



Defra

Rural Development
Programme for England

2007 - 2013

MID TERM EVALUATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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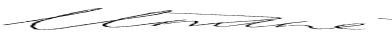



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1 Executive Summary

Overview of the Rural Development Programme for England 2007 – 2013

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) runs from 2007 to 2013, with a budget of approximately £3.9bn. The RDPE is structured around three broad objectives, known as Axes, which are common across the European Union (EU):

- Axis 1 - Improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors
- Axis 2 - Improving the environment and the countryside
- Axis 3 - Rural quality of life and diversification of the rural economy.

A fourth Axis is known as the Leader approach, and provides a 'bottom up' mechanism, with strong community focus, through which the RDPE budget can be allocated and spent.

The RDPE has a legal framework provided by the Rural Development Regulation (Council Regulation 1698/2005, agreed in September 2005). The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is the Managing Authority (MA) for the RDPE, and commissioned this report.

Preparation of the Mid Term Evaluation

This report documents the Mid Term Evaluation of the RDPE, which has been performed in the mid-point of the 2007 to 2013 programming period. Mid Term Evaluation (MTE) is a legal requirement of Council Regulation 1698/2005 and is considered an integral part of the ongoing evaluation process; its timing is set by the Regulation. The MTE considers the initial achievements, and the feedback provides an opportunity to improve the management of the RDPE for the remainder of the programming period.

The England MTE has been prepared by independent evaluators, Hyder Consulting (UK) Ltd with ADAS UK Ltd, DS Research and a team of peer reviewers. [Refer to **Chapter 2** for the report purpose].

Implementation of the RDPE

Each Axis contains a series of 'Measures', which set out the activities eligible for funding. For example, within Axis 1, Measure 111 relates to vocational training, whilst within Axis 2, Measure 214 relates to agri-environment payments. Whilst the Measure approach is common across Europe, each MA consults upon the Programme design, which is set out within the Programme Document. This details which Measures are implemented within England and the rationale for inclusion. It also sets out Measure objectives, indicators and targets, along with budget allocation and delivery mechanisms (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/rdpe/progdoc.htm>).

Delivery arrangements can be broadly summarised:

- Socio-economic Measures are administered by the eight English Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), with priorities and objectives set out within Regional Implementation Plans (RIPs); and the Leader approach through Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- Natural England (NE) administers agri-environment payments (Measures 214 and 216) through the Environmental Stewardship (ES) scheme, Forestry Commission (FC) administers the England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS), encompassing Measures 221, 223, 225 and 227

- Rural Payments Agency (RPA) administers the Hill Farm Allowance (HFA) (Measure 212) although this is being phased out from 2010.

[**Chapter 3** contains a summary of Measures applied in England, and **Chapter 5** provides further detail on implementation arrangements.]

An evaluation methodology was established for each Measure and for the Programme as a whole, and this is detailed in Chapter 4. Greater detail on how the Programme is implemented within England is provided within Chapter 5. Readers should note that whilst the evaluation is structured by Measure and Axis, in accordance with the European requirements, in practice the RDPE is delivered through various structures, which may group together aspects of several Measures.

Mid Term Evaluation Context

Discussions between Defra and the Commission meant that the socio-economic Measures in the Programme were delayed and were not established until January 2008; further delays ensued as the RDAs finalised delivery arrangements and established the Leader areas and LAGs. This has impacted on the progress of all Axis 1, 3 and 4 measures to some extent but particularly those measures delivered through the Leader approach, for which only one year's data is available at the mid term. As such it is difficult to comment on results and impacts or make judgements on their contribution to the success of the programme.

The new Coalition Government in the UK has made a number of announcements during 2010 which affect the context and delivery of the RDPE. This evaluation considers evidence from the first half of the programming period. However, the evolving context within which the MTE recommendations could be implemented should be noted [see **Chapter 3.2**].

