. *Seminars*: Three times annually the NRN holds a day long large seminar, usually attracting 80 – 120 delegates. These focus on current issues within rural development and usually feature a series of events based around dissemination of research and policy, often including case studies of interesting or best practice.

2. *Short Courses*: The second type of event is the short course. These are one or two days and are either on a specific topic for a particular group of practitioners or a general introduction for those relatively new to rural affairs.

3. *Local Development Activity (LDA)*: The third activity type comes as a follow-up to a specific event, which is pursued where there is demand from the membership identified by the CRE. This work is bespoke and examples of LDA have included follow-up events such as the three workshops linked to the Matthew Taylor review, and the development of applied research work, for example the Uplands LDA work.

In addition to the events, other strands of activity form part of the project: The first of these is a major survey of the businesses in the rural north east accompanied by a programme of sharing and discussing the findings with a range of groups and organisations across the region. Also included in project activity is a commitment to communicate with practitioners and researchers from outside the north of England, to carry out best practise dissemination, and to share experience of the NRN. Finally, there is a project web site which includes an extensive archive section detailing all the past events from inception in 2000 along with a series of business survey pages. Since 2008 - 2011 it has supplemented event information in greater depth by providing event presentations and in some cases recordings of selected keynote deliveries.

The current phase has a management team based at the Centre for Rural Economy (CRE), which includes university staff working with a freelance consultant attached to the CRE, who has the role of NRN Co-ordinator. This team is supported by a steering group, made up of public, private and voluntary sector representatives. The steering group assists the management team in designing the programme of activities and in informing other strategic decisions regarding the Network.

## The Review of Activities and Existing Evidence

### **Introduction:**

This first section of the evaluation is an updated continuation of the interim report submitted in September 2010, which reported initial findings of the review of NRN activities based around existing evidence. The review was carried out using NRN documents and reports supplied by the NRN management team, along with information accessed via the website as detailed in Table 1. It is split in to 4 key sections covering NRN membership, NRN events, the NRN website and NRN Management.

The website was evaluated separately in August 2010 and reviewed again in December 2010, by Fiona Davies, manager of the WiRE website. On both occasion this was undertaken as a desk exercise from the perspective of a visitor to the site. This was supported by interviews carried out with members of the management team and key individuals from the CRE and the Steering Group.

This section reviews activities and records within the context of the overall objectives of the NRN. Certain observations are made with some specific recommendations for the website.

**Table 1:** NRN documentation used for the Review of Activities using Existing Evidence.

<b>Documents</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Source</b>
Membership database	as at August 2010	Supplied by NRN
Events Archive	as at August 2010	Accessed via NRN website
NRN total output data	as of 09.03.10	Supplied by NRN
Progress report to Northern Rock Foundation	August 2010	Supplied by NRN
Critical Friend Progress Report	Progress report April 2009	Supplied by NRN
Critical Friend Final Report	April 2010	Supplied by NRN
NRN Event Feedback	July 2008 –December 2010	Supplied by NRN
Report to NRN Membership	July 2009	Accessed via NRN website
The Future of the Northern Rural Network. Note prepared by Jane Atterton and Nicola Thompson	July 2009	Supplied by NRN

## The Review of Activities and Existing Evidence contd.

### Programme of Events

During the period April 2008 – December 2010 the NRN held 18 events; the launch event, along with *Seminars (10)*, *Short Courses (4)*, and *Local Development Activity (3)*. Most were organised solely by the NRN but a number were organised jointly with partners. The majority of events were held in the North East region, although at least one was also held in each of the North West and Yorkshire and Humber regions. A summary of events is presented in Table 2.

Following each event, delegates were invited to complete on-line event evaluation questionnaires (using Survey Monkey). These questionnaires sought to establish whether events met expectations and satisfaction ratings for the event as a whole and each speaker, as well the delegates' view on logistics and venue.

The majority of the feedback indicates that delegates were very or mostly satisfied with the events that they attended. Events were recognised as well organised and in convenient locations. The high quality of speakers and the quality of the information disseminated are consistent themes for praise within delegate feedback. This is encapsulated by the following feedback comment from the CAP event evaluation:

*"A good course, up to the normal high standards set and maintained by NRN - these are a very useful way of keeping updated with developments in the rural economy. It would be very useful if NRN can continue - is there a way that these could be related to CPD with professional bodies e.g. RTPI, etc"*

Predictably, there were minor levels of dissatisfaction associated with expectation, but given the breadth of the audience, this was commendably low.

Review of the project documentation, reports to NRN funders and members and the Critical Friend reports, reveals development of the approach to and the structure of the events during the life of the project. At the start of the project, all events were based around an approach that concentrated on knowledge transfer and were, with the exception of the site visits, didactic in nature with little opportunity for delegates to share experience or develop particular themes. Delegate feedback in the early days included the following:

*"Celebrate good practice, allow time for informal networking. Perhaps more time for breakout group activities during seminars. Write ups of the events with key messages for discussion at a local level".*

The Critical Friend observed in her report of April 2009 that an approach adopting more facilitation would generate greater ownership by the membership and enable greater focus on networking and knowledge exchange rather than knowledge transfer.

More latterly and in response to both feedback and the critical friend the NRN have modified the organisation to accommodate this and feedback has accordingly improved with members noting networking as one of the key benefits of attendance. One of the key principles of the NRN was an intention to encourage a bottom up ownership of knowledge and practise – a 'neo-endogenous' approach, with the NRN, within the impartial modus of the university, having the role of facilitating. This development in the

## The Review of Existing Evidence, Programme of Events *contd.*

structure of events is judged to be an improvement and a move towards developing a forum which supports learning amongst NRN members and enables effective knowledge exchange between the university and civil society.

**Table 2:** NRN Events during the period April 2008 - December 2010

<b>Date and Event</b>	<b>VENUE</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
22 Apr 08 Launch Event : The Next Phase	Newcastle University	77
25 Jun 08 New LEADER Short Course	Function Rooms, Hexham Mart	51
25 Sep 08 Matthew Taylor Review	Centre for Life, Newcastle upon Tyne	122
21 Oct 08 Rural Development Short Course	Day 1 – Kirkharle, Day 2 - Hadrian's Wall	34
26 Nov 08 Renewable Energy and Rural Business	Durham County Cricket Club, Chester-le-Street	111
12 March 2009  Rural Land Use in the North: Future Challenges	Park Inn York  Festival of Social Science/National Science and Engineering Week	117
22 Apr 09 Matthew Taylor Follow-up Event (Northumberland)	Kirkharle Courtyard	17 Invitation only
28 Apr 09 Rural Economies: Coping with a Recession	Newcastle Racecourse	86
03 Jul 09 Matthew Taylor Follow-up Event (Durham)	Hamsterley Village Hall	Invitation only
10 Jul 09 LEADER Short Course	Richmond Station	47
22 Oct 09 Coalfields Regeneration	Woodhorn, Ashington	68
26 Jan 10 Matthew Taylor Follow-up Event	Newcastle upon Tyne	Invitation only
02 Mar 10 Future of the Uplands	Mickleton Village Hall, Co Durham	91
19 Mar 10 CAP Reform Short Course	Newcastle University	42
11 Jun 10 RDPE: Taking Stock and Sharing Knowledge	Castle Green Hotel, Kendal	96
16 Nov 10 Newcastle Science City: Opportunities for Rural Business	Lindisfarne Room, Kings Road Centre, Newcastle University	43

## The Review of Existing Evidence, Programme of Events *contd.*

Comparison of the proportions of different sectors comprising the NRN membership and those members who actually attended at least one event during the period April 2008 – July 2010 indicates that individuals working in the private sector were slightly less likely to attend at least one event than to be a member of the NRN (private sector as 24% of delegates as opposed to 33% of membership). The reverse is the case for members of cross-sector partnerships, including LAG/Leader groups and those representing the third sector. See Table 3.

**Table 3:** Sectoral breakdown of membership\* and members who attended at least one event between April 2008-July 2010. `

SECTOR	Membership	Event attendance
	%	%
Local Government	18	20
Education	10	14
Government Agency	23	18
Cross sector partnership, including LAG/Leader	4	10
Third Sector	12	14
Private Sector	33	24
Total	100	100

(Source NRN membership database July 2010)

\*Note: This analysis includes some 400 entries which are now no longer active (within the "total membership" category) after database cleansing.

## The Review of Activities and Existing Evidence, contd.

### Membership Data

The Northern Rural Network (NRN) membership represents individuals and organisations with some interest or stake in the economy and development of rural areas of the UK.

Membership of the NRN is free and open to anyone with an interest in rural development and people sign up either through the website or by attendance at an event. The membership database is comprised of a cumulative list of everyone who has signed up to the NRN and is kept as an electronic database of names, organisation name (if any), and email addresses. Some of the entries also have postal address and telephone number. There are no longitudinal records in that the join date is not recorded.

