

## July 2017

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### 1 Relu evaluation highlights achievements

The Rural Economy and Land Use programme made a distinctive contribution, built interdisciplinary research capacity and gave rise to a significant number of impacts, according to independent evaluation now [available on line](#). The evaluation found that the programme:

- Generated multiple outputs of strong scientific quality, with its distinctive contribution lying particularly in integrative, interdisciplinary publications.
- Contributed distinctively to research capacity in the UK on two levels: the individual researcher and the research landscape. The experience of working in Relu projects has enhanced the effectiveness of individual researchers in either or both interdisciplinary research and knowledge exchange, while funder attitudes and subsequent programmes have been influenced by Relu.
- Has given rise to a significant number of impacts across a range of sectors and domains, including but not limited to those described in seventeen Research Excellence Framework 2014 impact case studies.
- Is unambiguously seen as a platform from which research funders themselves could and should learn, toward effective design and implementation of complex programmes.

### 2 Autumn workshops from the Sustainable Intensification Research Platform

Learn about the findings of the Sustainable Intensification Research Platform at a final series of workshops this October. Funded by Defra and the Welsh Government, the Platform is promoting new methods in farmland and landscape scale management to increase farm output and competitiveness, while protecting the countryside and enhancing environmental and social benefits. Sign up for the workshops to listen and share views about the work of the platform, including interacting with new practical tools for decision support.

Workshops are free to attend and run from 10 am to 3 pm on:

Friday 20 October	North Wyke, Okehampton, Devon
Monday 23 October	Nafferton Farm, Stocksfield, Northumberland

Tuesday 24 October            The Allerton Project, Loddington, Leicestershire,  
Wednesday 25 October        Morley, Wymondham, Norfolk  
Friday 27 October            Henfaes Research Centre, Llanfairfechan, Conwy  
Contact Gavin Huggett for more information and to register: [g.huggett@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:g.huggett@exeter.ac.uk).

### **3        Twenty five new Brexit research projects funded by ESRC**

ESRC is funding 25 new research projects focusing on the process and consequences of the UK leaving the European Union. The research covers a wide range of issues including: the public's Brexit preferences, the impact of Brexit on stability and peace in Northern Ireland, its effect on trade, agriculture, the effects on UK environmental governance, the implications for UK fisheries policy and migration and the lives of expats and European families living in Britain. The projects, ranging from nine to 18 months are funded as part of the ESRC's The UK in a Changing Europe initiative. [The full list of funded projects may be found on the ESRC website.](#)

### **4        Researchers are investigating scenarios for agriculture after Brexit**

"Brexit: How might UK Agriculture Survive or Thrive?" is one of the 25 new Brexit research projects being funded by ESRC and it will bring together information across a wide range of different areas: imports, exports, supply, demand, prices, and animal welfare, to consider the potential implications. The researchers will investigate the interactions of these factors and the potential consequences of different policy scenarios. They aim to find out what the real effects could be for farming families: how resilient will their incomes be, how will their production decision making be affected, and what are the implications for UK agri-trade across the industry as a whole, for rural communities and for the consumer? The research is led by Dr Carmen Hubbard in Newcastle University's School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's Centre for Rural Economy [carmen.hubbard@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:carmen.hubbard@ncl.ac.uk) .

### **5        Could ecological intensification reverse pollinator decline?**

Farm management directly affects the availability and quality of foraging and nesting resources for pollinators within agricultural fields. The interrelated growth in the global human population, economic wealth, globalised trade and technological developments produces environmental pressures that alter pollinator biodiversity and pollination. Could the concept of ecological intensification help to reverse this? In a [paper published in Ecology Letters](#), Aniko Kovacs-Kostyanszki et al consider how land use and land management drivers affect pollinators and pollination.

### **6        Researchers urge agri-industry to challenge barriers to women farmers**

Research has found that women play a major role in Scottish agriculture, participating in the full range of farming activities. However, barriers remain to their entry into the industry, their career progression, and promotion to leadership roles. Women's important contribution to the agricultural economy in Scotland should be recognised, say researchers from Newcastle University and Scotland's James Hutton Institute. They are recommending agricultural organisations operate a quota system in their leadership elections in order to achieve better representation for women and also call for the traditional inheritance practices of passing on farms to one son to be challenged. [The Scottish Government is now putting a task force in place to look at these issues.](#) For more details contact Professor Sally Shortall [sally.shortall@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:sally.shortall@ncl.ac.uk).