Methodology

The evaluation method is based around the four phases recommended in the Evaluation Guidelines, namely structuring, observing, analysing and judging. The evaluation is underpinned by the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) for rural development issued by the European Commission. This contains a number of evaluation questions (some measure-specific and some horizontal across the whole RDP) that have to be answered as part of the MTE [Refer to **Chapter 4** for detailed method]. The evidence base [see **Appendices in Volume 2** for detail] is extensive and includes:

- Monitoring data sourced from each delivery agency [Appendix 8]
- Reviews of literature, particularly in relation to the agri-environment schemes [Appendix 5]
- Interviews with policy, delivery and stakeholder representatives [Appendix 6]
- Case studies of three English regions [Appendix 2 and 3]; three Leader areas; and one non-Leader area [Appendix 4]
- Telephone surveys of programme beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries [Appendix 9 and 10].

The challenge in developing a methodology is that many evaluation activities have to be integrated so that, at the judging phase, the relevant evidence has been collected, collated and analysed to answer the evaluation questions robustly. Challenges at the Mid Term stage are acknowledged within the CMEF, which highlights that *'in many cases, it will not be possible to link directly programme impacts with baseline trends due to the scale of the intervention or the*

lack of baseline data at an appropriate level. Evaluation of impact should therefore focus on a bottom-up approach to assessing programme effects. Evaluators should seek to assess the link between the impact of the programme and baseline trends, but this need not necessarily be quantified.'

Reporting

The evaluation has addressed all the evaluation questions of the Commission as set out in Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005, within the framework of the CMEF Guidance note B – Evaluation guidelines. Questions have been answered fully where possible but in some cases the answer is partial due to insufficient or equivocal evidence and in a few instances the question is not answered as it is not relevant to the England context.

The evaluators present detailed answers to the Measure-specific and horizontal evaluation questions within Chapter 6. Discussions regarding the rationale, targets and indicators are also included. Comments are provided where targets appear to be inappropriate. Net impact is considered by addressing issues of additionality, displacement and multipliers; and the socio-economic impact of agri-environmental schemes are considered and vice versa. Discussions throughout the report draw upon the evidence base which is set out in detail within Volume 2 (e.g. consultation reports, case study write ups, literature reviews, survey results and detailed answers to the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework indicators). Finally, conclusions and recommendations are grouped together in Chapter 7.

Evaluation findings

The evaluators conclude that the Programme has a coherent focus on the generation of environmental public goods (less so for soil and water improvements), delivered largely through Axis 2 support for agri-environment and forestry which together account for around 80% of the RDPE budget [refer to **Chapter 5**]. Socio-economic activities are largely supporting, including Axis 1 resource efficiency and renewable energy actions, use of Measure 111 (vocational training) to support agri-environment uptake and Catchment Sensitive Farming, and support for the conservation of rural heritage (Measure 323). Economic actions to encourage investment in value added, farm diversification, and microenterprise are more focused on private goods and there is an ongoing need to test market failure and additionality. Community actions under Axis 3 rely on a rationale of providing common access to employment and basic services and should be targeted to areas of most need.

The overall balance of the RDPE in funding terms can be justified in terms of the strength of the market failure case. Thus, while greater investment in knowledge transfer and technology uptake would better support competitiveness, the farming, forestry and food sectors operate in a commercial environment and should be largely market driven. This can also be applied to Axis 3 private sector measures. While there is a rationale for supporting these measures, provision should address specific market failures and be highly targeted.

In contrast, the absence of a market for environmental public goods means that they would not generally be provided in the absence of support. Support should still observe the principle of additionality, that is, public payments buy environmental benefits above and beyond those provided through commercial practice and regulatory requirements, although a case can be made for maintaining existing environmental assets where these are at risk. The evaluation highlights the successful mainstreaming of agri-environment schemes but also the need to selectively reduce deadweight where it is most evident, notably in Measure 214 (implemented through Entry Level Stewardship – agri-environment), and use effective targeting to deliver multiple outcomes where possible.

Programme performance is characterised by two distinct strands of delivery; first, that for established measures under Axis 2, much of which is based on multi-annual contracts (for example for agri-environment schemes) and, second, that for newly established schemes to deliver the socio-economic measures in Axes 1, 3 and 4. For the latter, the devolution of responsibility to the RDAs (from 2006) has entailed an investment in regional and local consultation, scheme design and monitoring systems, capacity building of staff and establishment of delivery systems. For Axis 4, a competitive process was required by the Implementation Regulation (Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006) so that potential Leader areas could bid for Leader status; this element of the programme was therefore not effectively in place until 2009. This has impacted on inputs, outputs and results at the Mid Term and consequently on the evidence available to make evaluative judgements.

