

## NOTES FROM PLENARY SESSION 2

Wednesday 19 January 2005

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I was asked to give my impressions of outcomes of the first day of the workshop, the afternoon session of which I chaired.

### Interdisciplinarity

There was the usual strong endorsement of this approach, but a concern that at a 3-year project level, this may be superficial. Longer term collaboration, or the development by RELU of an inter-disciplinary research culture, may be the goal.

There was some confusion regarding the level at which interdisciplinarity is valuable – at the very applied level everyone acknowledged the need for input from natural, economic and social sciences to problem solving, but was there a value to interdisciplinarity moving up to more basic research? The impression was that the role of RELU research here was to explore and develop new tools, rather than to solve specific problems. Several identified the value of an interdisciplinary approach in identifying the right research questions.

There was unanimous concern that the research assessment and funding systems do not recognize or reward interdisciplinarity, which was a strong disincentive.

### Stakeholder engagement

This was also identified as an important feature of RELU, but a difficult one. Lord Whitty identified public attitudes as *the* key issue for Defra's successful rural strategy. There are real challenges to engagement with stakeholders on research when it comes to interest groups, their influence and politics.

### Next steps for RELU

A number of suggestions emerged. There was a broad view that the project outputs of RELU may not be its main contribution. So many were convinced of the need for interdisciplinary sensitivity and cooperation in research that RELU might have the larger role of changing research culture. How could it achieve that?

Other more specific areas for the next call and beyond included:

1. taking a longer-term look, e.g. 10-15 years, at issues on the basis of modelling and prediction
2. tackling key issues which we know are important or emerging, perhaps through strictly defined calls or commissioning, such as the release of

large areas from farming following CAP reform, or animal disease and welfare.

3. collaborating with groups in other countries, particularly continental Europe to learn their lessons – local, public engagement on land use, pollution and water issues appears to be one area where we could learn.
4. addressing the question of why local government plays such a minor role in RELU-vant issues, and finding tools to engages and involve local government.