During the evaluation it became evident that the database contained a number of non-functional entries. The majority of these were email addresses which were not active (probably just no longer being used by the individual for whatever reason), but a small number were people who asked to be removed from the membership list. A spreadsheet listing the entries which should be removed from the membership, together with the reason, was passed to the NRN management team. The NRN database stands at some 1300 members and removing these 400 inactive entries brings this down to 900 active members. However, the following analysis has been carried out using the original NRN database as it was not feasible for the consultant to carry out the data cleansing and it was not possible to assess the viability of inactive contact details. The membership figures quoted through this report have therefore been approximated to 1300, as stated by the website unless otherwise supported by an explanation

Members come principally from across the three northern regions of England, representing the public, private, academic and voluntary/community sectors.

The composition of the membership is predominately public sector, comprising 51% of the membership (Table 4). This indicates no real change from the period 2002-2006, where public sector represented just over 50% of membership (NRN statistics, 2006).

**Table 4:** Sectoral breakdown of NRN membership

SECTOR	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP		GROUPED SECTOR	
	number	%	number	%
Local Government	241	18	686	51
Education	140	10		
Government Agency	305	23		
Cross sector partnership, including LAG/Leader	52	4	52	4
Third Sector	163	12	163	12
Private Sector	436	33	436	33
Total	1337	100	1337	100

(Data Source: NRN membership database July 2010)

## The Review of Existing Evidence, membership data, contd.

Membership of the NRN is administered and coordinated electronically – using only email and the website as the mechanisms of communicating with the membership about events and activities of the NRN. A small number of database entries (“members”), do not have a recorded email address and so are not routinely invited to NRN events or informed of NRN activities. Whilst this is a small number (n=40, or 4.4%), it should be monitored in case the effect is to systematically exclude a certain sector or group of people.

The reliance on electronic communication with members also has the result that the database does not include comprehensive information about postal address or geographical location of the membership. In order to “map” the membership, we have analysed the data held about delegates to NRN events, as postal address is a requirement of that element of the project record keeping.

Table 5 shows the breakdown of members who have attended at least one event (April 2008-July 2010), from within the One North East region and from what we refer to as National. The National category includes all members who have attended at least one event, from outside the One North East Region, including those from the North West and the Yorkshire and Humber regions.

This shows the proportion of members attending events from outside the One North East region at 38%, indicating a number of very positive outcomes. The programme has clearly drawn an audience willing to travel and that this has been established and maintained over a period of time, supports the feedback data highlighting the quality of provision being of a consistently high standard. It also suggests good potential for national dissemination of best practice outside the North East. The broad cross section of membership both in respect of sector and local/national coverage, is fertile ground for high levels of national impact across a number of sectors of influence (national/regional government bodies), across both public and private sector, and across the spectrum of grass roots to regional and national policy.

The membership composition therefore would seem to support the role of the NRN with respect to the dissemination of best practice, and provide a forum to enable and support “neo-endogenous” rural development. The potential for discourse and association from grassroots to ‘top level’ is high, underlining the potential importance of its role.

The higher proportion of delegates from within the One North East region, 62%, is unsurprising given that the majority of events were held in the North East. Unfortunately due to the lack of longitudinal membership data, we have been unable to ascertain whether the proportion of national to regional membership has changed over time.

## The Review of Existing Evidence, membership data, contd.

**Table 5:** Regional/National Breakdown of members who have attended at least one event (April 2008-July 2010) \*Data Source: NRN database as at July 2010

ORIGIN	NUMBER	% OF TOTAL
One Northeast	331	62%
National, including North West and Yorkshire and Humber	199	38%
TOTAL	530*	100%

## The Review of Activities and Existing Evidence, *contd.*

### Critical Friend Report

The Northern Rural Network appointed a critical friend in July 2008 to assist the management team to further the achievement of the network aims, over the period to 2010. The critical friend interim report (May 2009), highlighted a number of development issues for the network. Initially these included:

- More of an emphasis on follow up activities
- More participatory events
- Greater uptake and use of evidence by practitioners
- Changes in practice/behaviours
- A greater sense of the impact of the work of the NRN
- More effective communication

Final recommendations (April 2010), broadened these key issues which identified and concentrated on the operational nature of the network, with an emphasis on the need to broaden its scope to include greater levels of facilitation and knowledge exchange rather than knowledge transfer. The report reflected on good practice in developing communities of practice such as the NRN and stated that an important principle was to “design-in liveliness” or “build a fire in the centre to draw people in.” It identified that the NRN events were at the centre of the network and the arena where the energy of the network is generated (the fire drawing people in).

However also noted was that there was the risk that the energy is easily dissipated, recommending greater attention to the way that these events were run with a more deliberate focus on sharing and reciprocity amongst network members and to raise the expectations of action and feedback.

The report also noted that:

The membership surveys generally showed high levels of satisfaction with the NRN events

The funding requirements had been successfully met, with the exception of the final evaluation report. A postscript note suggested that an integrated evaluation report from the critical friend would have yielded “value for money”.

The University needed to take a stronger leadership role going forward in order to secure the networks sustainability

Better integration/use of research with the practise knowledge that the NRN offered was needed if the University should continue to play a role – an issue that the CRE was currently aware of and debating

The replication of NRN activities in 60-70 small areas across the region was a desirable ‘ground level’ network option

## The Review of Activities and Existing Evidence, *contd.*

### Review of the NRN Website

An integral part of phase 3 (2008-2011) was the development of a membership website. The importance of a well maintained website was highlighted by the Critical Friend highlighting RDPE research that “an excellent website should sit at the heart of the network”. As phase 3 draws to a close and funding comes to an end, with reduced public sector funding of any future developments, the website may well need to be the key membership link going forward in the short term. This section reviewing the NRN website acknowledges this and makes the following observations.

### Website Evaluation: Appearance and Content

The NRN website ([www.northernruralnetwork.co.uk](http://www.northernruralnetwork.co.uk) ) loads quickly from search engines and from direct navigation (typing the url into a browser bar). The home page looks both professional and appealing. The layout makes optimum use of white space and does not feel cluttered or confusing. The site has a distinct rural feel because of the colours and images and the rolling images are very appealing. The home page leans towards a “businesslike” rather than a “welcoming” feel. “Welcoming” network websites are usually dynamic<sup>1</sup>; they heavily feature people images, member testimonials and changing content on all pages of their website, but especially the home page. They invite comment and make use of automatic feeds to indicate activity and make the casual browser feel like they are being welcomed into the network. They encourage 2 way conversations between the business and the customer and vice versa (using web 2 technology) and tend to look busy and possibly a little messy. The intention being to replicate what it feels like to be in a room with lots of other people – they illustrate and encourage interaction. For examples see any [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) ; [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) pages or [www.4networking.biz/welcome](http://www.4networking.biz/welcome).

A more traditional “businesslike” or brochure website is based on dissemination of static information. The website is telling the customer about them, their product or their event. These websites are static rather than dynamic websites, they are a one way communication stream, but are explanatory, helpful and instructive. They allow the business to talk to their customers, share information and increase awareness of the business. For examples see [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) and [www.tcchold.com/YTS](http://www.tcchold.com/YTS). Both these different website styles are valid and useful for customers; they allow access to information immediately and give the company a window to the world.

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<sup>1</sup> : “dynamic” in a web context means a web page that is prepared with fresh information for viewing, pulling information from a database when called rather than from a static template with fixed information

## The Review of Existing Evidence, website evaluation, contd.

The NRN website has dynamic capabilities, it has updatable pages and database feeds for the events. At the time of the initial web evaluation there were no listed events – the site looks much more welcoming and vibrant now with current events listed.

Although it is clearly the home page of the “Northern Rural Network” it is not obvious what NRN can do for the customer (potential member). There is no text (nor additional content anywhere on the site) to explain what the network does, why one should join as a member and perhaps most importantly where the network is. The tagline “progress through knowledge” does not give any further hint. A website tagline is the prime “clarification of purpose” statement in the most important position on the site and should be used to maximum effect. Explanation and information is crucial to encourage the casual browser (and potential member) to investigate further into the site.

There is a strong emphasis on events. The events calendar takes up a large amount of space on all pages and is disproportionate to the actual number of events – 8 per annum being the maximum. At the time of the initial reviewing it was showing no events, which gave the impression of either an organisation which is not doing anything or a poorly updated website. The size of the calendar and its appearance on all pages forces the user to scroll down past the fold which is frustrating. There are also 2 extra events pages “forthcoming events” which again is blank at the time of writing and an “archive” which shows events from the previous 10 years. NRN has limited space and few pages on the site, these pages could be used to better effect.

There is very little content on the site. The page with the most text is the “about us” page, which has just 178 words. The lack of information and content means that there is virtually no user “stickiness”<sup>2</sup>, there is no reason for browsers to stay and no compelling reason to join NRN. Additional content is provided by external links, which take the user away from NRN, and hidden behind downloads. There is no member area and no information on members. People like to feel confident that there are real people behind a website and, in the case of a network’s website, that there is a vibrant community of organisations and people involved.

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<sup>2</sup> Stickiness is anything about a Web site that encourages a visitor to stay longer. A Web site is sticky if a visitor tends to stay for a long time and to return. [www.whatis.com](http://www.whatis.com)

## [The Review of Existing Evidence, website evaluation, contd.](#)

### **Website Evaluation: Usability and Accessibility**

Web usability<sup>3</sup> is critical to make web sites easy to use for the end-user without the need for training or support. The NRN website complies well with usability guidelines. The tabs along the top are clear and obvious. Navigation is straightforward and links are constantly visible and consistent throughout the website, the home button is clear and obvious from all pages. There is not enough content on the site to test usability to any degree, however the existing template is very user friendly. Additional content, images and downloads can compromise usability, NRN should endeavour to maintain the current high level of usability.

The DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) says that websites must be made accessible to blind and disabled people. At the time of evaluation, the NRN website could not be said

to be accessible to these groups. There is no resizing of text function, and no image marker, web-forms are not flexible and the user cannot tab through the site. The site should be thoroughly tested for accessibility see [www.webcredible.co.uk](http://www.webcredible.co.uk) for more information.

### **Website Evaluation: Google ranking**

NRN features on the first page of Google for the search "rural network" this is very good but it is because [www.northernruralnetwork.co.uk](http://www.northernruralnetwork.co.uk) is an intuitive url (it says what the company does) NRN does not appear in any other Google searches, this may not be a problem since the majority of the traffic comes from direct links however if additional content is being added to enhance the site and encourage more members it should include appropriate keywords to improve the ranking. Ranking will further be enhanced by some simple changes such as: reciprocal linking, RSS feeds and automatic news, member directory (which contains multiple links), blog and other social media feeds.

### **Website Evaluation: Conclusion**

Whilst the website is nicely designed for its current function, it is underutilised. With a relatively low level of technical development (requiring a web-developer), it could then be easily enlivened and maintained by a "Web Angel". This is a model developed by WiRE in order to address exactly these issues at low cost. For example buying in two days of Angel time per month could have an immediate impact on the website.

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia defines a usable website as having the following characteristics: -Presenting the information to the user in a clear and concise way and giving the correct choices to the users, in a very obvious way.

## Summary of Findings: Review of activities and Existing Evidence

Findings from the review of evidence collected by the NRN for phase 3 shows the NRN to be a highly successful learning network that has visibly met the targets and objectives set by its three key stakeholders; the University, NRN funders and its membership, but the recommendations made at specific points in this report reflect that this process has generated its difficulties and costs to staff, often at the expense of academic output, particularly research.

For the University it has successfully created an influential outlet for strategically important knowledge transfer (KT) and forum Knowledge Exchange (KE). The programme of KE has however reduced slightly over the period of phase 3, at the expense of accruing outputs for the major external sponsor, One North East. Notwithstanding the Network has heightened the profile of both the Centre for Rural Economy and the University in a positive way, showcasing high quality KT provision from within the University to and for its membership.

For the NRN funders, particularly for ONE, the NRN has delivered the output requirements of increased membership, attraction of rural businesses in to the network. It has also broadened its reputation and prominence both within and without the region as a Rural Development Centre of Excellence and adhered to ONE requirement to do so by using the "latest research, theories and practise on knowledge transfer to the benefit of the rural economy".

This is corroborated not only by the growth in membership numbers and the volume of those willing to travel from outside the region but also by the high levels of satisfaction expressed by the membership in response to the series of events organised by through the NRN shown throughout this report.

The NRN has clearly been successful and should continue to be supported, championed at the highest levels and maintained. However the academic resource intensive model that it currently operates will need to change, given that the political climate for public sector funding has changed. Precisely where and how this support will evolve remains unclear. Its form will need change in order for it to continue and depending on where this support comes will dictate the emphasis of any future alterations.

## Evaluation Survey

### Introduction

The requirements of the evaluation process indicated that the impact of the influence and effect NRN, particularly with regard to its success in effecting “neo-endogenous” development, should also be assessed. Initial research and review of the existing evidence quickly revealed that, despite ongoing evaluation, as no specific indicators and impact targets had been set at the outset of phase 3, it would not be possible to measure “impact” per se. Although no requirement other than reviewing what had been collated along with further interviews was expected, the authors felt it would benefit the NRN, to generate more specific responses about its activities and their effect, from and of the membership.

A questionnaire then was sent out to the NRN membership and results are reported in this next section of the report.

### Methodology

The NRN evaluation survey was carried out principally by the use of an on-line questionnaire. The whole NRN membership was contacted, except those with no recorded email address (40), and those deemed to be internal the project (e.g. members of the NRN management team or the CRE), and given the opportunity to complete an on-line survey during November 2010. The email was sent out to 1200 email addresses. Some 400 emails bounced back as undeliverable (due to the email address being inactive or non-functioning). Thus we have taken 800 to be the total number of members invited to complete the questionnaire.

This was followed up by selected more in-depth interviews and follow-up emails with respondents who had indicated in the narrative answers that they had an interesting story of NRN impact. The results of these are presented as Case Study ‘vignettes’.

## Results

### ***Profile of respondents***

Of the NRN members contacted, 134 logged into the survey and 129 completed at least a proportion of the questions. This is a return rate of 17%. The five who provided no useful data were deleted.

Of the analysable respondents, 82 (64%) were male and 46 (36%) were female (one person declined to say). Eighty-four percent of respondents provided their year of birth, indicating an age range of 24-72 years, with an average age of 49 years. Ninety-four percent of respondents (n=121) provided their ethnicity. Of these, all but two were white, and of those who were white, 94% (87% of all respondents) were "White - British". This suggests that the NRN is dominated by white British people, or that the non-white members mainly declined to participate in the survey (or declined to answer the question)

One of the two ethnic-minority respondents declined to give their name but used the open space provided for the purpose to express some anger at the inclusion of the questions of gender, age and ethnicity as being "evidence of Tick box self serving justification to attract FUNDING" and another comment by this respondent suggesting that the NRN "feels like a talking shop for civil servants and those already in the "know" to justify endeavouring what they do. Sounds like a quango which should just go." No real conclusion can be taken from this as the incidence of both negative responses and ethnic members of ethnic communities were so small.

Public sector employees dominated the respondents (n=71, 55%). Where details were given, these were split roughly equally between local government functions, central government functions and non-departmental public bodies ("quangos"). There were roughly equal numbers of private sector and third sector respondents, a smaller number from cross-sector partnerships and four unclassified who mainly said they were entrepreneurially employed across a variety of sectors (see Table 7).

Almost three-quarters of the respondents were senior managers, middle managers or professionals. A smaller, but substantial, minority had consultancy or technical roles. Ten respondents felt that their role was not described by the pre-classified descriptions. Of these, three were researchers, two were business advisers, two were volunteers, one was a councillor and one was engaged in outreach, (coordinating stakeholder relationships).

Almost half had line management duties (n=63, 49%), 52 (40%) did not have responsibility for staff and 14 (11%) declined to say. Of those who managed staff, 25 (19%) were responsible for more than 5 staff (although two of these said it depended on the project). Approximately 500 staff were managed by the respondents in total.

**Table 7: Sector of employment**

Which sector do you work in?					
	N	%		N	%
Public sector	71	55.0	Local government	22	17.0
			Education - HE (& FE)	11	8.5
			Other Central government (e.g. Environment Agency, Business Link)	9	6.9
			RDA	7	5.4
			Other Non-departmental Public Body (e.g. Forestry Commission, CRC, National Park etc)	12	9.3
			No details given	12	9.3
Private sector	24	18.6	Self-employed	11	8.5
			Employed	12	9.3
Third sector	22	17.1	Including National Trust, CLA, CPRE, Rural Community Councils, Community Renewable Energy, Soil Association, Housing Trusts/Charities, Carnegie UK and other charitable/voluntary groups		
Cross-sector partnership	8	6.2	Including AONB, LEADER, Sector Skills Council, and partnership delivery organisations e.g. a heritage company, forestry partnership		
Other	4	3.1	Mainly researchers and freelance entrepreneurs operating across different sectors		

**Table 8: Work role**

Which of the following best describes your role?			
Senior manager:		28.6%	36
Middle manager:		19.0%	24
Junior manager:		3.2%	4
Supervisor:		1.6%	2
Professional:		27.0%	34
Consultant:		8.7%	11
Technical:		4.0%	5
Clerical:		0.0%	0
Manual:		0.0%	0
Other ( <i>please specify</i> ):		7.9%	10

### **The Duration and Benefits of NRN Membership**

Thirty-two respondents (25%) had been members of the network for at least seven years, often from its inception. Almost one third (n=42, 33%) had been members for (approximately) more than three but less than seven years, while the remainder were those who joined comparatively recently (up to three years ago; n=50, 39%) or declined to answer (n=5, 4%).

The most common method of finding out about the network was by word of mouth, mainly through work colleagues or associates (see Table 9)

**Table 9: Method of discovering Northern Rural Network**





How did you hear about NRN?		
Word of mouth (work colleague or associate)	57%	72
Internet	16%	20
Email invitation	5%	7
Word of mouth (non work-related)	5%	6
Newcastle University	4%	5
Invitation to provide service	4%	5
Meeting / event	3%	4
Press / media	3%	4
Don't remember	3%	4
Other	6%	8





marginalised. The Pennines may be a significant barrier to the concept of a “Northern” Rural Network.

