

Communication Plan 2007-2010

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The overall aim of the RELU programme is to conduct research on the connections between rural economy and land use. The results will support the achievement of sustainable rural development, encompassing the social and economic vitality of rural areas and the conservation and protection of the rural environment. The programme has the following specific objectives:

Science Objective

To deliver integrative, interdisciplinary research of high quality that will advance understanding of the social, economic, environmental and technological challenges faced by rural areas and the relationship between them.

Capacity Building Objective

To enhance and expand capabilities for integrative, interdisciplinary research on rural issues.

Knowledge Transfer Objective

To enhance the impact of research on rural policy and practice by involving stakeholders in all stages of RELU, including programme development, research activities and communication of outcomes.

- 1.2 The Communication Plan sets out how these objectives will be achieved through communication of RELU's purpose, work and results and the active engagement of stakeholders with the programme.
- 1.3 Communication and stakeholder engagement must be a continuous and iterative process, in which stakeholders are engaged as active partners in establishing the priorities and foci of the programme, and not treated merely as the passive recipients of the results of the research when completed. The various communication activities have been designed to ensure this two-way communication process.
- 1.4 RELU stakeholders are those organisations with an interest in the programme. That includes the scientific community as well as the public, private and voluntary sectors. The RELU programme is expected to provide a body of evidence to inform policy and practice in the field of rural economy and land use. Communication activities will help to ensure that the programme and its results are relevant to policy makers and practitioners and that they are presented in a manner that is accessible to a broad and diverse audience.
- 1.5 The research community must be actively engaged in the RELU programme not only to ensure that good research is done but also to achieve the broader objectives of the programme regarding both stakeholder engagement and promoting interdisciplinarity. On the one hand, the programme will require effective networking and exchange between RELU researchers and interested

stakeholders. On the other hand, the programme will facilitate the internal exchange of experience and good practice concerning interdisciplinarity.

- 1.6 The Plan informs the communication activities of the programme as a whole as well as those of individual projects. Project co-ordinators and researchers will be expected to make a tangible commitment of their time to programme level networking, communication and dissemination actions.
- 1.7 This updated version of the RELU Communication Plan covers the communication activities for the period 2007 to November 2010.

2. Communication Aims

- 2.1 For operational purposes it is necessary to distinguish between internal and external communication aims while recognising that this is a somewhat artificial divide. Indeed, if external stakeholders are to feel that they have a genuine stake in the programme and if grant-holders and researchers are to be engaged in the wider purposes of the programme, it is desirable that the internal and external audiences are not segregated but overlap and interact.

External communication aims

- to maximise the utility and responsiveness of the programme to a wide range of stakeholders and potential beneficiaries of the research
- to highlight the contribution of the programme to issues of public interest and to provide inputs into policy and public debate
- to complement and inform other national and international research programmes relevant to RELU
- to update and maintain the RELU brand as an authoritative source of research excellence and expertise
- to be openly accountable and demonstrate the value for public resourcing of the programme

Internal communication aims

- to facilitate networking between programme participants and wider research and stakeholder communities
- to promote synergies, information exchange and interdisciplinary collaboration between projects
- to maintain the profile of the programme within the policies and activities of the Research Councils
- to facilitate the effective execution of the programme
- to acknowledge the intellectual contribution of the researchers, institutions and stakeholders

3. Audiences

- 3.1 From these communication aims we can identify various audiences with which RELU must engage in different ways:

RELU award holders

This group encompasses those conducting projects funded by RELU. It includes research staff and students, as well as research leaders.

The scientific community interested in RELU

This group encompasses the biological, environmental and social scientists with an interest in research on rural economy and land use. It includes those individuals, organisations and institutions with a specific interest in the direction of RELU and the outputs it will produce.

The Research Councils

This group includes the ESRC, BBSRC and NERC as the three sponsoring research councils, as well as the umbrella Research Councils UK.

Stakeholders

These are organisations in the public, private or voluntary sectors that have an interest in the RELU programme and particularly those that contribute to forming future policy and practice.

General public

This includes the broader public beyond the scientific and stakeholder communities, but with an interest in the societal issues surrounding rural economy and land use.