Axis 1: Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors

By December 2009, there had been mixed progress with Axis 1 measures; Measures 111 (Vocational training) and 123 (Adding value to agricultural and forestry products) are largely consistent with measures in the previous England Rural Development Programme (2000-2006) and were established quickly, while other measures have progressed more slowly. The RDAs have used the RIPs to set priorities for investment and budget allocation and all have prioritised these two measures.

A beneficiary survey for the MTE indicated a high element of deadweight in Measure 111, which raises some questions over the extent to which the intervention is sufficiently strategic and responsive to gaps in provision. RDAs report a more strategic approach for the second half of the Programme. In addition, use of the Measure at a national level to support Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) option selection under Measure 214, and to provide advice to land managers in sensitive water catchments, suggests that the Measure will be used in a more cross-cutting way in the second half of the programme. This will help build synergies between Measures and across Axes.

The main Measures for encouraging private sector investment are Measure 121 (farm modernisation) and Measure 123 (Adding value to agricultural and forestry products). The latter has progressed well and beneficiaries report very low deadweight, indicating that the Measure will leverage substantial investment in the processing sector. Measure 121 is behind target in terms of outputs at the end of 2009 but RDAs report very good progress in 2010. This Measure has mainly been focused on small grants for investments in resource efficiency, animal health and welfare and renewable energy, but a small number of larger projects have also been funded. The evaluators note that the Measure is delivering both economic and environmental benefits.

The evaluators note that limited use has been made of Measure 124 (Cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies) due to issues of definition. This is a lost opportunity given the need for more effective supply chains in some agricultural sectors, and the evaluators recommend that issues are resolved so that the measure can be used in the second half of the programme, ideally linked to Measure 123 grant awards.

There is very limited uptake of the Energy Crops Scheme element of Measure 121; while this is in part due to undeveloped supply chain infrastructure, questions have also been raised about the effectiveness of the scheme design and promotion. In any case, the budget for the Measure has been reduced in favour of funds for woodfuel development. Woodland measures 114 and 115 (advice) and 122 (economic value) have made very limited progress. Action has been taken to address a scheme design flaw in Measure 122 which should allow more effective use in the second half of the programme.

The aggregate impact of Axis 1 measures has been moderate in the first half of the Programme in terms of the impact indicators 'economic growth' and 'labour productivity'. The focus for many of the Measures is on improving practice and making better use of resources on beneficiary holdings; whilst this will contribute to competitiveness and environmental goals, it is unlikely to stimulate economic growth or improve labour productivity for rural areas as a whole. The key to both these aspects at the holding level is adding value to output and the adoption of labour-saving technology. While Measures 111 and 121 can make a contribution, the main Measure that can deliver this is Measure 123; this is reliant on the economic benefits of investment in processing being fed back to farm suppliers through price premia.

It is clear that many of the training and development needs of the agriculture, forestry and food sectors are common at England level. The evaluators feel there is a strong case, based on consultations and evidence of duplication of effort, to run a more strategically focused national programme under Axis 1, contracted to national and regional delivery bodies which have good sector knowledge and capacity. This would deliver a more efficient and even service, with regional and local priorities driven by sector bodies and industry demand.

Axis 2: Improving the environment and countryside

Axis 2 Measures have generally performed well, with outputs and results in line with targets and broadly positive feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Measures 214 and 216 (agri-environment schemes) were evaluated mainly on the basis of a review of the scientific evidence on the effectiveness of management options in delivering environmental impacts and on economic studies which considered programme deadweight and incidental impacts. In summary, while there is evidence that targeted use of higher level schemes can achieve specific goals it is difficult to demonstrate impacts at larger scales. This is in part due to the effects of natural environmental variability and external drivers, but is also likely to reflect limitations of the scheme. For example, the evidence highlights a deadweight problem in Entry Level Stewardship (ELS); some actions are already in place to address this but it is possible that more needs to be done, including moving away from an uptake target and placing more emphasis on targeting options and linking uptake at a landscape scale. A major barrier to improving effectiveness is the free (and until recently unsupported) choice of options given to ELS applicants. This encourages adverse selection whereby land managers opt for the least effort option rather than that with greatest environmental value. The EC requirement to base payments on compensation for income forgone plus cost also prevents the scheme from offering any incentives to help farmers select more challenging, but more environmentally beneficial, options.