**Table 10:** Perception of benefits received from participation in NRN

Q. How would you rate the NRN in terms of delivering the benefits you expected?			
Benefits have been much greater than expected:		29.7%	38
Benefits have been the same as expected:		61.7%	79
Benefits have been different from those expected:		3.9%	5
Benefits have been much lower than expected:		4.7%	6

## Networking Habits

A large majority (n=108, 85%) of respondents network within other forums and groups. Of these, 29% (n=38) declined to provide any specific fora, whilst a further 22 (17%) simply indicated that they were involved with many different groups, all or most of which were not given specific mention. Of those groups which were specified, the most frequently cited were the RDPE Network (n=6) and NERAF (x6) followed by LinkedIn (n=4). The remainder covered a broad range of networking opportunities including organisations with foci on rural affairs, housing, town planning, land, agriculture and food, climate change, transport, energy, sustainability, biodiversity, community, local development, enterprise and business. The sectors of operation of these groups also covered the full range of EU, national and local government, third sector, business, professional and consultancy. The wide variety of fora with which the members are involved, and the relative lack of commonality (most organisations appeared only once; see Appendix) suggest that the NRN Network does provide a unique networking opportunity for disparate, but rurally connected, interest groups.

## Use of NRN Services

Overall, the respondents indicated that they all used at least one of the services or events provided by the NRN (for example, the website or a single meeting), with the majority making use of between three and seven specific items (73%) (Table 11).

## Use of the Rural Business Survey and Newcastle University Departments

A significant aspect of the uniqueness of NRN is the academic underpinning provided by Newcastle University and the detailed information held in the form of the Rural Business Survey (see Table 12). Awareness of these elements ranged from almost ubiquitous (in the case of the Newcastle University Centre for Rural Economy) to a slight majority (in

the case of The Rural Business Survey 1999). With respect to the latter this is understandable as it pre-dated the NRN per se. The level of use was lower but followed the same rank order as that of awareness.

**Table 11:** Number of services or events used by respondents

Number of services used (including The Rural Business Survey, Newcastle University Departments, NRN Website and NRN Events and Meeting)	N	% of respondents
None	0	0%
1	5	4%
2	8	6%
3	14	11%
4	22	17%
5	24	19%
6	21	16%
7	13	10%
8	8	6%
9	4	3%
10	3	2%
11	3	2%
12	4	3%

**Table 12:** Awareness and use of the Rural Business Survey and Newcastle University

			What use have you made of this?						
	Aware of this	Used this	Attended events:	Read publications:	Rural policy documents:	Used facilities:	Accessed website:	Engaged in R&D:	Accessed expert advice:
	N % of respondents	N % of respondents	N % of users						
The Rural Business Survey 1999	70 54%	40 31%	12 30 %	33 83 %	17 43 %	2 5 %	11 28 %	6 15 %	5 13 %
The Rural Business Survey 2010	80 62%	58 39%	14 24 %	44 76 %	22 38 %	5 9 %	14 24 %	6 10 %	2 3 %
Newcastle University, Centre for Rural Economy	123 95%	106 82%	87 82 %	81 76 %	64 60 %	30 28 %	59 56 %	23 22 %	36 34 %

Newcastle University, other department	101 78%	74 57%	52 70 %	57 77 %	22 30 %	33 45 %	34 46 %	21 28 %	27 36 %
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## Use of NRN Website

One third of the respondents (n=86) had used the website. Of these almost three-quarters (n=63, 73%) used it for information, and almost as many (n=59, 69%) had downloaded reports. Half of users had booked for an event (n=44, 51%) but only 13% (n=11) had used it to make contact with anyone. Only 18 respondents (145 of respondents, 21% of website users) felt the website had room for improvement. The main suggestions were to have greater cross-linkages to other bodies so that it is a gateway portal (n=5) and more links to related studies/research (n=4). Other suggestions included more functional / mutual syndication of the events calendar (n=2), greater use of social networking sites (e.g. Twitter/LinkedIn) (n=2), more news and information about recent developments, more focus on the North West, and improved navigation.

## Attendance at Events and Meetings

Just over half the respondents attended one or two events, in keeping with an overall mean of 1.85. Almost a quarter attended none of the events or meetings, and the remainder (approximately a quarter) attended between three and eight meetings (Table 13).

The most common benefits of attending events were making useful contacts and accessing new information, although the Matthew Taylor events, in particular, were perceived to have helped implement policy and a number of events had aided research and development for a significant minority of attendees (Table 7). The main value of attending meetings and events was perceived to be the personal professional development of the participants, though some participants valued the social and community benefits (Table 15).

**Table 13:** Number of attendances at events/meetings arranged by NRN

Number of events/meetings	N	%
None	30	23%
1	35	27%
2	34	26%
3	12	9%
4	5	4%
5	6	5%
6	1	1%
7	4	3%
8	2	2%

## The Scope of Operation of the NRN

Six statements with a Likert-style response frame were used to assess the respondents' feelings about the independence and impartiality associated with the University's role and aspects of the networking opportunities provided. Table 14 shows the replies, which indicate that the respondents highly valued the independence and impartiality of the university but were more mutedly positive in their perception of the value of the networking aspects of the NRN.

**Table 14:** Likert-style statements; summary of results (N, % of respondents)

	Agree strongly	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know	Mean score
The University's role in running the NRN makes me more confident in the impartiality of advice and information	50 39%	50 39%	27 21%	2 2%	0 0%	0 0%	1.85
I think that as an independent body, it is important that the University runs the NRN	47 36%	40 31%	34 26%	4 3%	0 0%	2 2%	1.92
The NRN makes me feel less pressured than other networking organisations	18 14%	58 45%	45 35%	3 2%	0 0%	3 2%	2.21
The NRN provides too few opportunities to network outside the local area*	6 5%	19 15%	51 40%	38 29%	10 8%	3 2%	3.14
I have found new opportunities to cooperate with local businesses and agencies as a result of being in the NRN	8 6%	48 37%	47 36%	14 11%	5 4%	4 3%	2.59
Since joining NRN I feel I am a more "embedded" part of a rural policy and practise community	15 12%	62 48%	32 25%	13 10%	5 4%	0 0%	2.46

\* Negative statement

The respondents were asked two open-ended questions to enquire as to the specific positive impacts experienced (Q. 10), and to provide any other comments on the value, scope and usefulness of the NRN (Q. 11). The specific instances are obviously somewhat unique and are difficult to classify. Thirty-eight respondents (29%) gave a reply to this question. Figure 3 shows a Wordle word-cloud of the responses, and the Appendix gives the full list of responses.

Twenty-five respondents (19%) gave other comments on the value, scope and usefulness of the NRN. Here the most common focus was on the network itself and features of its usefulness. Once again, responses are shown as a Wordle word-cloud in figure 4 with the full responses listed in the Appendix 2.



Table 15: Attendance, benefits and value of specific events/meetings

	Have you attended this?	How did your business or work benefit?							How do you value the benefits gained from attending?							
		Made useful contacts	Gained new business	Changed work practise	Accessed new information	Helped develop or implement policy	Helped research and development	Other	Financial gain	Business growth	Personal professional development	Time saved	Social benefits (personal)	Social benefits (group)	Community benefits	Other (please specify)
	N /% of respondents	N/% of users							N/% of users							
Renewable Energy and Rural Business	33 26%	18 55%	0 0%	0 0%	25 76%	6 18%	6 18%	1 3%	1 3%	4 12%	25 76%	3 9%	5 15%	6 18%	7 21%	3 9%
Rural Land Use in the North	34 26%	24 71%	1 3%	2 6%	27 79%	10 29%	10 29%	0 0%	0 0%	3 9%	24 71%	3 9%	7 21%	7 21%	7 21%	2 6%
Rural Economies: Coping with recession	14 11%	11 79%	0 0%	0 0%	11 79%	3 21%	4 29%	0 0%	0 0%	3 21%	11 79%	0 0%	1 7%	1 7%	3 21%	1 7%
Matthew Taylor Review	28 22%	14 50%	0 0%	0 0%	20 71%	17 61%	8 29%	0 0%	0 0%	1 4%	22 79%	4 14%	3 11%	3 11%	9 32%	2 7%
Rural Development Short Course	14 11%	10 71%	1 7%	1 7%	9 64%	2 14%	8 57%	2 14%	0 0%	1 7%	12 86%	1 7%	2 14%	0 0%	2 14%	1 7%
LEADER Short Course	12 9%	8 67%	0 0%	3 25%	8 67%	4 33%	5 42%	0 0%	0 0%	1 9%	9 75%	4 33%	3 25%	3 25%	4 33%	1 9%
Coalfields Regeneration	10 8%	5 50%	0 0%	1 10%	8 80%	0 0%	2 20%	0 0%	0 0%	1 10%	6 60%	0 0%	4 40%	3 30%	1 10%	1 10%
Matthew Taylor Local Development Activity	12 9%	6 50%	0 0%	1 9%	4 66%	6 50%	1 9%	1 9%	0 0%	0 0%	6 50%	0 0%	1 9%	2 17%	2 17%	0 0%
Future of the Uplands	39 30%	25 64%	2 5%	4 10%	24 62%	12 31%	12 31%	2 5%	1 3%	4 10%	31 79%	6 15%	8 21%	7 18%	12 31%	0 0%
CAP Reform Short Course	17 13%	10 59%	0 0%	2 12%	14 82%	3 18%	8 47%	1 6%	2 12%	2 12%	13 76%	4 24%	5 29%	2 12%	1 6%	0 0%
RDPE: Taking stock and sharing knowledge	26 20%	17 65%	1 4%	3 12%	18 69%	8 31%	11 42%	1 4%	0 0%	1 4%	16 62%	6 23%	8 31%	9 35%	11 42%	3 12%



## Case Studies

### Case Study 1: Matthew Taylor Seminar and Local Activity Follow Up

#### High Impact – Knowledge Transfer( research) neo-endogenous development

##### Background

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008, Matthew Taylor, author of 'Living Working Countryside: The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing' submitted his report, at the request of the Prime Minister, to the government.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008, the NRN organised a day seminar at the Centre for Life, Newcastle upon Tyne, focused around rural housing and invited Matthew Taylor to speak to his report. The format of the day was organised to hear Matthew Taylor, supported by invited responses from representatives covering the environmental (CPRE), the social (CRC) and the economic (CLA) aspects of rural life. This was followed by a panel discussion and dissemination of overview of community led planning from both a national and local perspective that was followed by an 'open space' for participants to question and respond.