### **7        Researchers advocate place-based approach for PES**

There are increasing numbers of Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes but little attention is being paid to spatial and temporal inter-dependencies, interactions between different ecosystems and their services, and the need for multi-level governance. In [a paper published in Global Environmental Change](#), researchers advocate a place-based approach incorporating multi-level governance and shared values for ecosystem services.

### **8        Crops could be made more bee friendly say experts**

[Sugar content and the overall amount of nectar varies](#) between commercial varieties of oilseed rape produced with different breeding systems, new research has revealed. Experts at Newcastle University, Rothamsted Research and the University of Exeter have helped identify that plant breeding could be used to create crop varieties with pollinator-friendly traits, benefitting both bees for pollination and crop production. In recent years, some beekeepers have suggested that hybrid varieties of oilseed rape may provide inferior nectar for pollinators compared with traditional open-pollinated varieties.

## 9 Learning lessons from the past with CECAN

A major gap in policymaking is learning lessons from past interventions and applying them to future developments. The Centre for Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus (CECAN) aims to pioneer, test and promote innovative evaluation approaches and methods across nexus problem domains, such as biofuel production or climate change, where food, energy, water and environmental issues intersect. The latest Evaluation Policy and Practice Note in their series reports on a meta evaluation of past work looking at issues such as flood risk, biodiversity, land use, climate change, catchment management, bioenergy and community resilience. The new note on [Learning lessons for evaluating complexity across the nexus: a meta evaluation of projects](#) is available online and the whole series may be downloaded from the resources section of the [CECAN website](#).

## 10 Tackling black-grass and herbicide resistance

Cutting edge research on combatting the pernicious weed black-grass is being funded by BBSRC and AHDB. The [Black Grass Research Initiative](#) is a collaboration between Newcastle, Sheffield and York universities, Rothamsted Research and the Zoology Society of London. The researchers are using a combination of molecular biology and biochemistry, ecology and evolution, modelling and integrated pest management to develop better tools to monitor and manage black-grass and its developing resistance to herbicides. At Cereals 2017, the leading event for growers in the UK, researchers were able to demonstrate their innovative diagnostic device for in-field analysis. Next, they will be working industrial partners on the possibilities for commercialisation. For more information contact Professor Rob Edwards [Robert.edwards@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:Robert.edwards@ncl.ac.uk).

## 11 Commission of Inquiry on Peatlands Call for Experts

The IUCN UK Peatland Programme recently announced its [Call for Experts](#) to support the Commission of Inquiry Update 2017/18. They are seeking senior academics, early-career researchers, consultants and peatland practitioners and any other interested peatland stakeholders to contribute to: [Peatlands and Forestry](#), [Fen Peatlands](#), [Peatland Catchments](#). In addition to these new topics, aspects of the 2011 Commission of Inquiry will be revisited to update the information contained within the summary document and to reinforce key messages and recommendations. This will include updates to the [State of UK Peatlands](#), [Peatland Biodiversity](#) and [Funding for Peatland Management and Restoration](#). The deadline for responding to the Call for Experts is 19 July and [application forms are available online](#).

## 12 ProHealth updates from across Europe

Production diseases in pigs and poultry compromise their welfare and affect productivity, environmental standards, profits and, potentially, human health. The EU funded PROHEALTH project, involving 22 European partners, aims to improve competitiveness and sustainability of modern pig and poultry farming in Europe. The [latest ProHealth newsletter](#) is out now with updates on research carried out by the programme across Europe.

## 13 BESS outputs archive available on line

The BESS (Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Sustainability) programme has drawn to a close but all the synthesis briefing papers are archived on the [website and may be downloaded](#) from there.

## 14 RICS Rural Conference at Hexham Auction Mart

Although it will be some time before we know the full implications of Brexit, the [RICS Rural Conference](#) in Hexham on 11 October offers a timely opportunity to consider what a favourable outcome from Brexit could look like and how to achieve this. Topics will include:

- Understanding the impact on environmental law and policy after Brexit
- The need for bespoke rural housing policies to address rural housing challenges
- What type of properties will be affected by the new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards which come into force from April 2018
- The Digital Economy Act

[Download the full agenda from the RICS website](#).

## 15 RCUK policy placements for Research Council funded PhD students

The Research Council [policy internship scheme](#) provides the opportunity for Research Council-funded PhD students to work for three months in one of a selected group of highly influential policy organisations, including Parliamentary, Government Departments and Non-Governmental Bodies,

learned societies and organisations. The student will be expected to produce at least one briefing paper, participate in a policy inquiry and/or organise a policy event, or equivalent piece of work. The funding call is now open and the closing date is 10 August 2017.

**Produced by the Rural Economy and Land Use Network in association with [Landbridge](#)**

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