Measure 212 (HFA) is being phased out from 2010 with applicants moved to a new Upland Entry Level Stewardship (UELS) scheme. This should improve the environmental impacts of support to farmers in the (Severely Disadvantaged Areas within the) Less Favoured Area.

The forestry Measures (221-223-225-227) delivered under the EWGS are largely on target and have been effective in the creation of new woodland as well as managing existing woodland for biodiversity and access. The evaluators judge that woodland creation makes a measurable contribution to climate change mitigation but note that better targeting of woodland creation could make a more substantial impact on improving water quality.

Overall the impact of Axis 2 measures on the four environmental impact indicators is generally positive. Much of the focus for Measure 214 and 216 has been biodiversity and landscape, as is the case with the woodland management measures. While the decline in farmland bird numbers has not yet reversed, the aggregate impact of the annual investment of over €0.5 bn each year is substantial, although difficult to quantify. The extensive evidence base for Environmental Stewardship (ES) and ongoing developments to improve scheme effectiveness, including use of

Measure 111 funding for training, should ensure that the impact of Axis 2 on biodiversity in the second half of the programme is enhanced further.

Impacts on the other indicators are less clear; bringing elements of the Catchment Sensitive Farming scheme (which provides small grants and advice to farmers) into Axis 1 is positive in that it will allow the RDPE to play a greater role in improving water quality, but more targeting of ES is needed to focus on priority catchments. A similar approach is required for soil quality while climate change is a more crosscutting outcome from many of the Axis 2 measures, with a positive contribution from Axis 1 resource efficiency and forestry Measures.

Axis 3: Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy

Most Axis 3 measures were well behind target at the end of 2009 due to the delays to the start of the Programme and a high reliance on delivery through the Leader approach. Selection of Leader areas and establishment of LAGs exacerbated the delay in bringing projects forward for many Axis 3 measures.

There are two main groups of Measures; those focused on the private sector or business-led (311-312-313) and those which are focused on community development and services (321-322-323). At the mid term, limited progress has been made in terms of the former, with output and results still well behind target. The economic recession has also reduced confidence to invest. Of the community-led Measures, only 322 (Village Renewal) has progressed well against target which may reflect a degree of continuity with the previous programme. Measure 321 (Basic services for the economy and rural population) and 323 (Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage) have taken longer to establish but are expected to catch up in the second half of the programme.

Impacts for Axis 3 measures are therefore small at the mid term.

Axis 4: The Leader approach

Leader was formerly operated outside the Rural Development Regulation but has been mainstreamed into the current RDPE. The process of inviting bids for Leader status and establishing LAGs has caused delays, and moving to more structured administration is reported to have increased bureaucracy and caused tensions between bodies [see **Appendix 4**]. This raises questions over how well a bottom-up approach fits within the requirements of a highly-structured programme. More generally, the MTE has received very mixed views from stakeholders on the role and functioning of LAGs. In summary it is too early to comment on the 'added value' of the approach, relative to mainstream delivery.

Another key issue for Leader is the extent to which it has been confined to delivering Axis 3 Measures, rather than delivering integrated projects across all Axes, as was envisaged in Regulation 1698/2005. The evaluators feel that delivering multiple outputs at a local scale is indeed a key aspect of the principle behind Leader, working with local communities within a common context to meet economic, environmental and social objectives. Currently, Leader is being used as a local-level approach for delivery of more single-focus projects where Leader is just another delivery mechanism without the efficiencies available for larger scale delivery. While there is some evidence that LAGs are linking with other themes through the involvement of third parties or co-operation with Axis 1 and 2 projects, the role of Leader should be addressed urgently to ensure the 'value-added' of the approach is realised.

Conclusions

The evaluators have found evidence of good progress on outputs for Axis 2 Measures in the first half of the RDPE but more limited progress with the socio-economic Measures. The latter relates largely to delays in establishing the programme in the English regions and to mainstreaming Leader. The significance of the shortfall in spending is in the ability to meet programme allocations and Axis threshold targets. The MA is confident that this is not a major risk.

Uptake has been a problem for some of the Measures but these issues have been largely addressed in the first half of the programme. The evaluators make recommendations, where it is felt that further action would be beneficial.