The seminar was developed to provide and disseminate important, current information to those involved in the implementation of rural planning, building and housing policy at a grass roots level upwards. As identified by Matthew Taylor, the attending participants were critically 'place shapers' - those that implemented and empowered others at ground level to 'shape places'. Equally important for him was that the participants were also 'policy shapers' in so far as the place shaping cannot be achieved without shaping the policy. To that end, his attendance was to an extent premised on the ground level feedback responses to the report in order to encourage the 'Whitehall decision takers' to implement the recommendation based on received ground level or grass roots responses (NRN, 2008). The seminar agenda provided that process to be facilitated.

It was then developed by the NRN a stage further through the staging of 3 subsequent local development activity workshops with a group of invited 'place and policy shapers':

22/4/09 Kirkharle, Northumberland

03/07/09 Hamsterley village Hall Durham

26/01/10 Newcastle upon Tyne

##### Process

This case study concentrates on the outcome of the event in Northumberland which brought together 'representatives from land-owning, planning and community interests to talk about the implications of the Matthew Taylor Review and the Government's response to this review for rural Northumberland' (NRN website, 2010).

## Case Study 1 *contd.*

Professor Mark Shucksmith presented research that further contextualised the Matthew Taylor review and provided workshop case study materials for discussion and exploration of the implications at a local level. Subsequent reporting of the event evidences that the participants found this knowledge transfer process very empowering. The NRN event report of the follow up event noted an overall positive response to the event with participants recorded as commenting that the event leaves those taking part

“in a great position to do something. They don’t do this kind of work very often. Is there a role for informal networks like this elsewhere in the country or beyond?”

Clearly participants felt informed and enabled also commenting that

“this is a very good model of different people coming together, with Chatham House rules. NRN is independent, credible, an intermediary, in a forum not driven by sectoral interests. In developing ways of working, trust is important and may not be there if ‘controlled’ by one organisation”

The NRN in response were able to report that

“A note of the event will be taken to the Commission for Rural Communities Board meeting next week. The CRC has its own housing task group- tackling housing during the credit crunch”

### **Neo-endogenous development – Community Action Northumberland**

A key participant at the event was Community Action Northumberland (CAN). Who have been “proactive in supporting community-led social housing solutions in Northumberland's villages” from the early 1980s having recruited in 1989 one of the first Rural Housing enablers in Britain, through to 2004 when lack of funding precluded further development in 2004. Following this, in Northumberland, the attention of partner organizations then moved to the market towns and CAN as a smaller community group became less of a focus in rural housing matters.

## Case Study 1 *contd.*

The observation of CAN was that the

“events which focused on the Matthew Taylor report were a timely reminder that the social housing needs in the villages within the North-east were largely being ignored, and that the need was as strong as ever for expert and independent community-focused Rural Housing Enablers, who could work in an even-handed and authoritative way, between community groups, parish councils, landowners, local authorities, housing associations and funders.

In effect, the NRN events gave us and our fellow-Rural Community Councils the resolve to re-establish a Rural Housing Enabler service in the North-East” (David Francis, 2010)”

As a result of the initial seminar, CAN began discussions with regional staff of the Homes and Communities Agency and the National Housing Federation in early 2010 to re-establish the post of a rural housing enabler. Unfortunately the new government's financial cutbacks and structural reforms have delayed any further developments, but CAN remain “hopeful that we can make further progress in 2011”.

The effectiveness of the process of dissemination and knowledge transfer to the right audience in the right way is a powerful working example of the critical role that the NRN plays in local development.

### References Case Study 1

David Francis, Community Action Northumberland 14<sup>th</sup> December 2010

Northern Rural Network, 2008. Matthew Taylor presentation  
<http://www.northernruralnetwork.co.uk/archive/matthew-taylor-review> accessed 22/12/10

NRN MT Event Northumberland  
<http://www.northernruralnetwork.co.uk/archive/matthew-taylor-follow-up-event> accessed 22/12/10

Living Working Countryside: The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing Published 23 July 2008, ISBN 9781409803287

## Case Study 2:

### **The North East Tranquillity Study, and the 2006 National Tranquillity Mapping Project.**

#### **High Impact Outcome – Cross sector academic research**

One of the main features of the NRN is the coming together of individuals with a general interest in rural development and specific areas of interest and expertise. There is certainly a “feeling” and some evidence that this can lead to innovative cross sector working and new areas of research being commissioned. During 2003 and 2004 attendance at various NRN events led to conversations, contacts and a new idea of what might be possible amongst individuals working for the then Countryside Agency (CA), the CPRE and academics at Newcastle and Northumberland Universities.

This dialogue led to research being jointly commissioned by the CPRE North East and the CA, with co-funding from the NE Assembly, Northumberland National Park Authority, Northumberland Strategic Partnership and Durham County Council. The study was carried out jointly by the two universities. This research developed an innovative new methodology to assess and map the relative tranquillity of rural areas based on public experience, established through participatory appraisal and then mapped with powerful GIS techniques. The North East Tranquillity Study then acted as a pilot for a wider national study – the 2006 National Tranquillity Mapping Project.

Huw Davies, now Programme Manager Transforming Biodiversity Delivery for Natural England and Andrew Baker, of Natural England’s Landscape Monitoring team (in 2004/5 Natural England was part of the Countryside Agency), were two of the individuals involved.

Huw Davies recalled “It was contact at the NRN that led me to assisting Andrew Baker who ran the Countryside Quality Counts programme at the Countryside Agency, to develop this work with CPRE & Newcastle/Northumbria.

“This led to spin-off research in the North East, the NE Tranquillity Study, and the Project it led onto namely the 2006 National Tranquillity Mapping Project.” (Huw Davies 2010).

Whilst this research was led and largely carried out by the universities, both projects involved cross-sectoral working groups and a significant degree of partnership between the respective organisations. This cross-sectoral work was significantly enhanced by the cooperation established through the regular contact of individuals facilitated by meetings of the Northern Rural Network.

## References Case Study 2

MacFarlane, R., Haggett, C., Fuller, D., Dunsford, H. and Carlisle, B. (2004). *Tranquillity Mapping: developing a robust methodology for planning support*, Report to the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Countryside Agency, North East Assembly, Northumberland Strategic Partnership, Northumberland National Park Authority and Durham County Council, Centre for Environmental & Spatial Analysis, Northumbria University.

Jackson, S., Fuller, D., Dunsford, H., Mowbray, R., Hext, S., MacFarlane R. and Haggett, C. (2008). *Tranquillity Mapping: developing a robust methodology for planning support*, Report to the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Centre for Environmental & Spatial Analysis, Northumbria University, Bluespace environments and the University of Newcastle upon on Tyne.

These reports can be accessed at:

<http://www.countryside-quality-counts.org.uk>

## Case Study 3:

### **Rural Strategy for the Hull and Humber Ports City Region**

#### **High Impact Outcome - Knowledge Transfer**

In June 2009 the Humber Rural Partnership launched the Rural Strategy for the Hull and Humber Ports City Region. The development of this strategy was aided specifically by the academic work of the Centre for the Rural Economy at Newcastle University and more generally through a background of discussion and information gained through participating in NRN events.

The main piece of work used in developing the strategy was Midgley, Ward and Atterton - City Regions and Rural Areas in the North East of England, CRE May 2005.

Humber Rural Pathfinder Programme Manager Colin Walker, one of the strategy authors' commented: "This was useful in my general analysis in the Strategy section 1.2 "Why Should a City Region have a Rural Strategy", and is referenced there.

"It was particularly valuable in its insights into new living and working patterns, rural-urban interdependencies and counter-urbanisation. This thinking was central and critical to the rationale for preparing the H&H Ports CRRS.

"It gave a sound academic basis to the thesis we were expounding, and meant that our analysis that "the challenge of achieving sustainable economic growth while maintaining an acceptable level of high quality environment" must inevitably lead the City Region to consider the assets inherent in its rural areas"

"As well as this, I and colleagues have attended a number of CRE hosted seminars in which these kinds of ideas were discussed in some detail, and in more specific sectoral terms. These also provided very useful background info and context. Clearly the exposition from people like Neil Ward, Mark Shucksmith, Philip Lowe and others all proved highly informative and useful in the above respect." (Colin Walker 2010).