4. Communication Activities

- 4.1 The communication aims are realised through a number of activities which form the main work programme of the Director's Office, including:

- Stakeholder forums
- Stakeholder Engagement Plans
- Work shadowing scheme
- Visiting fellowship scheme
- Consultations
- Ambassadorial role of Director's Office
- Workshop and event series
- Publication and electronic dissemination actions
- Research Councils' communication
- Liaison with projects
- Communications advice and support for individual projects

- 4.2 These activities are closely linked to the overarching communication objectives (Table 1) and to specific RELU audiences (Table 2). These activities may be replaced or modified as RELU matures and in response to periodic review of the Communication Plan.

Table 1: Communication Activities and Objectives

Communication Activities	External Communication					Internal Communication			
	Maximise utility and responsiveness	Be openly accountable	Contribute to policy and public debate	Informing other research programmes	Maintaining RELU brand	Networking with research and stakeholder communities	Collaboration between projects	Maintaining profile within the Research Councils	Effective programme execution
Stakeholder forums	√	√	√		√	√		√	
Stakeholder Engagement Plans	√	√	√	√	√	√			
Work shadowing scheme	√		√			√			
Visiting fellowship scheme	√	√	√			√			
Consultations	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Ambassadorial role of Director's office	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	
Workshop and event series	√	√	√		√	√	√		√
Publication and electronic dissemination actions	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Research Councils' communication		√		√	√			√	√
Liaison with projects	√				√		√		√

Table 2: Communication Activities and Audiences

	RELU Award Holders	The interested scientific community	Research Councils	Stakeholders	General public
Stakeholder forums	√			√	
Stakeholder Engagement Plans				√	
Work shadowing scheme	√			√	
Visiting fellowship scheme	√			√	
Consultations	√	√	√	√	
Ambassadorial role of Director's Office		√	√	√	
Workshop and event series	√	√	√	√	√
Publication and electronic dissemination actions					
• <i>RELU web site</i>	√	√	√	√	√
• <i>RELU newsletter</i>	√	√	√	√	
• <i>Briefingpaper series</i>	√	√	√	√	
• <i>Policy and practice notes</i>	√	√	√	√	
• <i>Specialist articles</i>				√	√
• <i>Press releases</i>	√	√		√	√
• <i>Popular media</i>	√	√	√	√	√
• <i>Special issues</i>	√	√			
• <i>Textbookon interdisciplinary techniques</i>	√	√	√		
Research Councils' communication		√	√		√
Liaison with projects	√				

4.3 Stakeholder forums

Stakeholder forums are a prime means to ensure that RELU research is relevant to policy and practice. The Strategic Advisory Committee (SAC), serviced by the Research Councils, is the overarching Stakeholder Forum for RELU providing strategic advice on the programme's overall research development.

Two additional forums, coordinated by the Director's Office, address RELU's main sub-themes: the first one covering the *Food Chain*, the second one dealing with *People and the Rural Environment*. Each forum brings together key individuals from public, commercial and voluntary organisations. Each forum has the following functions:

- sounding board on research programme development
- sounding board on stakeholder and user engagement in the programme and individual projects

- rolling commission to explore core questions of public and policy interest related to RELU research
- advice on the rolling Communication Plan

The forums are relatively informal, small scale, and meet twice a year, with individuals offering expert advice in a personal rather than organisational capacity. Co-ordinators from particular RELU projects are invited to attend and discuss their research.

RELU projects will be commissioned to prepare focused policy and practice statements for critical comment by forum members prior to revision and dissemination (see 4.10).

Membership of the forums is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it includes representatives who can bring expertise and experience that is relevant to the breadth of research being carried out within the RELU Programme.

4.4 Stakeholder Engagement Plans

Through bilateral meetings with the Director's Office, stakeholders will continue to be involved as active partners in establishing the priorities and focus of the programme. The meetings will also be used to explore the expectations and potential role of a selection of key stakeholders in relation to RELU.