For Axis 2, which represents approximately 80% of the entire budget, substantial progress has been made in establishing ES. Key issues are dealing with deadweight and building on its effectiveness in delivering multiple outcomes. Recent changes to option selection within ELS should go some way to improving its effectiveness but the MTE suggests that further action is likely to be needed. Recommendations are made accordingly, which have been summarised below.

For the socio-economic Measures, the evaluation has been constrained by low uptake to December 2009 as the RDAs established schemes and delivery arrangements. This has been particularly the case for Axis 3 measures, given the reliance on delivery through the Leader approach. The evaluators recognise early evidence of positive impacts but have concerns over the extent of the aggregate impact of Axis 1 Measures on competitiveness and the contribution to economic growth and labour productivity of rural areas as a whole. Axis 3 represents a key mechanism for delivering employment creation and some good progress has been made on this. However, additionality is critical and actions must be targeted to new market opportunities and more deprived areas. It is too early to comment on the effectiveness of Axis 4.

The evaluators feel there is considerable opportunity to further develop synergy, both across and within Axes. While there is some evidence of this at the mid term in terms of measure use (for example the application of Measure 111 to support agri-environment scheme uptake and provide advice on managing water quality) there is limited cross-axis working. This relates, at least in part, to the relatively complex delivery architecture, encompassing national, regional and local organisations and discrete Axis responsibilities.

This is also linked to a more fundamental concern over the efficiency of a regionalised structure to deliver elements of a national programme to sectors (farming, forestry and food) with common needs. There is evidence that this has led to unevenness in programme performance and incurred additional administrative costs. It is possible to retain the benefits of regional priorities and addressing localised needs within a nationally-administered programme, as is evident from Axis 2. This argument also applies to Axes 3 and 4, although there a much stronger case exists for retaining regional and local delivery structures. Changes to the institutional landscape from 2010, notably abolition of the RDAs [see **Chapter 3.2**], provides an opportunity to move towards simpler and more efficient delivery architecture. A lesson from the first half of this programme is that change can be in itself unhelpful, causing delays and fracturing established networks; this is particularly evident for Axis 4.

Recommendations

A wide range of recommendations are made by the evaluators to address issues of programme management, monitoring and evaluation and effectiveness of individual measures. These are included within the report and collated below. Those marked with an asterisk * will require some input from, or agreement with, the European Commission.

Recommendations regarding data, monitoring and evaluation

Recommendation 4-1: All terms should be clearly defined within the evaluation terms of reference.*

Recommendation 4-2: As part of the ongoing evaluation requirements, review the baseline indicators to gauge their relevance to the objective and scale of the Measure in question. Where currently collected baseline is not relevant, the Managing Authority should look to identify an alternative source. Update baseline data on an annual basis to provide time-series data, which will assist in the management of the overall programme. Ensure that a comprehensive set of baseline data are available to form part of the terms of reference for the Ex Post Evaluation.

Recommendation 4-3: Ensure that indicators under development are finalised, agreed with the EC, and adopted at the earliest opportunity. Consideration should also be given to how data for these indicators will be collected and incorporated to the Ex Post Evaluation. *

Recommendation 4-4: Develop a standard system of recording both live and closed project data from projects administered by RDAs: expansion of the online Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework database should be considered. Given the potential change in delivery arrangements for RDA schemes, ensure that monitoring and evaluation requirements are fully considered, and that all project-level data are handed over.

Recommendation 4-5: identify which impact indicators have data available, and ensure that annually updated baseline data are available to support these, so that this information can help inform future programme design.

Recommendation 4-6: RDPE is delivered by many different agencies, each of whom has different database systems. It is recommended that a standardised list of 'minimum requirements' is set out by Defra, ensuring that agencies and intermediaries record the same data for their scheme beneficiaries such as telephone numbers, postal addresses and email (where available).

Recommendation 5-1: Establish an agreed methodology and data capture systems to ensure that the true cost of delivering the RDPE can be calculated, ahead of the Ex Post Evaluation. This should include not only the direct costs of public agencies responsible for managing and administering the component elements of the programme but also the wider costs of public sector involvement in consultative/stakeholder roles. This will enable a true picture of delivery costs to be understood.