#### **References Case Study 3**

*City Regions and Rural Areas in the North East of England*, Midgley, Ward & Atterton, Centre for the Rural Economy, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, May 2005

Rural Strategy for the Hull and Humber Ports City Region, Humber Rural Partnership, June 2009, available at [www.humberruralpartnership.org.uk](http://www.humberruralpartnership.org.uk)

## Impact Evaluation Conclusions

The online survey itself is judged to have been a successful exercise, with a return rate of 17% and a sectoral profile broadly in line with that of the membership database. Additionally, although baseline data was not available and the on-line survey covered only the period 2008-11 in the detailed questions; respondents are likely to have drawn on their total experience of the NRN going back to their first contact in answering the more open-ended questions. This is especially valuable as 10 years is a more realistic timescale than 2.5 in the search for ripples of neo-endogenous impact. As such, we feel confident in drawing some broad conclusions from the data provided by the online survey.

The survey provides abundant evidence of both the quantity and quality of the output generated by the NRN during the period 2008-2011.

NRN events are highly regarded and well-attended. Both through the events and the website the NRN gives access to academic research, reports and information and the survey demonstrates that members are making use of this access in downloading documents.

The membership feeling towards the NRN is very positive and they find the events to be of high quality. They attach high value to the access to high level information and current thinking on the subjects covered that the NRN provides.

The value placed by the membership on the NRN's role in providing a forum for cross sector networking is strikingly demonstrated by the Wordle word clouds generated from the narrative sections of the survey. The NRN performs an overarching role, particularly across the North East region, connecting "rural." It serves to provide rural practitioners from across all sectors, with networking opportunities and access to current thinking from leading academics and practitioners across regional and sectoral boundaries.

Successful Knowledge Transfer (KT), is clearly evidenced in the survey results. In addition to the KT taking place at events, over half of respondents claim to have read CRE publications and policy documents (63% and 50% respectively); and 17% to have engaged in R&D with the CRE (16% with the wider university).

As such it provides an ideal flagship for the CRE and the wider university. As a result of contact with the NRN 36% of these responding to the survey had accessed expert advice from CRE and 27% from other departments. Similarly 57% had attended other events across the University.

In terms of the positive impact of the NRN activity and outputs, we have identified positive impacts of three types. These are benefit or gain to the individual, their employer or business which is: *Financial*, either directly or indirectly; *Non financial but tangible and specific*; *Non financial, tangible but non-specific*.

## Impact Evaluation Conclusions

Financial impacts are reported at a low but consistent level. These include: time saved, new business gained, business growth and changes in work practice. It is interesting to note that even where there is a clear financial value to the benefit reported (for example “new business gained”), this is not always recognised by the respondent (see table 15).

Non-financial but tangible and specific impacts included accessing information, helping develop or implement policy and helping research and development. Examples of these emerged in the narrative sections of the survey and three are presented in the Case Studies.

The third category of impact, non-financial, tangible but non-specific is variously recorded by most respondents to the survey. Members of the NRN feel positive impacts in terms of professional development, making useful contacts and social benefits (personal and community). This positive feeling towards the NRN and feeling of having benefited – of knowing more and of being connected – is a striking feature of the survey responses.

These findings should inform the future business model of the NRN. In particular the finding that members of the NRN value the network very highly, but not in financial terms. Also of relevance is the substantial value in terms of Knowledge Transfer and reputation which is created for the University by the work of the NRN.

## APPENDIX 1

### Networking fora and groups used by respondents:

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) (2)  
Association for Geographic Information – Northern Group  
Bridge Club  
British Institute of Agricultural Consultants (BIAC)  
Business Clubs (2)  
Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV)  
Community Development Exchange (CDX)  
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)  
Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM)  
Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)  
Connect  
CoRE Network (2) (Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment? Centre for Outcomes Research and Effectiveness? COntinuous REcording of Lettings and Sales in Social Housing in England.....?)  
Countryside Recreation Network  
Cumbria Development Network  
Development Trust Association  
European Union Directorate-General for Agriculture Stakeholders Group  
Faith in Affordable Housing Forum  
Fiery Spirits (Carnegie)  
First Friday  
Food and Climate Research Network (FCRN)  
Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Groups  
Green Drinks  
Hexham Business Forum  
Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Forum  
Institute of Business Consulting (IBC)  
Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) (2)  
Institute of Economic Development  
Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA)  
LEADER Partnership  
LinkedIn (4)  
Local Access Forums (2)  
Local Enterprise Partnership  
Local Government Association Rural Commission  
Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)  
National Farmers Union (NFU)  
National Homes Network  
Newcastle Young Professionals Forum  
North East Biomass Forum  
North East Chamber of Commerce  
North East Research and Information Partnership (NERIP)

## APPENDIX 1     Contd.

### Networking fora and groups used by respondents:

North East Rural Communities Council (RuCANNE)  
North East Rural Affairs Forum (NERAF) (6)  
North Pennines Area of Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership  
Northumberland National Park Authority Forum  
Northumberland Renewable Energy Group  
Northumberland Strategic Partnership  
Northumberland Uplands Local Action Group (2)  
North West Rural Affairs Forum  
ONE Rural Group  
Parish Councils  
Princes Trust  
Regional Biodiversity Forum  
Regional Climate Change Partnership  
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) (2)  
Royal Society of the Arts (RSA)  
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) (2)  
Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) (6)  
Rural Housing Enabler Network  
Rural Housing Community of Practice  
Rural Services Network (2)  
Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming (SSFF)  
Sustainable Development Research Network (SDRN)  
Sustainable Production and Consumption Network (SCPNet)  
Water Framework Directive Liaison Panel  
Women's Food and Farming Union  
Yorkshire Food and Farming Forum  
Yorkshire and Humber Rural Transport Forum

## APPENDIX 2

## QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES

3. Why did you choose to become a member of the NRN?	4. Were there any specific benefits which you expected to gain from becoming a member?
I felt it was a useful network for my learning/development, my role in communications (forestry) and as a means of informing others about forestry.	Make useful contacts in the wider rural community. Learn more about related rural issues. Opportunity for promoting the benefits of forestry and timber.
Networking, roles that I held	Knowing people, knowing things
It was relevant to me and I think it is an important forum for rural issues.	Potential CPD
Very interested in Rural Economics. I felt that NRN related to my work and would assist my rural work.	Networking, information sharing, knowledge transfer, confidence that others were having similar issues and finding similar solutions.
To keep me in touch with others in the same line of work	Being part of a useful network
Networking and keeping up to date with rural issues and policies	
relevant to my work	
The objectives of the organisation and to support the rural economy	Information
Network and information opportunities	Part of my work territory is covered by the network, so I wanted to ensure that I am aware of all activity
Because they organised a range of interesting events and it was an opportunity to network with lots of other individuals in the same sector. a very useful platform to enable me to keep informed	the opportunity to network with other representatives of organisations, sharing best practice, learning about new research in order that we could disseminate it to farmers and land managers, chance to gain personal training and professional development
To obtain information	
Provided access to a wide range of excellent rural focussed topics	
To provide a means of networking with other members and as a source of valuable information.	
Attend courses and get useful information	Training events
My work has involved jointly working with the NRN in order to deliver various RDPE related events	Being able to share RDPE related information with practitioners in the Northern regions, thanks to the contacts already established by the NRN
Improve my organisation's understanding of the complex arrangements in England for delivering of rural development	Learning from best practice to both get around the administrative complexities of rural development and learn from best practice in actual delivery of rural development initiatives
Knowledge transfer, keeping up to date with live agricultural and rural issues	As 3)
Helpful for my research work	Contacts with rural businesses and up to date knowledge of policy issues
I was new to working in a Rural Team	Training Courses and seminars have been great!
To support current work + CPD	Insights into rural theory, lessons learned and ideas form projects.
Networking	Contacts
Useful briefing/understanding	

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

Interest in rural transport	Conference events and contacts
To keep updated with changing policy, good practice, some networking and to keep up to date with a regional approach that is different to the region I am based	no
To see if any of the issues covered would be of interest to the Local Access Forums and to my family as farmers in the north east	The sharing of information
Networking, CPD	Contacts, information
Updates of information and events	Updates of information and events
Useful for work	Training and networking opportunities
To broaden knowledge and share others experience of rural matters	
As a rural councillor I feel it important to be involved in rural affairs and kept informed on rural affairs	Increase of rural awareness and problems associated with rural issues
I thought it might be of some use and I could contribute	networking
On steering group and information assists me with my profession	Early provision of information and networking opportunities
to get an understanding of northern rural issues	as above
It allows us an easy route to discussions about developing policy agendas and regular engagement with relevant academic researchers	see three above, networking, idea generation
I have a professional and personal interest in rural issues	keeping up with what is going on
It puts on relevant events where I can learn from colleagues	Learning new ways of doing things or learning new information by keeping up to date with latest developments.
Asked to give a talk on a course for NRN	Networking through talking on course, learning from others on course and general networking opportunities
Interest	Keeping up to date with developments and informed of events
Opportunity to share knowledge and expertise across organisations.	Greater appreciation of business drivers in the rural environment.
attended an event	
Because they hold interesting and relevant events, talks etc	networking, education, information sharing
[Included due to role at work]	
Opportunity to explore wider policy issues and best practice	Networking with practitioners in similar areas of work and access to academic networks and research
To keep in touch with regional rural affairs and to network with other rural practitioners	networking, keeping up to date , finding out about funding opportunities
Was automatically registered having been a post-grad student. I am happy to be a member as have an interest in the topics.	Keeping up to date with information and thinking

