

RELU COMMUNICATION PLAN (VERSION 8, September 2005)

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 public, private and voluntary organisations. 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 The RELU Communication Plan will be reviewed periodically against a number of performance measures and will be adjusted in light of the outcomes of the main RELU calls and profile of projects. The Plan currently covers the communication activities for the period June 2003 to November 2006 (research activity under RELU is planned up until 2009).

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.

2.2 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 establish the RELU brand as an authoritative source of research excellence and expertise

2.3 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 (including taking forward the programme strategy, programme commissioning, and monitoring and reporting of programme outcomes and progress)

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, scoping studies, capacity building and development activities 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 potential applicants for RELU funding, as well as those 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.

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, including:

- Stakeholder fora
- Bilateral engagement with key stakeholders
- Consultations on the programme
- Ambassadorial role of Director
- Workshop and event series
- Publication and electronic dissemination actions
- Research Councils' communication
- Liaison with projects

4.2 These activities are closely linked to the overarching communication objectives (Annexe 1) and to specific RELU audiences (Table 1). Other communication activities may be developed as RELU unfolds beyond 2006 and in response to periodic review of the Communication Plan. It is probable, for example, that as RELU research projects begin to generate major findings that the Communication Plan will place greater emphasis on public engagement. In the meantime, the interested public will be kept informed about RELU through local and national media, the RELU web site and specific public engagement activities.

Table 1: Communication Activities and Audiences

	RELU Award Holders	The interested scientific community (including potential RELU applicants)	Research Councils	Stakeholders	General public
Stakeholder fora	√			√	
Bilateral engagement with key stakeholders				√	
Consultations on the programme	√	√		√	
Ambassadorial role of Director		√		√	
Workshop and event series	√			√	
Publication and electronic dissemination actions					
<i>RELU web site</i>	√	√	√	√	√
<i>RELU newsletter</i>	√	√	√	√	
<i>Programme pamphlet</i>	√	√	√	√	√
<i>Briefing paper series</i>	√	√	√	√	
<i>Specialist articles</i>				√	√
<i>Press releases</i>	√	√		√	√
Research Councils' communication		√	√		√
Liaison with projects	√				

4.3 Stakeholder Fora (Annexe 2)

Stakeholder Fora are a prime means to ensure that RELU research is relevant to policy and practice. In addition to the programme's Strategic Advisory Committee two fora are established for each of RELU's two main sub-themes: Food Chains and People and the Rural Environment. Each forum acts as a sounding board on research programme development and RELU's stakeholder engagement and communication activities.

4.4 Bilateral engagement with key stakeholders (Annexe 3)

Through bilateral meetings stakeholders are involved as active partners in establishing the priorities and foci of the programme. Sustained involvement in the programme is sought through the negotiation of individual Stakeholder Engagement Plans (SEPs) with a selection of key stakeholders.

4.5 Consultations on the programme

Consultations (for example through the RELU web site) are used to shape the direction of the programme and its research specifications. More targeted consultations are undertaken with RELU stakeholders.

4.6 **Ambassadorial role of Director**

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

4.7 **Workshop and event series (Annexe 4)**

There are two main forms of workshop under RELU. *Programme Wide Events* (e.g. the RELU annual conference) will bring together large numbers of (potential or existing) award holders under RELU and are important in forming a RELU research community. A particular emphasis will be on fostering the transference and exchange of inter-disciplinary experience. *Scoping and Thematic Review Workshops* will be more focused than the programme level events and will consider either a meta concept that embraces scientific and societal perspectives or a key cross-cutting topic of public policy. A set of workshops and events are planned to be convened by the Director's office. Award holders will also be encouraged to convene additional inter-project workshops around common themes. These additional workshops will help ensure consolidated outputs from the large number of projects that RELU will be funding.

4.8 **Publication and electronic dissemination actions (Annexe 5)**

Information about the programme is disseminated through the RELU website, programme pamphlet and a regular newsletter. Press releases are issued on newsworthy events and research findings, and these are a means of informing the wider public about the results of the programme. There is a briefing paper series for stakeholders (also available on the website). Specialist articles are prepared for technical and professional magazines.