Recommendation A7-2: A more user-friendly online project database is recommended for the RDPE Network to allow the users to download grouped information/data more easily, for example, in a tabular format.

Recommendation A7-3: At the Ex Post Evaluation when impact is more evident, a case study approach should be used to examine the impact of the RDPE Network combined with other approaches, for example, Social Network Analysis (SNA).

Recommendations on Measures

Recommendation 111-1: Review the range of training provided across the regions and undertake an analysis against skills gaps identified by Lantra.

Recommendation 111-2: Challenge training providers to evidence that proposed training courses are not readily available locally in order to reduce deadweight. ELS Training and Information Programme (ETIP) and Catchment Sensitive Farming training are good examples of a national/strategic approach with lower risk of deadweight.

Recommendation 114-1: Take steps to ensure current gaps in provision of the Forest Advisory Service to the forestry sector across England are addressed.

Recommendation 114-2: Review the extent to which Measure 114 has led to uptake of other forestry Measures in Axis 1 and 2; build these linkages in both directions where necessary to improve the impact of these related measures.

Recommendation 115-1: Improve the quality of monitoring data relating to Measure 115; the limited scale of outputs places an emphasis on what services are supported, their focus and scale as well as uptake.

Recommendation 115-2: Review the market failure case for this Measure and the suitability of a regional approach. A national approach led by the Forestry Commission might best build on existing provision for the delivery of public goods from English woodlands.

Recommendation 121-1: Share good practice between regions to ensure this Measure is taken up widely in the second half of the programme and is well targeted, including the potential to link with other measures, notably Measure 111.

Recommendation 122-1: Scope the demand for the revised Measure 122 activities and promote effectively to forest holders along with other woodland-related Measures under the EWGS banner.

Recommendation 122-2: Ensure effective linkages of the revised Measure 122 scheme (Woodfuel WIG) with other forestry Measures in the programme, notably Measures 114 and 115 (advisory services), Measure 123 (adding value) and Measure 125 (access to forest land).

Recommendation 123-1: Review the focus and outputs of a sample of projects funded under this Measure completed by 31 December 2009 to test against regional priorities and for displacement.

Recommendation 123-2: Review the process involved in accessing Measure 123 grants and share good practice across the regions.

Recommendation 123-3: Consider opportunities for improving linkages between Measure 123 and other Axis 1 measures. It is important that supported businesses have the benefit of appropriate training and advice (Measure 111, 114 and 115) and supply chain development support (Measures 122, 124 and 125).

Recommendation 124-1: Review the scope for public intervention in facilitating supply chain cooperation under RDPE and how Measure 124 can be better used in the second half of the programme.

Recommendation 124-2: Consider using Measures 123 to 124 together as a single value adding 'scheme' with two discrete strands, one for agriculture and one for forestry and linking to other Axis Measures which bring groups of producers and/or processors together such as Measure 111.

Recommendation 125-1: Link Measure 125 activities with other forestry Measures in the programme, notably Measures 114 and 115 (advisory services), the revised Measure 122 (forest management) and Axis 2 Measures.

Recommendation 125-2: Scope the demand for water storage and management investments and address any barriers to uptake in the second half of the programme.

Recommendation 214-1: Remove the target for uptake of agri-environment schemes (AES) as it relates to Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) as it reduces the scope for the targeting of options, which is necessary to reduce deadweight for a number of the high uptake ELS options and improve effectiveness more generally.

Recommendation 214-2: Continue to develop Entry Level Stewardship option targeting, including scheme design, spatial targeting and better linkage with HLS options. This should build on and be informed by existing initiatives, including the ELS Training and Information Programme (ETIP).

Recommendation 214-3: Improve feedback mechanisms for agri-environment schemes at different scales, from agreement level to scheme evaluation. This should include making better use of farmers' knowledge of the local environment as well as their potential role in monitoring results.

Recommendation 214-4: Ensure that agri-environment schemes operate with a strategic framework for land use to deliver a balance between the production of food and environmental public goods. This should recognise spatial and temporal diversity to target agri-environment schemes where it can deliver key priorities most effectively.

Recommendation 214-5: Make more effective use of Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework baseline and impact indicators for ongoing evaluation. Indicators should be regularly updated and available, using links to existing time series datasets where suitable. Where appropriate, more granular data should be made available to account for spatial diversity. The High Nature Value (HNV) farming indicator should be defined and data available for the Ex Post Evaluation, if possible.