Sustained involvement of stakeholders in the programme will continue to be sought. The modalities of engagement with stakeholders will vary and, where appropriate, they will be set out in individual *Stakeholder Engagement Plans* (SEPs) set up with a selection of key stakeholders. The SEPs are brief and outline the main modes of engagement between the stakeholder and RELU. The SEPs provide:

- the basis by which the stakeholder can inform its own members, as well as broader interests, of its links with RELU
- mechanisms whereby stakeholders can inform the development of RELU, to maximise the value and impact of the research
- a basis for coordinating the relationship between the stakeholder and the potentially large number of RELU award holders interested in engaging with it
- a basis for tailoring the communication of research results to the stakeholders needs and providing bespoke mechanisms for engagement in the programme

The SEP is based on a menu of possibilities, which include:

- Support of RELU stakeholder forums
- Work shadowing and visiting fellowships
- Co-funding of the programme or specific research projects
- Sponsorship of specific events
- Provision of data or other services

- Nomination of a named RELU contact to receive RELU communications, to disseminate these as appropriate and to be a main point of contact for consultation in relation to programme development and knowledge transfer

SEPs have been established with five key partners:

1. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2. Environment Agency
3. Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department
4. UK Water Industry Research
5. Welsh Assembly Government

4.5 All the individual projects within the programme have stakeholder involvement built into the research, some to a very high level. The Director's Office provides support and advice on stakeholder involvement when required.

4.6 **Work shadowing scheme**

The *Work Shadowing Scheme* supports RELU's capacity building and knowledge transfer objectives by providing an opportunity to introduce RELU research staff to the action-contexts in which their research may be used, whether within commercial organisations, voluntary bodies or public agencies. Potential hosts for placements include stakeholder partners of the programme or of individual projects. The placements last between one week and one month with the programme covering eligible travel and subsistence costs to a maximum of £500 per week and £2000 in total per placement.

4.7 **Visiting fellowship scheme**

Visiting Fellowships, which are organised in a similar way to the Work Shadowing, enable policy makers and practitioners from the commercial, voluntary or public sector to visit a RELU research team or cluster of teams, so that they can explore the implications of the research for their work and raise awareness of their interests among the researchers. The placements last between one week and one month with the programme covering eligible travel and subsistence costs to a maximum of £500 per week and £2000 in total per placement.

4.7 **Consultations**

Major consultations have been carried out (for example through the RELU web site) around each of the funding calls to shape the direction of the programme and its research priorities. More targeted consultations are undertaken with RELU stakeholders. In addition the Director's Office will itself respond to or orchestrate programme responses to key stakeholder consultations. This is an important means through which the programme can influence policy and science policy agendas.

4.8 **Ambassadorial role of Director's Office**

The ambassadorial role of the Director and his office is pursued through meetings and presentations at national and international gatherings, media interviews, meetings with decision makers, and engagement in key stakeholder forums. The Director will also seek to ensure that RELU complements, learns from and informs other relevant national and international research programmes.

4.9 **Events**

A programme of regular conferences and workshops is coordinated by the Director's Office.

Programme Wide Events bring together large numbers of award holders and stakeholders. These have played an important role in encouraging the formation of a RELU research and stakeholder community. As the programme comes to maturity the emphasis will move towards a dissemination phase. Three more major events of this kind are planned for the communication period 2007-2010 for Autumn 2007, Autumn 2008 and Autumn 2010. The last of these events will be the end of Programme conference.

Scoping and Thematic Review Workshops are more focused than the programme-wide events and aim either to establish the scope for collaborative investigation around key cross-cutting themes or to pursue a synthesis of research outcomes and their policy implications relating to key synoptic topics of public policy. Three events of this kind are planned, one in 2007, one in 2008 and one in 2009.

Training events are organised in interdisciplinary working and related themes, and involve researchers from across the RELU Programme.

In addition to the workshop and event series organised at programme level, award holders are encouraged to convene additional inter-project seminars and workshops around key themes, using a specific fund for this held by the Programme Director's Office. These workshops will encourage integrated activities, perspectives and outputs from the large number of projects funded by RELU.

Other, more public events have also been organised, particularly for the ESRC Festival of Social Science/National Science and Engineering Week.