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

Useful information source and they offer a wide range of interesting events relevant to current role	No
good way of networking across wider area than the county I work in and useful for building up CPD. I also like to learn by seeing.	time spent with people who were experts in their field, getting access to independent views.
CPD AND NETWORKING	NO
I thought that the NRN would give me many useful information for my study.	Receiving information related to rural development
Joint ran some events that I attended with RDPE network	Not especially - it seemed to happen automatically
Interesting subject matter, relevant to my work	Knowledge and intelligence
In the absence of a professional institute for practitioners engaged in rural development and countryside management, I joined the NRN to exchange information and extend my knowledge and understanding of rural affairs.	Access to a wide community with common interests in the sustainability of rural communities and the countryside. An enhanced knowledge and understanding of rural affairs. A forum for debating current affairs and specific themes or policy areas. An audience for disseminating research findings and informing others of current activities.
As a national organisation we have an interest in keeping up to date with the rural networks. NRN offers an excellent opportunity to network with rural leads we would not normally see.	Rural networking across different agendas
Some topics of interest	Information
interest as a community activist	up to date knowledge of the topics involved
Great learning opportunity on a broad range of relevant rural development topics; plenty of examples of good practice; chance to get to know others engaged with rural development; it's free!	better understanding on rural development issues; inspiration;
To share and to learn	
To attend events and engage with university colleagues	Find new ideas, meet other practitioners
[Invited to event]	
Anything that co-ordinates rural policy across the northern hills interests me.	
Good opportunities for networking with colleagues and for finding up-to-date info from targeted research across the environmental & rural economy fields	Specific access to determine the direction of future research projects - limited success, more due to having access to Philip Lowe as a Board Member of Countryside Agency
Beneficial to work area and networking	Knowledge and networking
Networking Local information	Networking Local information
Became LEADER Project Co-ordinator, therefore links into Network v useful	Networking opportunities, top events and speakers, interesting debates with people not usually in networks I wander in.

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

Events relevant to my work and offering a source of up to date information, otherwise difficult to find.	Information I could use in lectures and to keep up with policy developments. Make contacts which could be useful
Useful network and relevant topics for events. Linked to my work.	Contacts and opportunities relating to my role in rural knowledge exchange.
Valuable work-related network	Relevant contacts and event participation
So that I was aware of events/seminars etc	
to get up to date information	as above
It is relevant to the work I do - projecting managing community based employability and skills hubs in deep rural areas	Networking and partnership building
Relevancy to work sphere of interest and activity	Improvement of professional knowledge
As an Rural Community Council Officer, rural issues, and community development are core to my work role.	
To keep up to date with rural policy and networking with others	
I worked within CRE at University of Newcastle	Networking; Development; Policy awareness; Increased engagement with those delivering interventions
To keep in touch with rural issues in NE England and as a networking mechanism.	
I work in rural development and was interested in the seminars etc on offer	Greater knowledge of certain technical areas
Useful network and events	Keeping up to date with rural development news and thinking
Interest in rural economy	Information exchange
Interest in rural social enterprise	Knowledge, networking
Information very relevant to my old role in Countryside Agency	Dealing with Stakeholder Relationships important to understand other people's perspectives. Increasing my knowledge of key issues and potential solutions. I have also presented at events so contributed to furthering my skills and experience.
The courses and conferences had been useful when I was a postgraduate student for their factual information and case studies and for the people you meet at the events. Working outside academia I wanted to continue these links and the link back to the research and researchers at CRE.	
Useful for my work.	Meeting opportunities
Useful range of events and networking	Knowledge transfer from good events. Ability to use NRN to publicise my own events. Possibility of influencing policy - local, regional and national.
links to best practice for Humber Rural Pathfinder activities 2005 - 2008	As 3

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

Useful to hear what is going on	Learning about what is available to help
Very relevant to work	No
Via a farming charity	Access to academic information
I work for Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) and I'm undertaking a PhD in rural partnerships. The NRN is very relevant to me.	Meeting new people and learning from their experiences.
I am interested in and care about rural issues.	Make a difference for those who live and work in a rural area
My work relates to whole of Northern England and this NRN covers that area and it concerns rural issues across this area	as above and networking across agencies ,and vcs
Interest in academic connection to policy	notification of events
I'm interested in the rural economy	To keep up with current rural policy issues and real world problems.
On the basis that it would provide relevant information and networking opportunities that would support me in delivering our objectives in rural areas.	No
Good networking	Insights into rural priorities
As although we work on rural housing, it is important to see the wider picture on rural issues.	Opportunities to network and to learn more on changes in policy/funding for rural issues.
To keep abreast of opportunities for myself and for colleagues and clients	See above
Was beneficial to my work within the University	
I have the role of Rural Champion for Durham CC	Up to date information on a range if issues impacting on rural communities
To network and share good practice with other areas	No
Because networking is one of the most effective means of sharing experience, ideas and developing new initiatives	Opportunity to share ideas, experience, best practice, be inspired, develop partnerships
To be able to share good practice	Be able to discuss similar issues with members in different areas
Access to quality learning experiences in the region	Good practice independently identified
I was part of the organisation	Stakeholder and academic contacts, research dissemination and knowledge exchange opportunity, raised profile
Relu	No
Network contacts, presentation opportunities	none
Relevant events and information	See 3
Joined as a student during MSc in Rural Social Science	Networking with rural businesses
	Information about developments in work related to AD
To find out more about how a reportedly successful network operates and to become more informed about the issues the Network addresses.	As 3 above.

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

I was invited by NRN	
To understand what was happening in the area.	Networking and best practice.
[Council representative]	This is a rural council and has to deal with all the rural issues raised
Excellent means to network pan region on rural issues	Yes a closer insight into the academic sector in the North of England
Opportunity to network across north of England and because it dealt with rural issues	knowledge and understanding
Good networking between professionals, academics and practitioners	
Helpful to my work	Networking and useful information
Linked to my work first with the Countryside Agency and later with Natural England	Useful to share latest thinking- excellent networking opportunities
Learning in new post	Learning and networking
After attending a seminar	To hear about events that would be of value to me at work
Because I'm involved in delivery work in rural uplands and in strategy and policy influencing	Information and network opportunities
In order to be able to work jointly with the NRN, thus pooling resources, expertise, information etc. so that we could support each other in achieving the aims of our organisations.	Develop a better understanding of the breadth of rural development related stakeholders in the north of England + Develop networking contacts.
relevant to my interests	Up to date on topical issues

	<b>Q4_a_i If you have any comments on the way the benefits have been greater, different or lower than those expected please tell us here</b>
Greater benefits than expected	The depth and range of issues has been significantly greater than I expected and some of the networking contacts have been extremely useful.
	I have been very impressed with the range and type of events offered and i have come in to contact with leading researchers and these have proved very useful contacts
	Other forums, seminars have not had the academic underpinning
	I have been very pleased at the high quality of the events offered by NRN
	Benefits vary in direct relevance depending on subject matter in focus but overall the content is very relevant to the NNPA
	Seminars with various subjects like regeneration programme and the change of rural policy.
	very high class speakers and participants
	The ability to attend through work made me realise that the benefits were greater than I originally thought. Network of colleagues has grown considerably. I'm a useless networker - these have helped. I wish I could of attended more
	Greater range and depth of information derived
	Understanding of other's perspectives which informs approached to advocacy and delivery.