Recommendation 214-6: Continue to develop the methodology for Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework result indicators relating to the 'degree of success' of Axis 2 measures. This should capture, where possible, spatial characteristics and other data that are reinforcing, to weight results.

Recommendation 216-1: Monitoring of Measure 214 should consider the effectiveness of and dependency on capital investments under Measure 216. Additional indicators may be needed

Recommendation 221-1: Subject to other considerations, increase the afforestation target for the Measure to provide a higher contribution to the 'new challenges' of climate change, renewable energies, water management and biodiversity. Woodland creation has a particular role to play in delivering the Low Carbon Transition Plan targets (they currently provide around 22% per annum of the 10,000 ha pa target over from 2007-2013).

Recommendation 221-2: Strengthen the targeting of woodland creation to deliver greater benefits to water and soil quality. Spatial targeting is required to fully achieve the multi-objective potential of woodland creation and this requires better Measure linkages with other Axes and Measures and use of modelling research. It also requires good institutional linkages, notably between the Forestry Commission and Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Recommendation 223-1: Subject to other considerations, increase the afforestation target for the Measure to provide a higher contribution to the 'new challenges' of climate change, renewable energies, water management and biodiversity. Woodland creation has a particular role to play in delivering the Low Carbon Transition Plan targets (they currently provide around 22% per annum of the 10,000 ha pa target over from 2007-2013).

Recommendation 223-2: Strengthen the targeting of woodland creation to deliver greater benefits to water and soil quality. Spatial targeting is required to fully achieve the multi-objective potential of woodland creation and this requires better Measure linkages with other Axes and Measures and use of modelling research. It also requires good institutional linkages, notably between the Forestry Commission and Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Recommendation 225-1: This Measure has the highest level of deadweight of the forestry Measures which requires further analysis. For example, can the deadweight be reduced by changing the links with Measure 227 which can provide extra support to deliver specific benefits?

Recommendation 225-2: Strengthen the targeting of woodland management to deliver greater benefits to water and soil quality. Spatial targeting is required to fully achieve the multi-objective

potential of woodland management and this requires better Measure linkages with other Axes and Measures and use of modelling research. It also requires good institutional linkages, notably between the Forestry Commission and Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Recommendation 311-1: Investigate the impacts of the different regional approaches to implementation of this Measure, particularly in terms of effectiveness of uptake, cost of jobs created and delivery of multiple outputs. This can be achieved through sharing experiences and promoting good practice across regions.

Recommendation 312-1: Further research is necessary to understand the impact of delivery models on generating employment and how well this relates to areas of need. For example it would be useful to compare the Business Link approach with projects delivered by Leader, in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency. Issues of displacement should also be considered.

Recommendation 312-2: Best practice in implementing this measure should be shared across regions.

Recommendation 313-1: Review the reasons for low uptake of this measure across the regions and the interface with regional tourism strategies. It is important to understand the extent to which this measure is performing poorly due to overlap with other initiatives or due to limited demand.

Recommendation 321-1: Review the scope and focus of outputs from Measure 321 and share good practice to maximise the effectiveness and sustainability of the services delivered.

Recommendation 321-2: Develop the result indicator for broadband access (increase in internet penetration) to specify broadband speed, for example of at least 2Mbps.

Recommendation 321-3: Clarify the basis for counting the result indicator 'Population in rural areas benefitting from improved services' to ensure that the indicator is meaningful in terms of defining where benefits are felt. It should also allow targets are set appropriately.

Recommendation 322-1: Review the impacts of investment in Village Renewal and Development through a qualitative analysis of impacts, mapping these against Measure objectives and scoring effectiveness and sustainability.

Recommendation 322-2: Share good practice across regions in terms of selection of Village Renewal and Development projects which deliver high impact.

Recommendation 323-1: Review the reasons for slow progress of this measure and work with heritage and conservation partners (English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund, and Natural England) to overcome barriers to take up in terms of level of investment. Share good practice between regions in terms of implementation, promotion, uptake and impacts.

Recommendation 331-1: There is a need for a stronger national network to facilitate training, including dissemination of best practice.