4.9 **Research Councils' communication**

The Director will report to the PMG, SAC, MAG and ESRC Research Priorities Board on the suite of activities and overall programme objectives. The Director will engage in key meetings with ESRC, BBSRC and NERC personnel. The objective will be to maintain the accountability of the programme and to ensure its profile within the Research Councils.

4.10 **Liaison with projects (Annexe 6)**

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 will be incorporated in all award offers. In particular RELU project leaders will be asked to prepare a Project Communication and Data Management Plan. Close liaison will continue through active links with project co-ordinators (for example requesting highlights every quarter for the newsletter concerning progress and dissemination) to ensure reciprocity between programme and project-level objectives.

ANNEXE 1: COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVES

External Communication					Internal Communication			
Communication Activities	Maximise users' interest	Contribute to policy and public debate	Influence other research programmes	Establish RELU brand	Networking with research and stakeholder communities	Collaboration between projects	Maintaining profile within the Research Councils	Effective programme execution
Stakeholder fora	√	√		√	√		√	
Bilateral engagement with key stakeholders	√		√	√				
Consultations on the programme	√	√	√	√	√			√
Ambassadorial role of Director	√	√	√	√			√	
Workshop and event series	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
Publication and electronic dissemination actions	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Research Councils' communication			√	√			√	√
Liaison with projects						√		√

ANNEXE 2: STAKEHOLDER FORA

A2.1 The Strategic Advisory Committee (SAC) is the overarching Stakeholder Forum for RELU providing strategic advice on the programme's overall research development. Two additional fora are established for each of RELU's two main sub-themes – the first one covering the food chain, the second one dealing with People and the Rural Environment. Each forum brings together a few key individuals from public, commercial and voluntary organisations, together with a small number of SAC members. 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
- advice on the rolling Communication Plan
- source of experts for chairing of events

A2.2 The fora are relatively informal, small scale, meeting twice a year, with individuals offering expert advice in a personal rather than organisational capacity. Co-ordinators from particular RELU projects will be invited to attend and discuss their research. Travel and subsistence costs will be met centrally by the research councils.

ANNEXE 3: BILATERAL ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

A3.1 Through bilateral meetings with the Director, stakeholders will be involved as active partners in establishing the priorities and foci 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. The modalities of engagement with key stakeholders will vary and, where appropriate, they will be set out in individual Stakeholder Engagement Plans (SEPs).

A3.2 Sustained involvement in the programme is sought through the negotiation of individual Stakeholder Engagement Plans (SEPs) with a selection of key stakeholders. The SEPs are brief (usually in the form of a letter) 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 could include:

- Support of RELU stakeholder fora
- Co-funding of the programme or specific research projects
- Sponsorship of specific events
- Provision of data or other services to the programme
- Nomination of named RELU contact:
 - to receive RELU communications (and to disseminate these as appropriate);
 - as main point of contact for consultation in relation to programme development and knowledge transfer

A3.3 RELU has established bespoke SEPs with five key partners.

1. [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#), Contact: Dr Peter Costigan, Science Co-ordinator
2. [Environment Agency](#), Contact: Dr Bob Harris, Head of Air, Land and Water Science
3. [Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department](#), Contact: Dr Linda Pooley, Scientific Adviser
4. [UK Water Industry Research](#), Contact: Dr Mike Farrimond, Director
5. [Welsh Assembly Government](#), Contact: Fiona McFarlane, Senior Rural Development Adviser

ANNEXE 4: WORKSHOP AND EVENT SERIES

A4.1 *Programme Wide Events* bring together large numbers of (potential or existing) award holders under RELU. They are important in encouraging the formation of a RELU research community. A particular focus will be on fostering the exchange of good practice in interdisciplinary working and the development of inter-disciplinary capacity within the RELU research community and beyond. Two events of this kind have been planned for the 2003-2006 communication period, bringing together award holders under each of the first two calls of RELU.