4.10 **Publication and electronic dissemination actions**

Information about the programme is disseminated through the RELU website and a quarterly newsletter. Press releases are issued on newsworthy events and research findings. These are a means of informing the wider public about the results of the programme. Specialist articles are prepared for technical and professional magazines. The Director's Office also provides specialist advice and support to individual projects on their communications activities.

RELU web site

The web-site is maintained as the prime source of general information about the programme. Key features of the site include:

- RELU aims, information and policies
- Project information and links to project web sites
- Key contacts for projects
- Stakeholder information and links to stakeholder web sites
- Access to newsletters and programme briefings
- Event and workshop announcements and diary
- Links to Data Support Service
- Contact registration

The website will also remain as a key feature of the legacy of the RELU programme and is being redesigned and updated in 2007 with this in mind.

RELU newsletter

This is an electronic news sheet produced quarterly to cover the periods Jan-Mar, Apr-Jun, Jul-Sep and Oct-Dec and is distributed to the RELU mail base of 2000 interested stakeholders and researchers. The newsletter includes project level information, news stories and articles on projects and events. The quarterly newsletter is occasionally supplemented by RELU newsflashes on major news items.

Briefing paper series

The programme briefing paper series reviews the scope and outcomes of programme research. The series provides a means by which RELU can impact on science and innovation policy. Five briefing papers have been published so far and at least four more are planned during the life of the programme. Themes being addressed in the briefing papers include good practice of interdisciplinary research, the rural economy and land use futures, guidance on data management and knowledge exchange.

Policy and Practice notes

Each project will produce a policy and practice note, which will be a short document outlining the most important findings from the research and the policy and practice implications. These will be produced in accessible language, using a common format and will provide a concise means of communicating the results of the research as widely as possible to a range of audiences. Some groups of projects may also be commissioned to produce similar documents that cut across all of their findings.

Specialist articles

Articles are prepared for technical and professional magazines to raise the profile of RELU and to disseminate its research findings.

Press releases

Press releases are issued on newsworthy events and research findings and these will increase as more research results become available.

Popular media

We are exploring the potential for dissemination of RELU research in various popular outlets, including film and popular books. These would make the research available to a wider audience and stimulate public discussion about the challenges facing rural areas.

Journal special issues

A special issue of the Journal of Agricultural Economics, has already been published, containing articles arising from the research programme and crossing disciplines. The production of a special issue of a journal is planned for each of RELU's main rounds of funding.

Text book on interdisciplinary research

The projects have accumulated a vast amount of experience in how to carry out successful research across several disciplines. Although interdisciplinary research is increasingly seen as essential in tackling complex challenges, no standard text book exists reviewing different research methods. We are exploring how the experience accumulated within the programme might be brought together into a text book that could be used by students and researchers setting out on interdisciplinary research projects.

4.10 Research Councils' communication

The Director will report to the RELU Strategic Advisory Committee and Management Advisory Group and ESRC Strategic Research Board on the suite of activities and overall programme objectives. The Director will engage in key meetings with ESRC, BBSRC and NERC personnel and RELU assessment panels. An overarching objective will be to maintain the accountability of the programme and to ensure its profile within the Research Councils. We will continue to offer guidance to the Research Councils on research policy and procedure. In addition a Programme Annual Report will be prepared for the Research Councils in March 2007, March 2008, March 2009 and March 2010.

4.11 Liaison with projects

There needs to be full 'buy in' to the Communication Plan on the part of project leaders. To help secure this, requirements relating to the Plan are incorporated in all award offers. In particular RELU project leaders are asked to prepare a Project Communication and Data Management Plan which forms the operational basis of the Director's Office project monitoring and programme planning system.

Close liaison is maintained with project co-ordinators (for example requesting highlights every quarter for the newsletter concerning progress and dissemination). The Director's Office visits each project during the course of the communication period. A project induction meeting is taking place for new call 3 project PIs in 2007.

Projects are encouraged to take up the opportunities presented by an Inter-research project exchange/workshop fund which will reimburse minor travel expenses to allow researchers from different projects to meet and plan joint research and dissemination activities.

5 Plans for legacy of RELU

In conclusion, over the next two to three years the Director's office will be planning the legacy of the RELU programme in order to ensure a lasting resource for future researchers, stakeholders and the public.

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