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

	<p>good mix of people and topics</p> <p>Well attended events (very important), informative speakers.</p> <p>Quality of speakers and the business like way events are organised</p> <p>A very important contact was made</p> <p>Excellent network and interdisciplinary in terms of rural stakeholders / Excellent discussions with superb chairmanship to include everyone / workshops have very good formats and themes are up to date</p> <p>existence of a regular programme of activity - continuity</p> <p>Really good quality events with high quality inputs. I appreciate this hugely.</p> <p>The NRN has provided information on a broader range of issues than I had originally anticipated + Opened up a larger range of networking contacts.</p>
Same benefits as expected	<p>Perhaps a little disappointed that many of the subjects are too remote for me - connections too tenuous. I struggled to get forestry on to the agenda, but succeeded in getting one meeting (in nearly 10 years!). This has been followed by one on renewable energy, which I was equally keen to support. But the scope is so wide that I probably only attend about meeting a year, if that. This is not really a criticism, but something I had not anticipated to this extent.</p> <p>Fewer businesses involved that anticipated but a lot of very useful material covered in the events, and made available through the websites.</p> <p>Contacts are not that appropriate to business type.</p> <p>Always interesting and stimulating</p> <p>I have benefit a great deal from the NRN but don't feel that I have maximised the opportunities and the seminars events are perhaps not frequent enough.</p> <p>I have not had much engagement over the last 3 years, so benefits have been less during this period</p> <p>My interest is particularly in the CAP and its development. Certain events have been especially useful, but most are not. They then appeal to different participants. The opportunities for networking have been much less than I anticipated as I do not come from the North and most delegates do.</p> <p>I have felt that it is more a NE group rather than a wider North group, as most of the events have been across in the NE area which is a distance for us to travel (= time and expense), and some of the topics have been more NE focussed and rural economy focussed, and less on issues affecting Cumbria, rural communities and housing.</p>
Different benefits	<p>Focus of NRN has changed with greater bias towards economic development with much less emphasis on social aspects of rural affairs</p> <p>I have little time for seminars etc - much more useful to have web based information.</p> <p>Encountered a wide range of activities, some more relevant than others Encountered a wide range of rural issues - some more relevant than others. Encountered RELU Research Programme with useful impacts during Pathfinder 3 years and afterwards - including RELU Fellowships for staff members and attendance at RELU events.</p> <p>participation has been useful in terms of keeping current with what is important to rural organisations (as opposed to rural businesses)</p>
Fewer benefits	<p>Not convinced enough is done to engage the private sector interest seems because of funding</p> <p>Many of the topics addressed have not been of interest.</p> <p>Not hugely convenient having the network based and operating largely in the NE, a split centre would have helped.</p>

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

10. If you have any specific examples of how your engagement with the NRN has positively impacted your work (and would be prepared to share with us) please give details here:	11. If you have any further comments on the usefulness, scope, value or applicability of NRN events or activities in relation to your work please use the space below:
My personal professional development is significant in my role in communications (forestry) - so there is a considerable spin-off.	
Links with the wider university and in particular the ESRC rural land use programme have been very helpful.	
Organisation benefits by bringing together rural businesses both in networking and making aware of what other people do. in addition the information provided of proposed government policy is important in how we run our businesses.	
It has been very useful to make the link between delivery on the ground (advice to farmers/land managers) and academia / research. we have made use of these links now when organising training events and others	
sharing costs for events has enabled us to deliver those events more efficiently, we have benefitted from the team's knowledge of RDPE delivery in the north and also contacts who we have been able to approach as speakers for events etc.	
Have embedded the rural business survey as a key policy measure both within the Northumberland uplands leader approach and the statutory state of the park reporting at Northumberland national park authority. seen the value of intelligence (as opposed to information) research provided by the network and CRE in particular and have agreed a three year research programme	National links with the RDPE network (now in Defra) are valuable in both finding new innovative solutions and sharing the frustrations with colleagues elsewhere in England regarding the administrative monster we face.
Meeting other researchers, both private and public sector. Maintaining links with CRE. Accessing materials for research. Keeping up to date on policy agendas.	
one or two of the events I thought members should attend. however there was no interest.	I believe that the problems facing the rural economy should be shared with those people who have an interest in access.
	networking, chance to catch up and discuss issues both formally and informally

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

The events I have attended have been very useful.	None
none	It feels like a talking shop for civil servants and those already in the "know" to justify endeavouring what they do. sounds like a quango which should just go
The NRN provides the most efficient forum for practitioners to keep engaged with both policy development and academic research linked to rural development. it provides the only opportunity to discuss these topics with interested parties from a very wide range of backgrounds.	I would be very supportive of the NRN continuing beyond 2011.
being connected with another region, it's a little out of my area I haven't been able to attend events but very useful knowing what is going on	presentation etc to download
a chance to talk to people in a different 'sphere' of rural policy and research to those I usually encounter	The NRN has been of great value to crc in broadening our knowledge and local contacts in the north of England. it's effects have spread beyond the north of England.
kept me up to date with events etc	very useful
	I can only attend events that are accessible by public transport which has prevented me from attending several events that I would have like to have gone to.
contacts gained have led to several areas of research being undertaken with CRE which have greatly helped in developing policy and programme approaches in the national park.	
	my time is becoming more restrained so I struggle to get to the events. NRN may need to consider this as a widespread effect across sectors as public finances squeeze.
Useful to network with colleagues across the region and beyond.	

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

NRN held a valuable and most timely event examining the future for upland areas, coinciding with the culmination of the commission for rural communities' inquiry on this topic. it succeeded in raising the national profile of the north's upland communities and providing a national platform to announce the policy priorities emerging from the CRC inquiry.	NRN fulfils a need for professional development in rural affairs and addresses topical issues. it serves rural interests and informs and educates practitioners covering diverse geographic regions and a wide range of disciplines in a way that perhaps a professional institute for rural practitioners and policymakers might have done.
	as a farmer I found energy information useful. while some of the other might have an impact on my business, they are not something I can benefit from hearing/discussing at an event.
The NRN's work re Matthew Taylor has helped us and our colleagues to move the provision of affordable housing up the agenda, and has been a salutary reminder re the other interested parties.	
as the uplands specialist for the TFA I am only interested in increasing food production and preserving the landscape in the uplands with profitability as a main aim hence a lot of the above is not of great interest and is time consuming.	
engagement with researchers in the CRE helped to define a research project that ca commissioned jointly with the CPRE on relative tranquillity	Very useful to network & share knowledge, particularly over the wider area of northern regions - it is easy to get isolated & reinvent stuff that has already been done in another area.
RDPE range of speakers excellent and inspiring; fabulous leveller for the lone worker in leader	
most of Alan Buckwell's lectures are tremendously useful to me and a source of up to date data I use in lectures	
We were able to use the NRN as an exemplar to set up a very successful similar initiative elsewhere in the UK.	
	Range, and relevance to rural economy / communities, of NRN events are strengths. generally delivery is 'applied', but occasionally the academic focus limits relevance / application

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

	it would be most useful to have a more proactive engagement with the many other rural forums across the ne, especially a central information point to give a more comprehensive overview of activities and strengthen lobbying, planning etc.
	NRN has been a very useful way of bringing rural practitioners and policy makers together and has been a useful source of information on topical rural issues.
Used CRE work on rural economies/city regions to inform preparation of a rural strategy for the hull and Humber ports city region useful discussions around this issue at NRN events.	
	I was much more engaged in past years with NRN as it directly related to my work. More recently we have limited numbers of staff attending these and other priorities have prevented my attendance. Nevertheless, I am fully supportive of it and feel it provides a critical network.
I can't remember much about the above as they are spread over quite a period of time.	
exposure to range of views on impacts of changes to rural policy has helped my work as a local government rural policy adviser	
I met roger hemming through the NRN and subsequently invited him to talk to staff at NNPA about his community experiences. I also learned about hydro-schemes in Cumbria and passed on the case studies to others in Northumberland looking to do the same. useful for meeting new people and finding out what they are up to.	The NRN is invaluable and I would urge that it is retained and reinvented in the future to keep it fresh and relevant.
made contact with institutions present	
Used the network to promote events for the north east rural affairs forum; excellent range of delegates attend from a variety of backgrounds.	The scope is varied and network of contacts is excellent.
It was useful to attend the Matthew Taylor event to hear him speak.	as stated before, the emphasis on NRN has been more on the economic side, which has some impact on our work on rural housing, but the link between rural economies and rural housing has not been covered that I know of.

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

Durham economic partnership has a rural group and information from NRN is used by this group.	my involvement with NRN has been very supportive in my role with DCC
	<p>NRN has been an excellent example of the university acting as a neo-endogenous intermediary, bridging the region and its localities with extra regional networks and expertise. it has served to 'import' research and policy expertise from across the UK, and in turn provided a conduit for CRE and the region to contribute to national debates, which has raised the profile of CRE in the region and beyond. NRN events and activities have also been useful in 'showcasing' our own 'research' as well as our 'expertise', and to demonstrate the university's active role in rural development and its knowledge needs (ranging from setting up Northumbria larder, the business surveys, to student placements out in policy and practice). I see these dual roles becoming even more necessary in the coming years as the established institutions and players of rural development are shaken up - with NRN operating as a knowledge exchange hub for rural development regionally but also nationally. in future it would be good to clearly tease out the best examples of NRN's impacts on policy or practice, as well as conceiving the network as a research impact in its own right. another area could be to explore the role of the NRN as providing a conduit for people exchange - a means through which Newcastle researchers might embed themselves within policy and practice for short periods, or through which stakeholders might become involved in research or university.</p>
current awareness	
the business contact we made has proved very useful to the development of our project	
Informed our work to support the establishment of south west rural update - based at the royal agricultural college.	

## APPENDIX 2 QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES, *Contd.*

helped the writing of the brief for the council's landscape character assessment	
leader programme education about rural development in England for lag members in north Yorkshire / pan regional working and issues uncovered through NRN	excellent please keep the network open and alive
Can't imagine doing my work without the learning I have gained from NRN events.	Brings a wide range of people together who work in the rural field but who don't necessarily come together anywhere else in a space that allows constructive debate and free thinking.
Please see my previous comments above.	I think there are future opportunities for the NRN to continue to work collaboratively with other networks and academic institutions, both in the UK and Europe, to take the concept of neo-endogenous rural development forward.
over the years I have attended a number of useful one day events that were very relevant to my work in the rural and farming sector	