- 19-21 January 2005 “The Challenge for Research”, Birmingham
- 18-20 January 2006 “Enabling Knowledge Exchange”, Manchester

A4.2 *Scoping and Thematic Review Workshops* are more focused than the programme-wide events and consider:

- either a meta concept that embraces scientific and societal perspectives (such as biosecurity, integrated food chains, rural economy, multifunctional agriculture or the learning catchment), to establish the scope for collaborative investigation (Scoping Workshop)
- or a key cross-cutting topic of public policy (such as animal disease management, rural proofing or water catchment planning), to pursue a synthesis of research outcomes and their policy implications (Thematic Review Workshops).

Each workshop seeks to achieve a common definition of the topic or concept under scrutiny, as well as mutual understanding of the perspectives of different disciplines on it.

A4.3 Workshops and events are planned and focused through the rolling RELU Communication Plan. Scoping seminars, for example, are scheduled with a view to shaping the development of RELU.

A4.4 The workshops and events are attended by a (varying) balance of academics and stakeholders. The academic participants are mainly from within the programme (holders of RELU awards and studentships) but key external experts from the UK and abroad are also invited, to strengthen the programme’s strategic linkages.

A4.5 In addition to the workshop and event series, award holders are encouraged by the Director to convene additional inter-project seminars and workshops around key themes, using a specific fund for this held by the Research Councils. These workshops will encourage integrated activities, perspectives and outputs from the potentially large numbers of projects funded by RELU.

ANNEXE 5: PUBLICATION AND ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION ACTIONS

A5.1 Information about the programme is disseminated through a set of publication and electronic dissemination actions, including:

- *RELU web site*

The web-site is used as a source of information about the programme. Key features of the site for Stage 1 of its development (the current Communication period) include:

- RELU aims and general information
- Project information
- Links to project web sites
- Links to stakeholder web sites
- Call information
- Access to newsletters, project and programme briefings
- Event and workshop announcements and diary
- List of publications
- Contact registration

- *RELU newsletter*

The RELU newsletter is an electronic news sheet produced quarterly to cover the periods Jan-Mar, Apr-Jun, Jul-Sep, Oct-Dec. It includes project level information, news stories and articles on projects and events.

- *Programme pamphlet*

A programme pamphlet is used in stakeholder engagement and public communication.

- *Briefing paper series*

Produced for stakeholders on key issues related to RELU . The series includes programme and individual project briefings; and a selection of cross-programme thematic briefings as specifically commissioned/written by the Director's Office.

- *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. The Director's Office will work with award holders in helping to manage the media's interest in RELU.

ANNEXE 6: REQUIREMENTS OF AWARD HOLDERS

A6.1 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. It is a **condition** of funding that the award holders:

- a) Collaborate in and contribute to the Programme in:
 - a. Informing the Directors Office about significant project achievements, highlights, events, publications, stakeholder engagement and press coverage (for possible inclusion in the RELU website or newsletter) and provide electronic copies of all publications arising from the award.
 - b. Co-operate with the Programme Director and other research teams in the Programme in discussing the progress of the research and be open to collaboration, networking, data exchange, co-ordination of activities/outputs and synergies with other RELU projects
 - c. Producing a website within 6 months of project start date and informing office of the link
 - d. At the invitation of the Programme Director, attend and contribute to Programme wide events and workshops and national stakeholder fora throughout the life of the Programme.
 - e. Acknowledge RELU funding in all media, publicity materials and publications derived from work funded by the award
- b) Engage project team members in RELU research training and capacity building activities.
- c) Encourage development and participation of ‘new’ and contract RELU researchers in programme activities and the presentation and discussion of research findings.
- d) Produce a draft Project Communication and Data Management plan within one month of start, in line with the overall RELU Communication and Data Management Plans. A short proforma will be provided for this purpose. The Plan will form a basis for regular monitoring of project progress. Progress in implementing the plan should be reported in the project’s annual progress reports, according to guidance from the Director’s Office.
- e) Respond to requests for oral and written updates on the progress of the award from the Research Councils or Programme Director.
- f) Provide an annual progress report to the Programme Director and Research Councils by 31 January each year, covering progress in the previous calendar year, according to guidance from the Director’s Office.
- g) Provide a final end of award report to the Research Councils and Programme Director within three months of the project end date according to guidance from the Research Councils