Recommendation 341-1: Examine how this measure could be applied more widely across England, especially in relation to Community Led Planning (or similar) activity that promotes community engagement in local decision making.

Recommendation 41-1: More attention should be paid to how 'improving governance in rural areas' can be achieved and evaluated.

Recommendation 41-2: Review the suitability of Leader for delivering 'private-sector' Measures (for example, Axis 1 Measures and some Axis 3 Measures including Measure 311, 312 and elements of 313) on the basis that it is generally not as efficient as other delivery approaches. In comparison, the rural community measures tend to be community led, suited to the Leader approach, and often aim to achieve a range of wider non-economic benefits.

Recommendation 41-3: More weight should be given to commonality of issues within areas and their 'identity' in addition to size considerations when determining LAG coverage.

Recommendation 421-1: Ensure a strong national lead for exchange of good practice to support both inter-LAG and trans-national exchange.

Recommendation 431-1: Capture data and information on how the budget under this Measure is spent. The level of running costs should be monitored not only at regional, sub-regional level, but also at national level.

Recommendations at programme level

Recommendation H-1: Ensure interventions are focused on areas of priority across all axes; notably economic opportunity in Axis 1, environmental priority in Axis 2 and socioeconomic need in Axis 3. This requires scoping and mapping of relevant datasets of need (for example, processing infrastructure; environmental need; economic deprivation) against interventions to ensure a good fit.

Recommendation H-2: In light of the likely impact of impending institutional changes on delivery of Axis 1, 3 and 4, ensure that there is, as far as possible, continuity as far as RDPE beneficiaries are concerned.

Recommendation H-3: Ensure common access to the programme in meeting common needs in the agricultural, forestry and food sectors and fit with national support structures such as AHDB. This could be achieved, for example, by moving to national delivery for Axis 1 measures and Axis 3 Measure 311 (farm diversification), while continuing to respond to area-based priorities via the existing networks of regionally-based staff and contractors. Consider opportunities for integration across measures or axes where possible to simplify the delivery architecture and monitoring, improve synergies between axes and reduce points of entry for applicants.

Recommendation H-4: Aim to improve the links and synergy between axes, notably axis 2 and the socio-economic axes for a largely common customer base (farmers and foresters). This should build on existing models, for example ELS Training and Information Programme (ETIP) and England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative (ECSFDI), which use Axis 1 (Measure 111) to provide training for ES participants and countryside management training delivered locally by LAGs (Axis 4). For example, there is scope to develop further links from Axis 2 measures to Axis 3, for example access and interpretation actions, and to Axis 1 added value.

Recommendation H-5: Consider the development of a suite of indicators for those measures that play a role in climate change adaptation, to capture the effects at Programme level.*

Recommendation H-6: Look critically at the cost of delivery of Axis 4, the Leader approach. There appears to be a mismatch between the bureaucracy and cost associated with a top-down EU programme with multiple, highly specified measures and a bottom-up innovative model. Evidence from Europe should be helpful in this respect.*

Recommendation H-7: Address issues of funding for projects especially those delivered through Axis 4. For grant-led measures, consider the use of loans as an option to encourage investment in association with or in place of investment grants.

Recommendation H-8: Provide better leadership and guidance from the Managing Authority across implementation and delivery, including clarification of rules, priorities for action and data monitoring and evaluation requirements. This should include ensuring that these things are done.

Recommendation H-9: Ensure evaluation guidance notes are out on time ideally before MTE contracts are put out to tender so that contractors can reflect this in their methodologies/ cost structures. *

Recommendation H-10: Ensure monitoring systems are consistent across all delivery agencies and are captured in a single system. Targets for projects should be retained as actual data becomes available and the system should be able to report on a live basis, not just when projects complete. The system should be able to accommodate cross-measure and cross-axis projects.

Recommendation H-11: Strengthen the dissemination of good practice, particularly across Axes 1, 3 and 4, including supporting inter-LAG activity and links with other networks.

Recommendation A7-1: There should be greater encouragement and Leadership from Defra in getting delivery bodies to engage more with the RDPE Network. This can be done through:

- enabling delivery bodies to spend staff resource on engaging with the Network
- encouraging regional RDPE Networks to link and integrate with the Network
- encouraging formal relationships to form between the delivery bodies and the RDPE Network.